



THE
POWER
OF
KARMA

The Power of Karma

Thānissaro Bhikkhu

(Geoffrey DeGraff)

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Preface

In February of this year, I was invited by the Sociedade Vipassanā de Meditação and the Grupo Karuṇā, both of Brasília, to give a talk and lead a retreat on the topic of karma. This book contains edited English transcripts of both events, plus the readings that were sent to the retreatants beforehand.

Karma is a teaching whose meaning is widely misunderstood and whose usefulness is under-appreciated in Western Buddhist circles, to say nothing of the West at large. So, in preparing for the talk and the retreat, I thought it would be a good opportunity to focus on the most basic principles, showing that—far from teaching determinism or fatalism—the Buddha’s teachings on karma are designed to show the power of intentions in shaping a person’s life for the better.

I hope that you find the discussions here helpful in making the best use of the power of your own karma.

I would like to thank Katatto Bhikkhu for being my translator during the talk at SVM and the retreat at Paraíso na Terra; Julia Uddén for her help in transcribing the talks; and the members of the Sociedade Vipassanā de Meditação and the Grupo Karuṇā for their hospitality during my time in Brazil.

Note: In general, I’ve used the Pali forms of Buddhist technical terms mentioned in these talks. However, because the Sanskrit form of the word *karma* has been adopted into the English language, I’ve used it instead of the Pali form, *kamma*, in the transcripts of the talks. Still, because the readings are from the Pali Canon, I’ve kept *kamma* in those.

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The Power of Karma

I'd like to talk about what you were doing just now as you meditated. You were learning a skill. You told yourself to breathe in a comfortable way, then you tried to breathe in a comfortable way, and then you judged the results. If the results were good, you kept them up. If the results were not good, you could change. Even if you were doing it just for stress reduction, what you were doing could be explained by the Buddha's teachings on karma.

You may not welcome this idea, largely because there are many misunderstandings about the teachings on karma. We tend to think of karma as something negative that comes from the past and cannot be changed, and that the present moment is totally shaped by our past actions—which sounds fatalistic. But actually, that's not how the Buddha taught karma. As he said, if everything were determined by the past, there would be no path to the end of suffering. His actual explanation was that what you experience in the present moment is a combination of three things: the results of past karma, your present karma—the choices you're making right now, which are not necessarily determined by the past—and then the results of your present actions. This means that even though you may have some bad karma coming in from the past, you don't have to suffer from it if you're more skillful in how you act in the present moment.

Now, these actions follow a certain pattern, but because you have freedom of choice in the present moment, the pattern is not deterministic. This combination of a pattern plus the freedom to manipulate the pattern is precisely what allows for you to develop a skill. If there were nothing but a pattern but with no freedom, you wouldn't have the ability to change your actions. If there were freedom with no pattern, you couldn't learn anything that you could use in the future. In other words, what you learned today might

not help you at all tomorrow. This combination of a pattern that you are free to manipulate. Which is what allows you to learn a path to the end of suffering.

So tonight we'd like to talk about some of that freedom you have in the present moment. That's one of the reasons why this talk is called "The Power of Karma." You have the power, through your present actions, not to suffer. As the Buddha said, your present moment experience comes from the raw material coming in from the past, but your actual experience of the present moment requires that you shape that raw material with your intentions in the present moment. Those intentions are your present karma. The Buddha calls those intentions *saṅkhāras*, which we translate as *fabrication*.

Fabrications come in three kinds. There's bodily fabrication, which is the way you breathe.

There's verbal fabrication, which is the way you talk to yourself—what the Buddha calls directed thought and evaluation. In other words, you direct your thoughts to a particular topic and then you evaluate it, you make comments on it; you ask questions about it and try to answer the questions.

Then there's mental fabrication, which consist of perceptions and feelings. Perceptions are the labels you put on things, basically identifying what they are, like "This is a microphone, these are my glasses." But you also identify what their meaning is, as when you see a red light at an intersection. You can identify the color as *red*. You also know what it means. It means *stop*. Those are all perceptions. As for feelings, those are feeling tones of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain.

It's through these three kinds of fabrication that we actually have an experience of the present moment. Without them, we wouldn't experience the present at all.

The Buddha noticed that we suffer because we do these fabrications, these processes, in ignorance. But if we do them with knowledge, we can make them a path to the end of suffering. This is one of the reasons why, when we meditate, we consciously focus on the breath. We talk to ourselves about the breath and the mind, so that we can find better and better ways to breathe and then better and better ways to bring the mind to stay with the breath.

Then we also work with different perceptions of the breath. You can think of the breath as the air coming in through the nose, or you can think of the breath as energy that flows through the body, down through the nerves, down through the blood vessels. Then you can ask yourself, “Which perception creates a better sense of well-being in the present moment?” As you do this, you’re trying to create feelings of well-being in the body and the mind.

The fact that you’re doing this with knowledge and awareness means that this is now part of the path to the end of suffering. As you get more skilled in doing this in meditation, you begin to notice that you can also get more skilled in these processes as you go through your life, day-to-day. If somebody does something that makes you angry and you know that you tend to do stupid things when you’re angry, you can ask yourself “Is the way that I’m breathing aggravating the anger? Or is that actually helping to calm the anger down?”

The same with the way you talk to yourself: You can talk to yourself in ways that aggravate the anger, or you can talk to yourself in ways that calm the anger down. Which would be better?

The same with mental fabrication: You can hold perceptions in the mind that make the anger or the situation in general hard to bear, or you can hold perceptions that have the opposite effect. This means that you have more freedom in the present moment. You don’t have to be a slave to your anger.

So even if some bad situations are presenting themselves because of your past karma, what you do with that raw material in the present moment will determine whether you suffer from that raw material or not. It’s like being a good cook. You open the refrigerator and there’s nothing but bad food in the refrigerator. But because you’re a good cook, you can still make good food out of it. The food in the refrigerator is your past bad karma; your skill as a cook is your present karma.

The Buddha talks a lot about the skills you can develop in this area. The image he gives is a big hunk of salt. If you try to put the salt into a small cup of water, you can’t drink the water because it’s too salty. But if you put that salt into the Rio Bonito, you could still drink the water because there’s so much of it. So how do you make your mind like the Rio Bonito? One, the Buddha says, is that you try to develop your virtue. Two, you try to develop discernment.

Three, you learn to train your mind so that it's not easily overcome by pain or pleasure. This is basically what we learn in concentration practice.

For example, because of your past karma, there are potentials for pains in the body. But by the way you breathe, you can reduce that amount of pain. Or even if you can't reduce the pain, you can focus on the breath in the areas of the body that you can make comfortable, which makes it a lot easier for you to bear with the pain.

As for not being overcome by pleasure, again, this is one of the skills you'll learn in concentration practice. One, if you don't want to be stuck on pleasures outside, you can provide a sense of well-being inside by the way you focus on the breath. As for the pleasure of the concentration itself, you discover that if you leave the breath and go to wallow in the sense of pleasure, your concentration blurs out. So you have to learn how to be with the pleasure but not wallow in it. You let it do its work while you stay focused on the breath. That's how you maintain your concentration. The fact that you're not wallowing in the pleasure means that you're not opening the door to wallowing in pain.

And finally, the Buddha says one of the skills you need to develop in the present moment is to make your mind expansive like the Rio Bonito. That refers to the brahma-vihāras, developing an attitude of unlimited goodwill, unlimited compassion, unlimited empathetic joy, and unlimited equanimity.

As the Buddha said, if you develop these skills, then even though you have some past bad karma, you don't have to suffer from it.

So this is one of the ways in which we talk about the power of karma. You can develop skills that you use in the present moment so that even if you have some past bad karma coming in, your mastery of present karma means you don't have to suffer from it.

The other meaning of the phrase, "The Power of Karma," is to understand that karma is the Buddha's most basic teaching. It underlies everything else he taught. If you want to understand any of his other teachings, you have to understand them in the context of karma. For example, with the four noble truths, the first noble truth, the truth of suffering, is the result of unskillful karma. The second noble truth, the three forms of craving, is the actual

unskillful karma. The third noble truth, the cessation of suffering, is the result of skillful karma. And the fourth noble truth, the path to the end of suffering, is the path of skillful karma.

When you understand that karma underlies everything the Buddha taught, it helps to prevent a lot of misunderstandings about a lot of his teachings. For example, sometimes you hear people ask, “If there is no self, then who does the karma? Who suffers from the results of karma?” Those questions come from taking the teaching on not-self as the most basic context, and then trying to fit the teaching of karma into that context—and it doesn’t fit. Sometimes you hear people saying that if you think that *you* are doing the path, that’s wrong view, because there’s nobody there to do the path. And you have no choice in the matter anyhow. There’s no self to make the choices.

In both of these cases, these people have got the context backwards. The true context is the truth of karma, that your actions do have power, and that there are skillful actions and unskillful actions based on skillful intentions and unskillful intentions. In that context, the teaching of not-self takes on a different meaning. Because not-self is a perception, and perceptions are mental actions, then the question is, “What kind of action is that perception? When is it skillful and when is it not?”

You begin to realize that as you go through the day, you already are using perceptions of self and not self. The problem is that you tend to do this in ignorance, so it leads to suffering. For instance, suppose you’re a child with a younger sister, and some bullies down the street are beating up on your sister. Because she’s *your* sister, you go and protect her. That’s when you have a strong perception of self around your sister. She’s yours. But then you bring her home, and she starts playing with your toys without asking your permission. At that moment, she’s not your sister anymore. She’s the Other. Your perception has changed.

This is something we do all the time, switching back and forth like this, but as I said, we often do it in ignorance, so it can lead to suffering. The Buddha wants us to bring more alertness to what we’re doing. In that context, when the Buddha teaches not-self, the question is: When is the perception of not-self useful? What kinds of perceptions of self are useful, and when? For

example, when you're developing the path, you need to have a good strong sense of self: that you're capable of following the path, that you'll be responsible for following the path, and that you'll benefit from following the path. That's a skillful sense of self that you need on the path.

If you have too strong a sense of not-self as you do the path, that can actually get in the way. For instance, if you try to get the mind into concentration, and it's not going very well, when you tell yourself, "Okay, that's just the nature of concentration, it's not self," that's not an insight. It's laziness. Or when you're driving down the road and you go over the speed limit: When the police catch you and say, "Why did you go over the speed limit?" if you say, "There's nobody here," it's not very skillful.

So as you're following the path, as I said, you need a strong sense of self that you are capable of doing it.

Now, when the path is completed, that's when you let go of the path. That's when you develop the perception of not-self for everything, because the path has done its work. You don't need to hold on to it anymore.

You may remember the Buddha's image of going across the river. The side of the river you're on is dangerous. The other side is safe, but there's no boat to come and pick you up to take you across, and there's no bridge over the river. So you have to make a raft. What do you make a raft from? The things you identify with on this side of the river: bodily fabrication, verbal fabrication, mental fabrication. Then you hold on tight to that raft as you swim across the river. When you get to the other side of the river, that's when you can let the raft go. In other words, you've followed the path to the ultimate happiness. There's nothing more you have to do. That's why the path is called the karma that puts an end to karma. You let everything go and there's the ultimate happiness.

So it's important to see the teaching on karma as the most basic Buddhist teaching. This is just one example of how it helps all the Buddha's teachings to make sense.

This means that there are two ways in which karma is powerful. One, in the sense that karma as a *concept* helps to explain everything the Buddha taught. But even more importantly, the *reality* of karma is that you have the power to

not suffer in the present moment. If you learn the skills of the three kinds of fabrication, you have the power in your hands not to suffer. Now, with the power comes responsibility, but even though that responsibility requires some work, the results are well worth whatever effort you put in.

For those of you who will be going on the retreat, this is just a first taste of what we're going to be covering in the retreat. For those of you who are not going to the retreat, we recommend that you start bringing more knowledge to the way you breathe, the way you talk to yourself, and the way you use perceptions and feelings in the present moment. You'll find that with these skills comes the power not to suffer. You may have noticed that when the Buddha taught, he didn't ask people, "Do you deserve to suffer? I only teach the end of suffering to people who don't deserve to suffer." No, he taught the end of suffering to everybody. And you're one person in that "everybody."

Q&A

Q: This brings to mind the perceptions that other people close to you may have about you and the effect of those perceptions, how those perceptions become your own, somehow, and create a lot of suffering.

A: The fact that someone else has a bad perception of you is the result of past bad karma. But whether you accept that perception or not, that's your present karma. If you tried to change everybody's perceptions of you to be good perceptions, you'd never come to the end of them. So you have to ask yourself, "To what extent do I have to accept these perceptions? If I can't change their perceptions of me, how can I learn how not to adopt those perceptions myself? And how can I learn how not to suffer from the fact that they hold those perceptions about me?" Learn to exercise your powers of choice in this area.

Q: How to keep an internal balance when all around is the perception that the world seems to be collapsing, with all the cruelty and other bad things happening around us?

A: You have to realize that the karma of the world is the karma of the world. Your karma is your karma. Even though the world may seem to be determined on going to hell, you can still maintain your good karma. You don't have to go to hell along with them. You can develop the perfections, by developing goodwill, your persistence, your determination. Look for opportunities where you can be of help.

There's a sutta where the king comes to see the Buddha, and the Buddha asked him, "Where are you coming from in the middle of the day?" The king is remarkably frank. He says, "Oh, the typical things of someone who's obsessed with gaining power and maintaining power over a vast sphere of land." The Buddha says, "Suppose someone trustworthy were to come to you and say, 'There's a huge mountain moving in from the east, crushing all living beings in its path.' And another trustworthy person says, 'There's another mountain moving in from the south, crushing all living beings in its path.' Two other

trustworthy people say, 'There's another mountain moving in from the west and another mountain moving in from the north, crushing all living beings in their path.' With this terrible destruction of life, what would you do?" The king replies, "What else could I do but practice the Dhamma?"

Then the Buddha says, "I'm telling you, aging, illness, and death are moving in, crushing all living beings in their path. What are you going to do?"

"What could I do but practice the Dhamma?"

And as for you, what else are you going to do? It's your good karma that can't get crushed, your good karma that you take with you. That's your treasure. If other people are throwing their treasures away, that's no reason for you to throw your treasures away. And you're not the only one who will benefit. There are the people you help through your virtue and generosity, and there are the people who are inspired by your good example. That's my recommendation.

Q: If the karma is already predetermined, is it determined that we have to suffer?

A: There are some bad things that will happen because of your past karma and there may be some really good things that will happen because of your past karma. Sometimes they're unavoidable, but the question of whether you're going to suffer from them or not, that's up to your skill in the present moment. That's the part that's not predetermined.

Q: Is there a way to understand collective karma, and how does that affect us? For example, people who are born in different countries, like some people who are born in Brazil or other countries: Is there a karmic root or something that leads to that? What's the relation?

A: Karma is something you do individually, because each person's karma is based on that person's individual intentions. Now, it may be the case that different individuals in different places have done something bad that's very similar; later on they all happen to be born in the same place, and their bad karma comes to fruition at the same time. So if something bad happens to a lot of people in Brazil, it's not the case that Brazilian people all did the bad karma. You may have people born here who in a past life were born in other

places, and they did their bad karma individually in other places. But then they happened to be born here and met a similar fate all at the same time. This is why you have large numbers of people dying in accidents or disasters of one kind or another.

Maybe I shouldn't have said Brazil. People born in America right now have a lot of bad karma.

Q: The questioner was preparing to receive some visitors. So she's reflecting about some things that happened during the preceding week for her. For example, she went to five stores to do chores and out of the five places where she stopped, at four of them she had problems. First, something with the cashier; second, something with the price; third, something with the system going down and so forth. So it seems to be working repeatedly for her over time. People tell her this happens to everybody, but she feels that this is personal. Can you say that this is a karmic thing or is there any suttas or anything that would explain this?

A: The Buddha said if you try to think about these things you go crazy. Just recall the basic principle that if there's some difficulty, there were some unskillful actions in the past. But as for exactly what those actions were, the Buddha discourages you from thinking about it. And as for how long this bad karma is going to last, you don't know.

Some people think that karma is like a bank account, and that what you see at any one moment is the running balance in the account. But that's not the case. The Buddha says it's more like having a field, and every action you do is like planting a seed in the field. You've got some good seeds; you've got some bad seeds. Some of them will sprout slowly; some of them will sprout quickly. Maybe right now some bad seeds are sprouting, but that doesn't mean you don't have some good seeds ready to sprout soon.

And the Buddha says you can water the good seeds with your attention, so they grow more quickly. What that means is that when you see somebody else who is suffering, you don't say, "Well, they're suffering because of their bad karma, so they deserve to continue suffering." Maybe they have some good seeds that are not sprouting yet. And try to put yourself in that person's place. If you were suffering from some bad karma sprouting, wouldn't you

appreciate someone helping you? So here's your chance to invest some good karma by helping that other person if you can.

In your own case right now, you've got some bad karma sprouting, but that doesn't mean that's the only karma you have. And remember that all of us in the human realm have a mixture of good and bad karma, so don't be embarrassed by the fact that some bad karma is currently sprouting in your field.

Q: I'm wondering what to do when you are dealing with some really strong, stormy fabrications—really strong rage or lust—and you're just a step away from doing an unskillful act, but you're not able to just sit and meditate. What should you do?

A: This is when you need some strong medicine. For instance, with lust: the person you're lusting for—imagine taking the skin off. Do you still have lust? Some people who are really desperate may still have lust, and then the question is “What is still feeding the lust inside me?” Sometimes the lust is not focused on the object or the person. It's focused on the story you tell yourself. “I do this, then I do this, then I do this, and she does that, and she does that.” In a case like that, ask yourself, “How much longer do I want to keep falling for these lies I tell myself?” Think of your lust laughing at you. Tell yourself, “Just this once I'm going to say No.” See what happens.

FEBRUARY 13, 2026, EVENING

Introduction

Good evening, and welcome to our retreat. It's always a pleasure to be here with you, and I hope that you'll find the retreat useful.

The title of this retreat is *The Power of Karma*, a phrase with two meanings. The first meaning refers to the power of the *concept* of karma, or intentional action, in that the teaching on karma is the Buddha's most basic teaching. Once you have a proper understanding of this teaching and see it as the context for all his other teachings, it helps you to understand those teachings correctly—and not only to understand them, but also to put them into practice so that you can put an end to suffering.

This connects with the second meaning of the phrase, which refers to the power of the *reality* of karma: the power you have, through your own intentions and actions, to bring about happiness here and now, and ultimately to bring about the total end of suffering.

Now, this interpretation may conflict with what you've heard from other Buddhist teachers, even from some Buddhist monks, who tell you that karma is irrelevant to the Dhamma. The Dhamma is all about the present moment, they say, whereas karma deals with past and future. Some will tell you that the teaching on karma was a mistake, adopted from common beliefs in India in the Buddha's time—either by the Buddha himself or by his later followers—without thinking about the implications of some of his other teachings. Many will teach you that the issue of karma plays no role in the teaching. Some will say that it's because there's nothing for you to do, that the path will grow on its own. Others will tell you that there's nothing you *can* do, because everything has been determined by the past. And some will even tell you there is nobody to do it anyhow.

We'll show in the course of this retreat that these interpretations grossly misrepresent what the Buddha taught. They actually get in the way of

following the path to the end of suffering.

The teaching on karma is relevant, in fact is actually *necessary* for understanding the Buddha's teaching. Karma does deal with the past and the future, but its focus is what you can do right here and right now in the face of past influences so that you can have a good influence on the present and on into the future. Also, the path to the end of suffering is something that you do. And you have to do it. It's not a mushroom that grows on its own in the jungle. You are free to choose to do the path or not, because your past actions don't totally shape the present moment. As the Buddha said, if we were not free to choose what we can do in the present moment, there would be no path to the end of suffering and no idea of anything that should or should not be done, because everything that's done had to be done that way.

This is the point that is probably most misunderstood about karma. People don't like the teaching on karma because it sounds like a negative, deterministic, fatalistic force, coming from the past. When things go poorly, you'll often hear people say, "It's my bad karma." Yet when things go well, people don't usually say, "Boy, that's my good karma," which is not fair. As the Buddha taught, the fact that generosity is meaningful, the fact that gratitude is meaningful, comes from the fact that we have freedom of choice. This is probably the most important point to remember from this retreat.

Now, it's true that actions and their results follow patterns of cause and effect, but it's possible to manipulate the causes so that they give the effects you desire. You have that freedom, and it's the combination of a pattern of cause and effect that you are free to manipulate that allows you to develop any skill at all, and especially the skills of the path. The existence of that pattern operating over time is what allows you to learn lessons today that you can apply on into the future. The freedom is what allows you to adjust that pattern right now to get the results you desire.

The pattern in general is that if you act on skillful intentions—free of greed, aversion, and delusion—you're going to get pleasant results. If you act on unskillful intentions—with greed, aversion or delusion—you'll get painful results.

Here it's important to understand the difference between good intentions and skillful intentions. In English, we have an expression, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." That's because good intentions—even though they're well-meaning—can often be deluded and so can cause harm. This is why an important part of the Buddha's teaching lies in his instructions for how to turn your good intentions into skillful intentions without delusion.

We'll focus on the pattern of cause and effect more toward the end of the retreat, as that requires the least explanation, and as it's also relevant to your life outside of the retreat. We'll focus first on your freedom to choose a course of action, because that's most relevant to the meditation we'll be doing in the course of the retreat, and also because it requires the most explanation.

To begin with, karma is basically the intention that motivates an action in thought, word, or deed. The Buddha teaches that your experience is shaped by a combination of old intentions and new intentions. He analyzes your experience of the present moment in this way: the input of the six senses is the result of past karma. Present karma comes both prior to the experience of past karma and in response to past karma.

Here we'll focus on the karma that comes first, because that's the most powerful. Prior to the input of your senses, there are two sets of mental factors that are related to your intentions. You've probably seen them at work in your own experience. If you're already angry with somebody, then when that person does a little thing that's wrong, you're going to focus really intensely on that wrong. It's going to be very large in your awareness. But if somebody you love were to do the same thing, you probably won't even notice it. In other words, we approach experience with a lot of preconceived notions and attitudes, likes and dislikes.

The Buddha's most detailed explanation of the causes of suffering—dependent co-arising—lists what some of these preconceived notions are. First of all are what he calls the three fabrications—in Pali the word is *saṅkhāra*—and the three types are bodily fabrication, verbal fabrication, and mental fabrication.

- Bodily fabrication is the way you breathe in and out.

- Verbal fabrication is how you talk to yourself. The Buddha divides this into two types of activities. One is directed thought; the other is evaluation. Directed thought is when you choose a topic to focus on. Evaluation is when you ask questions about the topic, analyze it, or make comments.

I'll tell you a story. I had an American friend who was teaching in Thailand. She was blonde and had blue eyes and she fell in love with a Thai man. Of course, there was the language barrier, and she was trying her best to learn Thai so that their conversations could be more and more direct. One night, she was talking about something that meant a great deal to her. He was looking deep into her eyes, and she was thinking, "He must really understand me." When she was finished, he asked her, "Those blue eyes of yours: Do you really see with them, or are they just ornaments?" In this case, he was directing his thoughts at her eyes and not at what she was saying, and his evaluation was about how blue they were. That's verbal fabrication.

- Mental fabrications are perceptions and feelings. Perceptions are the labels you put on things—either as individual words or mental pictures. You use them, first, to identify what something is; second, to identify what it means; third to identify how important it is. For example, with a red light at an intersection: You identify that it's red, you identify that red means stop, and then you identify that you really need to pay attention to it—you really ought to stop. Those are perceptions.

Feelings are feeling tones of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain.

It's through these three types of fabrication that we shape our experience of the present moment.

Then there are two other sub-factors in dependent co-arising that also help shape our experience. One is attention—in other words, the questions you pay attention to. The other is intention, what you mean to accomplish by an action.

Even before you experience the results of your past actions, these internal factors shape how you'll approach it. If this is done in ignorance, it can lead to suffering. If it's done with knowledge of the four noble truths, it can be part of the path to the end of suffering.

Expressed in another way, karma from the past provides the raw materials for the present moment. Your present karma—in terms of the three fabrications, attention, and intention—is what turns that raw material into an actual experience of the present moment.

It's as if you're a cook. The raw material from the past is like the food in your garden or your kitchen. Your present karma is what you actually do with that raw material, those ingredients, to make the food you're going to eat. Just as cooks can sometimes be so skilled that they can use bad ingredients to make good food, one of the purposes of meditation is to learn how to do these factors with more knowledge so that even bad karma coming in from the past doesn't have to make you suffer. This is why meditation focuses precisely on these factors.

For example, with breath meditation, focusing on the breath: That's bodily fabrication. One of the things you want to learn is that there are many different ways of breathing that you can learn how to master.

The Buddha never taught you just to be with whatever way you're breathing. He recommends that you learn how to breathe while being aware of the whole body, how to breathe in a way that gives rise to pleasure, gives rise to rapture, gives rise to gladness in the mind. There are lots of different ways you can breathe, and he says, basically, to take advantage of them. That's bodily fabrication.

With verbal fabrication, you're focusing your thoughts on the breath, and then you're evaluating the way your breath goes through the body, trying out different ways of breathing to see what works best.

As for mental fabrications, you'll also use different perceptions of how the breath moves through the body, and you'll take advantage of the fact that you can make it flow in a way that feels pleasant.

That's all three fabrications right there.

Of course, you're also doing this with an overriding intention, which is to bring the mind to stillness so that you can see more clearly what's going on in the mind. You're also using acts of attention—what the Buddha calls *appropriate* attention, trying to ask questions that apply the framework of the four noble truths to whatever problems are getting in the way. In other words,

if your mind is not settling down, you don't ask yourself, "Why am I such a bad meditator? Why is my meditation so hopeless? Why is everyone else in the room so calm when I'm not?" Those are inappropriate questions to ask. Make it simply, "What kind of breathing would feel better and help me to settle down? If I'm forcing it too much, how can I be a little bit more lenient or forgiving?"

I'll tell you a story. When I was a young monk, I made friends with a young Thai monk who had also just recently ordained. Every morning, we would go up to an old wooden meditation hall on the side of the hill. Pretty soon, the mosquitoes were biting, my legs were hurting, my mind was not settling down. I looked over at the other monk. He was sitting very still. I said to myself, "I have to preserve the good name of Americans. I've got to keep at this." So I kept on sitting there in spite of the pain. I found out later that he was sitting there, mosquitoes were biting him, his legs were hurting, his mind was not settling down. He looked over this American monk who looked so calm. He told himself, "I can't lose out to the American." So, we maintained our good intentions but our motivation was probably not the best.

The important lesson is that while you're meditating, you're learning how to create good karma in the present moment, to shape the present moment well. Which means that all the teachings on karma are directly relevant to what you're doing right now as you meditate.

By the time the retreat is over, we hope that the talks will clear up any misunderstandings you may have on the teachings of karma, so that you'll be able to develop these good potentials not only as you meditate, but also as you go through daily life. You'll find that there is a lot to like in the teaching of karma, because it points out what powers you have to bring about happiness. It gives you instructions on how you can make best use of those potentials.

So to get started, let's meditate so that we can see how skillfully we can shape the present moment by maintaining the intention to focus on our breath.

FEBRUARY 14, 2026, MORNING

The Karma of Breath Meditation

Last night, we talked about the mental factors you use to shape the results of past karma arising in the present moment: acts of intention, acts of attention. Intention is your purpose. Attention covers the issues and questions you think are worth paying attention to.

Then there are the three kinds of fabrication: bodily fabrication, which is the in-and-out breath; verbal fabrication, the way you talk to yourself; and mental fabrications, which are your perceptions and feelings. We also mentioned how, when we practice meditation, we're focused on the present moment so that we can handle these factors more skillfully.

This morning, I'd like to focus in more detail on exactly how you're engaging in these factors as you meditate—whether you realize it or not—and particularly on how you can do it more skillfully if you get a good vocabulary for describing to yourself what you're doing. It's like professional tasters. They have to develop a precise vocabulary to describe the things they're asked to taste. So today we're going to give you the vocabulary you need to become a professional breather.

First, you have to set up the intention that you're going to try to stay focused on the breath as continuously as possible. Then you pay attention. Learn how you can stay focused on the breath as comfortably, and with as much alertness, as possible. In other words, learn how to ask the right questions as you go along—in particular, on how to encourage more mindfulness and alertness.

Mindfulness, you may remember, is a faculty of your memory. It's not simply bare awareness of what's happening. The Buddha defines it as remembering things that have happened long ago—and particularly things that are relevant to what you're doing right now: remembering to stay right here with the breath, remembering how to recognize skillful and unskillful

qualities arising in the mind, and remembering what has worked and what has not worked in the past in dealing with those qualities.

One of the things you'll be paying appropriate attention to is how to make the breath interesting. In other words, you're not just watching the breath coming in and going out, in, out, in, out. You're also observing how to make it more comfortable and more helpful for the body and the mind. On top of that, you want to pay attention when distractions come up, asking yourself how to put them aside as quickly and as effectively as possible.

This is where you're going to run into what I call the committee of the mind—all the different opinions you have chattering inside your mind right now. There are many different versions of you inside there. As you focus on the breath, you find that there are other parts of the mind that want to think about something else. Their questions are going to be: how to enjoy a potential distraction and how they can slip out during a moment when the meditator in your mind is not alert.

The more you get to know your mind, the more you realize that these conversations are going on, on a subterranean level, all the time. They tell themselves, "As soon as the meditator slips, we're going to go." So it's important that you not pay attention to their questions and that you pay more attention to *your* questions, in particular, how to recognize a distraction as a distraction, and how to drop it as quickly as possible. We'll go into these issues in more detail tomorrow morning.

These are some of the ways in which you make use of skillful intentions and appropriate attention as you meditate.

As for the question of how to stay comfortably focused and alert, this is where the three fabrications come in. For example, with the breath, you want to notice where you feel the breath most clearly. Remember, the breath is not the air coming in and out through the nose. It's the feeling of energy flowing through the body.

As for verbal fabrication, which is directed thought and evaluation, you direct your thoughts to how important it is for you to try to master this skill now in order to get to know the basic force of life. If you have any chronic pains or illnesses, you can focus on how to use the breath to alleviate them.

As for evaluation, there are lots of questions you can ask yourself. What kind of breathing feels best for the body right now?—energizing if you're feeling tired, relaxing if you're feeling tense, soothing if you're feeling frazzled. You can try different rhythms of breathing: long, short; heavy, light; deep or shallow. You can try different textures of breathing: heavy, light; coarse or refined. Then you can combine and compare the different ways of breathing. An important part of evaluation is having different things to compare.

Once you've found something that's comfortable, the question is how to maintain it and when you need to adjust it further. After all, as the mind settles down, you'll find that the needs of the body will change. At first long breathing may feel best, but after a while shorter breathing might feel better.

Once you're able to maintain a sense of comfort, then the next question is how to spread that comfortable sensation throughout the body, at the same time expanding the range of your awareness to fill the whole body to be aware of that sense of comfort all around.

This is where we get into mental fabrication. For example, with the issue of perception: What perception of the breath is most conducive to comfort? You can perceive the body as a sponge, surrounded by pores on all sides. The air can come in and out very freely through the pores from all directions. This perception can help you get past the sensation you sometimes have that you have to fight against obstructions in order to breathe.

At the same time, try not to perceive a sharp dividing line between the in-breath and the out-breath, because when you create a sharp dividing line, there's a little bit of tension that goes with that sharp dividing line, which cuts through any sense of comfort or fullness that may be developing from the breath. Think of the out-breath flowing into the in-breath, and the in-breath flowing into the out-breath. Hold in mind the perception that you don't want to squeeze the out-breath out of the body. Remember: You're aiming at a sense of fullness as you breathe in and as you breathe out. So don't force the breath out. Allow it to go out on its own, while you maintain a relaxed sense of fullness inside.

Another series of perceptions you can ask yourself about are: Where does the breath start in the body? Does it actually come from outside? If so, where does it come into the body? Does it come in many places? Or if it starts inside, where does it start? One point? Many points? Every cell? This last perception is especially useful as the in-and-out breath gets softer and even stops. That will happen as the mind gets very still and you begin to realize that you're not breathing. You have to remind yourself you're not going to die. If the body needs to breathe, it'll breathe. If you've developed the perception that you're already full of breath energy, that helps to overcome the fear of dying.

Other perceptions you might try asking yourself about include, "What directions does the breath flow in the body?" If you've read Ajaan Lee's "Method Two," you know he talks about the breath energy flowing down the spine, then down the legs to the feet. But even he explored other directions. For example, in one of his Dhamma talks he mentions the breath that starts at the soles of the feet and runs up the spine. So you can try different perceptions and see which ones feel best for you.

Another perception that you might investigate: Do you sense the breath-body ending at the skin or does it surround the material body, like a cocoon of energy? If you sense a cocoon of energy around the body, can you make it feel healthy? Once it's healthy, can you draw that healthy energy from it into the material body?

Here we might want to stop and ask a question that people sometimes ask: "I thought meditation was supposed to be seeing things as they are, so why are we imagining things?" The answer is that our purpose is not looking at things as they are, but exploring things *as they can be*, in other words, seeing what potentials we have and how we can develop them into a basis for solid and alert concentration. Sometimes, in order to see these potentials clearly, you have to expand your imagination.

This is a principle that applies throughout life. For example, when you tell a child that the world is round, as far as the child is concerned, he has no way of knowing whether that's true or not. But once you understand that it is a possibility, you can start exploring that possibility and use it to actually benefit. For example, if I'm going to fly from Los Angeles to Bangkok, then

because the world is round, the shortest route is to fly near Alaska. Sometimes in order to see the truth, you have to first *imagine* the truth. These exercises of perception are basically opening our mind to possibilities that our current perceptions have closed off.

So those are some of the issues around perception, combined with appropriate attention: questioning your perceptions to find which ones are most useful for developing concentration.

There's also the issue of feelings, the other form of mental fabrication. Sometimes very strong feelings of energy come up in the body and become unpleasant. Here again, you can use some perceptions to help you deal with them. For example, you can imagine that the excess energy is going out the palms of your hands, the soles of your feet, or out your eyes. Sometimes there's a feeling of fullness and after a while it begins to feel uncomfortable. I've had this happen to a couple of my students. In every case, it turns out that they had almost drowned at some time earlier in their lives. If that's happened to you, hold in mind the image that you're surrounded by air, which you are. Hold that perception in mind and the feeling of fullness will become more and more pleasant.

If there are pains in one part of the body, focus on another part of the body that you can make comfortable by the way you breathe. Then when you're well established in that comfortable part, think of the comfortable breath energy flowing from there through the pain. For example, if there are pains in the knees, focus on opening the breath channels starting with the back of the neck, and then going down the spine, down the legs, through the knees, and out the feet. If there's a perception that the pain creates a wall that the breath cannot go through, destroy that perception. Hold in mind the perception that no matter how solid the wall, its atoms are surrounded by spaces, and the breath can flow through the spaces.

An important point is that you not force the breath energy into different parts of the body. A good image to hold in mind is that you've cut a road through the wilderness. Once the road is open, the trucks and cars will run along the road on their own. You don't need to push them. If the body doesn't seem to want to breathe, maybe it doesn't have to. The breath coming in

through the pores of the skin may be enough. At the same time, don't force the body not to breathe. If it wants to, let it breathe.

These are just a few examples of how you can use the three fabrications along with appropriate attention to maintain the intention to stay with the breath, at ease and alert.

When you get used to shaping your meditative experience in this way, you become more sensitive to how you use the same fabrications to shape all your experiences at home, at work, and at play. The importance of these skills is indicated by the fact that when the Buddha describes the causes of suffering, the three kinds of fabrication come right after ignorance; right after them come intention and attention—which means that these factors are the first things you should pay attention to when you try to put an end to your ignorance.

All of the Buddhist teachings can be seen as instructions in what kind of intentions are best to develop, what questions are best to pay attention to, how to talk to yourself, which perceptions and feelings you should focus on. For example, if you've read any of the suttas, you may have noticed that there are lots and lots of similes. It's through these similes that Buddha teaches you what perceptions to hold in mind. He even teaches you how to breathe.

In this way, you can learn how to use the power of your present moment karma, to lead to the end of suffering.

In a few minutes, we'll have a period of walking meditation. The instructions are these: Find a path that's at least 25 paces long. Stand at one end of the path. Hold your hands either in front of you or behind you. Walk at a fairly normal pace and focus either on your breath or on your feet. When you get to the end of the path, make up your mind that each time you reach the end of the path, you will turn either always to the right or always to the left, all throughout the meditation session. When you get to the end of the path, turn around, stop for a second to make sure you're focused on your spot in the body, and make up your mind to stay with your meditation object all the way to the other end of the path.

If you're focusing on the breath, you ideally should focus on your breath in a part of the body that moves the least while you're walking: the middle of the

chest, for example, the abdomen, or the head. We recommend that you focus on the breath rather than the feet, because this is the first step in learning how to be with the breath as you go through the whole day. In other words, you can walk and breathe at the same time. You don't have to try to make the breath go in and out together with the steps of the feet. Let the breath flow whatever way it feels most comfortable.

If you have trouble focusing on the breath while you walk, you can focus on the movement of the legs and feet.

The image they give in the Canon is a man walking with a bowl of oil on his head, filled to the brim. Behind him is a man with a raised sword. The first man has to take a path between a beauty queen on one side and a crowd excited by the beauty queen on the other side. If he drops one drop of oil, the man with the sword will cut off his head. So at the end of the walking meditation period, I want you all to come back with your heads on.

FEBRUARY 14, 2026, AFTERNOON

Q&A

Q: What is karma?

A: Karma has two meanings. The first and primary meaning is intentional action. The quality of the karma, skillful or unskillful, is determined by the quality of the intention.

The second meaning is the result of an intentional action. For example, when the Buddha talks about old karma, he's actually talking about the results of karma you did in the past.

Q: Today while returning from the dining hall after breakfast, I saw a caterpillar right in the middle of the path. I thought someone might step on it, so I moved it out of the way and placed it somewhere safe. I walked on feeling very happy, but then I thought, was it the caterpillar's karma to die crushed on the path and did I interfere with that? How can we avoid that our actions, even when motivated by good intentions, interfere with the karma of other beings? Gratitude.

A: Actually, this is an important question. The Buddha doesn't say that you have one karma result that has to happen at any one time. His image is a field, and in that field, you have many different seeds. The seeds are your past actions. Some of them will sprout right away; some will take a long time to sprout. Some will sprout if they're watered through attention; others will sprout whether they're watered or not.

In the case of the caterpillar, it had several different potentials ready to sprout. It might have some seeds to be crushed on the path. Or maybe in a previous lifetime, it saw another caterpillar and it pushed that caterpillar off to the side of the road to safety. In your case, you watered the seed of saving the caterpillar's life. So what you did was a good thing. However, if it turns out that the caterpillar was going to die today no matter what anybody did—for

instance, you placed the caterpillar in the grass and a bird came along and ate it—your intention was still to save the caterpillar’s life. That’s your good karma now. Keep on saving lives.

Q: To what extent should I rely on karma when others are misbehaving? For example, on the way to the retreat, a taxi driver tried to overcharge me. I can report him but, one, he was a young man who can fall into a worse path if fired. Two, I tend to be spiteful, so my desires to straighten out the world are often bad karma on their own.

A: This is going to be an individual matter. You don’t know really what the fate of that young man would be if you reported him. But if you’re afraid that reporting him would lead to a bad outcome, don’t report him. Just give him a stern lecture.

Q: The Buddha discourages us from asking about the specifics of karmic processes—what particular actions led to our current state. At the same time, teachings in the Thai forest tradition appear to sometimes answer such questions—for example, Ajaan Fuang telling you that you were orphaned due to having killed in previous lifetimes. Another example: You’re attracted to a person because you were related to him or her in the past. Another example is that practicing generosity leads to wealth in coming lifetimes, and another example, lack of anger leads to beauty. So given that those teachings might help, was it not skillful to ask in first place?

A: There’s a difference between asking about general principles and asking about specific instances. Knowing the general principle that generosity leads to wealth is something useful to know. That’s why the Buddha taught it. As for the question of why I was orphaned, I didn’t ask the question. If I had asked the question of Ajaan Fuang, he probably would’ve glared at me. He simply happened to offer that bit of information once. If I quizzed him more about when and where I had done that, he probably, again, would’ve glared at me. The particulars—as in when you were an Egyptian princess—are not really useful to know. Do you have that in Brazil? People claiming to having been

Egyptian princesses? That's not useful to know, but the general principles of how karma works *are* useful to know and so they're worth talking about. We'll talk about them more in detail toward the end of the retreat.

Q: I've been subjected to discrimination due to my ethnicity, so I feel bad about asking this question, but I will. I'm attracted to someone from a distance and trying to kill the attraction. Some of my committee members don't like this person's ethnicity. I don't like these committee members because of their racism, but should they have their way in this context?

A: When you're trying to kill your attraction to another person, you want to give good reasons for not having the attraction, reasons that you actually feel good about allowing to have power in your mind. You would feel bad about judging another person because of his or her ethnicity, so push those committee members aside. Focus on the committee members that have better reasons. Number one is, ask yourself: Why do I really want to kill the attraction? Focus on those reasons.

Q: Sometimes when I'm meditating, I get visions of places or people. Should I allow them to flow naturally—I have noticed that sometimes they give me insights—or should I just take my attention back to the breath?

A: Spread goodwill to the people and, if they seem to want some merit from your meditation, dedicate the merit to them. Then go back to your breath. You want to develop this as a strong habit. If you very easily get involved in visions, the same thing will happen when you die: You'll run off into a vision and be reborn wherever it leads you.

You don't necessarily want to get involved with everybody in your visions. A film years back, called *Ice Age II*, had a scene where the characters are floating on a raft through fog in the ocean. A light appears on the horizon, so they go toward the light. There they find a group of very beautiful mermaids and mermen. The characters are very attracted to them. But then when you look carefully at the mermaids and the mermen, there's static. And in the static, there are piranhas. So watch out for images.

Q: Regarding the precept not to kill, how should we deal with taking care of our own health or that of other beings who depend on us, like family or pets with, for example, intestinal worms, fleas, or small microorganisms?

A: The precept against killing does not apply to the microorganisms. It applies only to things you can see with your naked eye. As for worms and fleas, there are medicines that can get the worms out of your intestines without killing them, and also ways of getting fleas off of an animal without killing the fleas. It's worth going out of your way to find those remedies.

Q: During the body scan, when discomfort arises in another part of the body from the one that's being scanned—for example, in the center of the head—what should be done? Should I continue with the progressive scan or should I bring my attention back to the part of the body where the discomfort is and acknowledge it?

A: You can do it either way. If there's a pain that suddenly appears while you're doing the scan, the first thing would be to go focus on that, and then to see if the way you breathe or spread breath energy can alleviate it. It's in this way that you discover how there are many interesting patterns of tension and pain running in unusual ways through the body. However, if you cannot make the pain go away by the way you breathe, then just leave it alone and go back to your original scan.

Q: What is becoming?

A: Becoming is a state of mind that you create. You start with a desire for something and then, around that object, you have a sense of the world in which that object is found. Then you have a sense of yourself going into that world. The question is then: Do you have the ability to get what you want or not? That whole construct—the object you desire, the world in which it's found, and your sense of your identity in that world: That's a becoming.

For example, suppose you have the desire for a pizza. There's no pizza here in the retreat center. But there might be a pizza in Brazlândia. So you think of the pizza in Brazlândia. Then you think about how, after this session is over, you're going to sneak off to your car and drive out to Brazlândia. All of that is a

becoming. We do this many, many times in the course of the day. This is called becoming on the micro level.

But becoming can also happen on what's called the macro level. As your last lifetime was ending, a desire for something appeared and you saw that you could find it in the human world, so you came into this human world. This is how rebirth happens. It's the same process that we follow day-to-day as we go from one becoming to the next. As the Buddha said, it's this desire for becoming that causes us to suffer. But in order to get out of this process of becoming, we have to create the becoming of the path.

As when you're sitting in meditation: There's a desire for calm. There's a desire for peace, a desire for clarity. You realize you're going to find these things inside you, and you can bring your attention inside your body. In this case, the world of this becoming is your body as you feel it from within. Your identity is as the meditator doing the meditation. That, too, is a type of becoming, but it's a useful type of becoming for putting an end to suffering because you can see the process of becoming very clearly when you're doing this.

As for any distracting thought that comes up, realize that it's an alternative becoming. As you learn more and more quickly how not to go for these alternative distractions, you come to see and understand the steps by which this process happens. You also begin to see that it's not worth the effort to go into the distraction. So you develop a dispassion for these other forms of becoming, until finally the only becoming that's left is you as a meditator. And then, because you see that it's fabricated and subject to change even when your powers of concentration are good, you developed dispassion for this. When you can let all these processes go, that's when you open up to something much greater, where there's no becoming, but there is the ultimate happiness.

That's a short talk on becoming. If you have any questions about the details, we can discuss them later on.

Q: When we practice during the day, you say we should be mindful and that mindfulness means keeping something in mind. For those of us who are not advanced in meditation and , what would be the basic principles to keep in mind to develop skillful qualities and abandon unskillful ones? When trying to

stay mindful during the day, my mind is mostly thinking random things that are either useless or downright unskillful. How should I approach this so that my mind doesn't feel repressed from being told to stop all the time?

A: If you take a dog as a pet and you see the dog doesn't like to be repressed, so you allow it to piss and shit anywhere in the house, you're going to have trouble living with that dog. You have to teach the dog how to *want* not to piss and shit in the house. It's the same way with the mind: You have to make the mind learn to *want* to think skillful thoughts. For example, you can ask yourself, "What opportunities do I have today to be generous?" Learn how to enjoy planning generosity. If you don't have material things to give, what other things can you give? Your time? Your energy? Your knowledge? Your forgiveness?

When you make skillful thoughts interesting and entertaining, then you realize that this is much better than just allowing your mind to think random useless thoughts. For example, generosity is an excellent opportunity to exercise your creativity. At the same time, learn how to enjoy following the precepts and practicing meditation. As the meditation becomes more enjoyable, then the mind will become more and more inclined to want to do it. It'll stop leaving messes around your house.

Q: Some people with physical or mental fatigue who turn to meditation in order to slow down and regain balance may feel very sleepy during practice. What guidance would you give in such cases?

A: If you find yourself falling asleep during the meditation, you have to give the mind work to do. This is one of the reasons why we do the scan of the body. If you find that that's too slow to keep you awake, you can do the scan more quickly. Focus on the middle of the chest for three breaths. Then move up to the throat for three breaths, to the head for three breaths, then down through the throat to the body and so on. An alternative would be to think of all the different beings in the world to whom you want to spread goodwill. Think of all the people that you're indebted to, and to whom you would like to think send thoughts of gratitude.

Q: I've been feeling anger toward some people. How can I transform this feeling?

A: This is a good opportunity to think about the three fabrications we've been talking about. First, start with some verbal fabrication. Remind yourself that when you're angry with other people, you tend to do stupid things. You don't want to do those stupid things, so you'd better get the anger under control.

This is where you run into some committee members who actually like the anger: When you're angry, you get to say and do what you want. You get to show your power. But you have to remind those committee members again about the stupid things you do when you're angry. If you want to make a good, skillful change in the world, you can't do it while you're angry. When you get past the anger, then you can see more clearly what needs to be done.

In other words, you have to see that there's a part of the mind that's attracted to anger and another part of the mind that realizes that anger has some very strong drawbacks, and it really is in your best interest to get past the anger. If the unskillful committee members say, "I don't care," that's when you remind them that when you do something stupid under the force of anger, you're actually going to please your enemy. Do you want to please that person? This is using spite to get past your anger—it may not be the most skillful thing to do, but sometimes it's all that works.

That's verbal fabrication.

Once you've talked yourself into wanting to get rid of the anger, then you ask yourself, "How am I breathing that's aggravating the anger? Can I breathe in a way that's more calming? What perceptions am I holding in mind?" In other words, how do you perceive the situation? Can you perceive it in another way that's less likely to give rise to anger? Try to look at the good qualities of the person you're angry at, to remind yourself that you actually do want to behave in a skillful way toward that person.

Finally, what feelings in your own body and mind are you focusing on? Often when we're angry, we start focusing on the pains, the tightness and tension in our body, which often come from unskillful ways of breathing and which make the situation even more difficult to bear. So ask yourself, are there

places in the body where you can create a sense of pleasure? Focus there. When the anger calms down this way, you can promise yourself: “Just because I’ve calmed down doesn’t mean I’m not going to do anything about the situation.” IYou’ll be in a better position to see what the actual skillful thing would be to do or say.

Q: From what you’ve said so far, we shouldn’t think of the actions of the past as deterministic, but that we have a choice. Yet in spite of this, at some level, according to Buddhist philosophy, shouldn’t we simply accept things as they are? Could you comment on that?

A: There are two points to discuss here. One is that you don’t really know what opportunities are available in the present moment until you try changing things. When you realize that no matter what you do, you cannot make a difference, only then should you say, “I’ll have to accept this for the time being.”

When the Buddha talks about accepting things as they are, he’s basically telling you to look at the situation in which you find yourself and then be very honest with yourself about what the situation is. Starting from that position, you develop the path. Remember that if the Buddha had just accepted things as they were, he would have stayed in the palace and nothing would have changed. We wouldn’t have the Dhamma. He had a very strong sense that he wanted something better than what he had.

Second: The phrase that sometimes you hear translated as “knowing things as they are,” actually should be translated as “knowing things as they have come to be.” Which means you’re trying to understand cause and effect, and how causes and effects have arrived at the situation where you are. Then the next question is, how can you use that pattern of cause and effect to take yourself to a place where there’s less suffering?

Q: In some situations we need to develop equanimity for a person, i.e., a person whom we’ve discovered will not change in spite of our efforts to help. Here it will be easy to tell ourselves that their misfortune is their karma. Is that unskillful or is it not necessary to think like that?

A: We have to admit that it is their karma. What's important is the tone of voice in which you think that thought. If you think, "They deserve it," that's not equanimity. That's spite. You have to remember with karma that sometimes certain seeds for the possibility of change haven't sprouted yet, but you never know when those seeds might be ready to sprout. So the proper attitude should be that "Right now I cannot help that person, but maybe sometime in the future I will be able to help that person and I'll be happy to help then." In some cases, it's going to be a long time. It'll be a long time before you can teach that caterpillar to come and meditate, but you can help the caterpillar as best you can, given its situation.

I'll tell you a story. I have a student in Singapore whose job required that he drive around the city on a scooter. This was long before Uber treats. He had a habit, when he saw an animal that had been run over, to stop, take a piece of newspaper, and pull the animal out of the road, so that its body wouldn't be mangled by the traffic. It would often happen that these little animals would come into his dreams at night and tell him a lottery number. The numbers won rewards, but because the animals were small, the numbers gave only small rewards.

FEBRUARY 14, 2026, EVENING

Past Karma

Last night, we talked about the fact that your present experience is composed of three things: results from past actions—and here “actions” means “intentions”—your present intentions, and the results of your present intentions.

Tonight I’d like to talk about the attitude we should have toward the results of our past actions.

We can’t go back and change those actions, but we find that we do have various ways of dealing with their results as they come up in the present moment.

A teaching you sometimes hear is that to know a person’s past actions, look at his present condition; to know a person’s future condition, look at his present actions. This, though, is much too simplistic. It assumes that we have a single karma account, like a single bank account, and what you see in the present moment is the running balance.

Actually, what you see in the present moment is only one small piece of a person’s past karma. For instance, you may see someone who seems to be happy, with lots of good fortune in life, but that person has many seeds of karma in his background and some of those seeds can be very bad. In the same way, you may see someone who seems very unfortunate right now—in other words, some bad seeds are sprouting right now—but they may also have some very good seeds in their background that are either ready to sprout or may sprout sometime in the future.

The same principle applies to you.

The image that the Buddha uses to help us understand our past karma is not a bank account. It’s a field full of seeds. You can have good seeds and bad seeds in your field coming from your past karma. In the present moment, you can add water to some of the seeds in the field and you’ll encourage some of

them to grow, which means that you have to be very careful about what you water.

Now, in some cases, the seeds are not ready to sprout no matter how much water you add. Some are ready to sprout only if you add water, and some will sprout whether you add water or not. In any case, the “water” stands for your attention and your delight in things.

So that’s what you have to watch out for: *what* you’re paying attention to, *how* you’re paying attention to it, and what kind of delight you find in it.

This fact has many implications. One is that you don’t need to ask which deed in the past left which seed in the field. As the Buddha said, if you tried to trace back all of your past karma, you’d go crazy. When you hear someone asking, “Oh, what karma caused all these people to die?” Or: “Why is this person suffering?” all you need to know is the general principle: that there was some bad karma in the past, but you don’t know exactly what the actions were.

The Buddha’s recommendation is that you focus instead on accepting that there are good and bad seeds in your field and in the fields of other people, and then proceed from there. If we had only good seeds, we wouldn’t be human beings. We’d be devas up in one of the heavens some place. All you have to focus on is watering the right seeds—the ones that hold the potential for happiness—and planting good new seeds in your own field, and to encourage other people to water and plant the right seeds in theirs. That’s the first implication.

The second implication is that there’s no need for remorse over your past bad actions, because remorse can be debilitating. Simply recognize the fact that you have made mistakes, resolve not to repeat them, and then spread thoughts of goodwill to yourself and to all other beings. Goodwill for others is to maintain your desire to be harmless. Goodwill for yourself is to keep you from beating yourself up over your mistakes. That way, it’ll be easier to remember them and so not repeat them. Remember, too, that the simple intention to incline your mind in a skillful direction is, in and of itself, already a skillful action. Nourish that inclination.

Remember too that a bad deed doesn’t necessarily mean you’ll have to go to a bad destination. A change of heart in the right direction—being virtuous

and maintaining right view—can send you to the good destinations, where you can continue to produce more good karma to overwhelm the bad karma you’ve made.

That’s the second implication.

The third implication is that there are many potentials in the present. For example, there are potentials for pain as well as potentials for pleasure right here in your body. You can make yourself miserable by focusing unskillfully on the potentials for pain, and you can actually get the mind in a good state by focusing skillfully on the potentials for pleasure. If your focus is skillful, using appropriate attention, the right intentions and perceptions, you can focus even on the potentials for pain in a way that puts the mind in a good shape.

The same principle applies to the potentials in the mind. Your mind has the potential both for many skillful attitudes and for many unskillful attitudes. Here it’s important to note that the Buddha never says that the mind is naturally good or naturally bad. He notes instead that the mind is very changeable—it can change so quickly that even he, the master of apt analogies, couldn’t find an analogy for how quick it is to change. Even “the flash of an eye” is too slow in comparison. He also notes that the mind has potentials in both directions, skillful and not skillful. So, to be wise, we focus on developing the skillful attitudes and learn how to undercut or weaken the unskillful ones. We do this by watering our skillful attitudes with our attention and delight. This is why appropriate attention and skillful delight are such important parts of the practice.

Our problem is that we often delight in unskillful attitudes. Lust and greed are obvious examples, but we also have a potential for anger, and sometimes part of use really enjoys it. The Buddha said what you should try to do is develop a delight in developing what’s skillful, and a delight in abandoning what’s unskillful. This is one of the traditions of the noble ones.

Some of the implications of the Buddha’s teachings on past karma apply directly to your meditation. For example, if you find that there’s a lot of pain, don’t just sit there with the pain. Ask yourself skillful questions about it. This would count as the water of appropriate attention. At the same time, look for alternative potentials in the body and then develop those.

I'll give you an example. Several years back, we had a meditation session out under the trees in the monastery, and it was a beautiful day: a light breeze; the temperature was just right. And for me, it was a very pleasant meditation. However, a woman in the group had brought along a friend who had never meditated before.

After the end of the meditation, the friend announced to the group, "I have never suffered so much in my life." She suffered because of what she was paying attention to: how she couldn't move, how much pain she was feeling, how bored she was. If you pay inappropriate attention to the things that you don't like about the present moment, you actually weaken yourself. If you focus on the potentials for strength, this gives you more strength. This is one of the ways that we can learn to develop endurance and patience: You don't focus on the difficulties. You focus instead on the areas that are energizing. That's how your attention becomes appropriate.

And finally, many of the same implications of the Buddha's teachings on past karma apply to the attitudes you should take when dealing with other people.

When you're dealing with other people, pay attention to the fact that—just as you have a large field full of many different seeds of karma, but you don't know what those seeds are—other people have their own large but unknown fields, too.

This means that if you see someone suffering, you don't just say, "That's their karma," and just leave it at that. You have to remember that here's your chance to help them, because you may have the seeds for that same kind of karma in your background as well. If you ever fall into their situation, would you want the people around you to be indifferent? Here's your chance to develop the kind of karma that would lead other people to want to help you.

There's also the possibility that the person who is currently suffering may have some good seeds that are just about ready to sprout. All you have to do is give that person the right help and encouragement, and those good seeds will be able to sprout.

So, you don't know the other person's potentials, just as you don't know your own. The right attitude is that you always focus on the possibility that

there are some good potentials in all of us. In this way, thinking about past karma in the correct way actually encourages an attitude of compassion for the sufferings of others.

It also encourages an attitude of heedfulness about your own possible sufferings. Even though things may be going well for you right now, you never know when some bad seeds may mature and sprout, so you should always prepare your mind not to be overcome by pleasure or pain, so that you'll be able to endure whatever comes up and deal with it skillfully.

This is why we develop concentration and discernment to get rid of our greed, aversion, and delusion: so that no matter what plants come up in our field, none of them will cause us to suffer or to act in ways that create more seeds for future sufferings.

FEBRUARY 15, 2026, MORNING

The Karma of Distraction

When you set up the intention to stay with the breath, you'll find that other thoughts and intentions come bumping into that original intention, to deflect it.

This is where it's good to remember the Buddha's teachings on how your experience of the moment is based both on past karma and on present karma.

The fact that a distracting thought has appeared in the mind could be the result either of past karma or of present karma. In either case, what matters is what you intend to do with it now. That will be your most important present karma. If you go along with the thought, turn it into a thought world and go traveling in that thought world, your present karma has been kidnapped by unskillful intentions.

For instance, if a thought arises about what you'd like to eat for lunch, in ordinary circumstances you might make it your intention to dwell on that thought. You might tell yourself that it's a perfectly innocent and natural pastime. You might even tell yourself that once the thought arises, you have to follow through with it. This, by the way, is one of the mind's favorite excuses for following through with a thought it knows to be unskillful. You tell yourself that once the thought is there, you're committed to following through. This is one of the mind's favorite ways of lying to itself.

In any event, when you believe these excuses, you've allowed your intentions and acts of verbal fabrication help in pulling the mind in the direction of the distraction.

But here you're meditating, and have more important work to do. So in this context, the skillful way to deal with distractions is to recognize that they're not what you intend to focus on, and then use the present-moment-karma factors we've been discussing—intention, attention, and the three fabrications—in whatever forms are necessary to get the mind back with the breath.

Now, the first step in dealing with distracting thoughts is to recognize them as distractions when they come, and to remind yourself of your freedom to choose the skillful option in the present moment: The simple fact that those thoughts have arisen doesn't commit you to following through with them.

Those are acts of appropriate attention.

But you don't stop there. The next step is that, once you recognize distraction, you try to cut away any causes that would give rise to more distraction. The Buddha gives five examples for how you deal with distracting thoughts. As he says, when you master these approaches, you'll be able to think the thoughts you want to think, and not think the thoughts you don't want to think. What he doesn't say is that you will also gradually become more discerning in detecting what's really worth thinking and what's not.

Each of these approaches involves asking more questions in line with appropriate attention, and using verbal and mental fabrications—in particular, perceptions and your inner conversation of directed thought and evaluation. These approaches will work, however, only if you can maintain your original intention to get mind to settle down. If you can do that, the battle is already half-won.

The first approach is to replace an unskillful thought with a more skillful one. The skillful thoughts you try to use will depend on your state of mind and the particular distraction.

The first question to ask is what caused you to slip off the breath. The state of the distracted mind, as the Buddha said, can fall into three sorts. Here we'll focus on the first two. One is when the mind has too little energy, when it's depressed, when it feels discouraged or lonely. The second sort is when you have too much energy, when the mind is excited or worried.

When you've figured out the cause, then you can apply the appropriate remedy. For the first instance, when you have too little energy, the Buddha recommends trying to gladden the mind, and several ways of thinking can do this. One is to develop the sublime attitudes: thoughts of goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, or equanimity for all beings. You may find that those thoughts lift up the mind. Another topic can be your own generosity. Think of times when you gave a gift because you freely wanted to give it. This

particular thought works well if you have lots of acts of generosity you can think back on. In other words, if you can think of only one time in your life that you were freely generous, it doesn't work as an uplifting thought for very long. This is why continuous generosity is a good basis for meditation. Another gladdening theme would be to think back on your own virtue, remembering the times when you could have done something harmful and may have gotten away with it, but you saw that it was beneath you, so you didn't do it. That gives you a sense of self-esteem. You can also think of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha: any aspect of those three things that gives you a sense of inspiration. Any of these themes can help gladden the mind.

The second problem is when the mind is too excited or worried about the future. The Buddha says you should try to steady the mind, and a good theme for that is contemplation of death. In other words, death could come at any time, which means that your worries about the future would be totally useless.

Once there was a woman who came to practice at Wat Dhammasathit with Ajaan Fuang. Her plan was to stay for two weeks, but on the second day she came to say goodbye. Ajaan Fuang asked her, "Hey, I thought you were going to stay two weeks. Why are you going back so soon?" She said, "I'm worried about my family. Who's going to cook for them? Who will wash the clothes?" He said, "Tell yourself that you've already died. They're going to have to look after themselves some way or another." And it worked. She was able to stay for the two weeks. So if you find yourself worried about what will happen after the retreat, tell yourself you've already died, and that can help stabilize your thoughts.

So mindfulness of death doesn't mean thinking "death, death, death" all the time. Think about it only long enough to motivate yourself to want to get back to the breath.

Another useful contemplation to steady the mind is to tell yourself that you don't know what's going to happen in the future, but you *do* know that whatever comes up, you're going to need more mindfulness, more alertness, more discernment, and more concentration, so the best way to prepare for the

future is to get the mind back to the breath and to develop those qualities in the mind right now.

That's the first way of dealing with distracting thoughts: replacing an unskillful thought with skillful thinking. The Buddha gives you an analogy to hold in mind as a perception to associate with this approach: You're like a carpenter who uses a fine peg to remove a large peg from a piece of wood.

This also leads into **the second approach**, which is to think of the drawbacks of your thinking. This deals with the third sort of reason for why you fall for a distraction: Something about it attracts you. So to get past it, you have to focus on making it unattractive. For instance, if you fall for thoughts of lust, you can imagine taking your own body apart and placing the parts on the floor in front of the person you're attracted to. Then remember that that person's body is made up of the same parts.

If you fall for thoughts of ill will, thinking that someone deserves to suffer for their actions so that justice is done, remember that in light of the long course of saṃsāra, you don't know when the back-and-forth of bad actions began, or who started it. When you don't know when this bad game began, how can you even know the score? The best thing is to pull out of the game entirely.

Another way of thinking that I've found very useful if my thoughts keep going back to the same topic again and again: I ask myself, "If this were a movie, would I pay to watch it?" Usually the answer is, "No. The plot is predictable, the acting is even worse, so why am I spending time with it?" When you can see these thoughts as a waste of time, it's a lot easier to go past them.

For this approach, the Buddha gives another simile: You're like a young man or woman, fond of your own beauty, but you look into a mirror and see the carcass of a snake or a dog hanging from your neck. In the same way, when you can get disgusted with the distracting thought and drop it, that's the second approach.

The third approach: If the thoughts keep coming back, you can simply ignore them and pay attention to your breath instead. Remind yourself that even though there is thinking going on in the mind, it doesn't destroy the

breath. You stay with the breath and let the thoughts take care of themselves. Ajaan Lee's image is that the thoughts are like shadows. If you go running after a shadow with a bar of soap in your hand to try to clean it to make it white, you'll never succeed. You just get drawn further and further away from your breath. So just let the shadows run around on their own. If you stay still, eventually the shadows will have to be still as well.

Another image you can think of is that your thoughts are like crazy people. You have work to do, and they want to come and talk to you. Even if you say just a word to them to drive them away, they've trapped you. So the only way you can deal with them is to pretend they're not there. They'll say things that are even crazier and crazier to get your attention, but the best way to deal with them is just not to respond at all. When you don't feed them with your attention, eventually they starve and they'll go away. That's the third approach.

The fourth approach is to notice that when the mind is thinking, there's going to be a pattern of tension somewhere in the body. If you can locate where that tension is and just breathe right through it and allow it to relax, the thought will have no place to stay. It'll have to stop. This works especially well as you get more and more sensitive to the breathing energies in the body. Think of the image of a spider on the web. As soon as an insect touches the web, the spider moves from its spot, deals with the insect, and then returns back to its spot. In other words, as soon as you see a pattern of tension appearing in the body, you zap it with breath energy and then you return to your focal point. That's the fourth approach.

The fifth approach, if none of these other approaches work, is to press your tongue against your palate and tell yourself, "I will not think that thought." If you have a meditation word such as *buddho*, which means, "awake," you can just repeat that word quickly again and again and again—rapid fire, like a machine gun—in your mind, and that will block the thought. This last approach is the one that requires the least discernment and the most force, so it doesn't work for a long time, but it is useful to have as a tool if nothing else works. It clears the mind, at least for a short period. If we think of these different approaches as if they were tools in a toolbox, the first tools are the more refined ones, like a surgeon's tools or a watchmaker's tools. The last tool is like a sledgehammer.

The Buddha's image for this approach is of two strong men beating down a weaker man.

These are the five ways of dealing with distracting thoughts:

- You replace the distracting thoughts with a line of thinking that's more skillful.
- You contemplate the drawbacks of the distracting thoughts.
- You consciously ignore the thoughts
- You relax whatever tension or energy keeps those thoughts in mind.
- You beat the thoughts out of your mind with the determination that you won't think them.

In each case, you use the approach until it gets you back to the breath.

So when you see that you have a distraction, remember that you have a variety of tools of present-moment karma to free yourself from it. Try to understand what the distraction is and why the mind is attracted to it. Is it because there's too little energy or too much energy? Or is it because there's something in the thought itself that's really attractive? Once you see what the problem is, gain a sense of which tool will work for that particular problem. This is one of the ways in which you can exercise the power of your karma to keep your meditation on track.

FEBRUARY 15, 2026, AFTERNOON

Q&A

Q: I'm not a Buddhist and I'm unfamiliar with the Buddhist teachings, but I have great admiration for what little I have heard about him. Therefore, I apologize if my question seems naive. Could you please tell me what is the Buddha's main teaching is?

A: The Buddha's main teaching explains what suffering is, what actions in your own mind cause suffering, and how you can develop the skills you need for attacking the problem of suffering at the cause so that you can put an end to suffering and find the ultimate happiness. There's a little book in English called *Four Noble Truths* that will explain these points further. We hope to get it translated into Portuguese soon.

Q: You said the Buddha wanted better things. That's why he left the palace. But you also you said that "wanting" is the source of our suffering. How can those two ideas coexist? How are they related? Sorry if that's a silly question, I'm confused about that. Thank you.

A: This is not a silly question. The Buddha didn't say that all kinds of wanting are causes of suffering. He identified three kinds of craving that are the causes for suffering: craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, and craving to destroy whatever state of becoming you have. Those three come under the second noble truth. However, there is also the desire to do and think and say what is skillful and to abandon what is unskillful, for the sake of putting an end to suffering. That desire is part of the path, the fourth noble truth.

Now, there will be some stress in following through with those skillful desires, but if you truly follow through with them, you'll get to a point where you have no need for desire. The image the Buddha gives is of taking a raft across a river. You're standing on the side of the river that's dangerous. There's safety on the other side, but there's no bridge over the river, and no

nibbāna yacht to come over and take you across. You have to make a raft out of the branches and twigs on this side of the river: skillful versions of the things you ordinarily desire and cling to. Then you hold on to the raft as you paddle with your arms and legs to cross the river. The effort to paddle with your arms and legs stands for your right efforts to abandon unskillful qualities and develop skillful ones. Those efforts require that you motivate yourself with skillful desires. When you get to the other side, you can stop paddling and let the raft go.

Q: Can consequences of our actions be avoided? Can old karma be avoided?

A: You cannot erase old karma, but you can develop a state of mind such that, when old bad karma that sprouts in the present moment, this state of mind atwill weaken the results so that you don't have to suffer from them. That'll be the topic for tonight's talk.

Q: Taan Ajaan, is it right to affirm that everything that we experience in this world is a manifestation of karma? Is everything karma?

A: All the pleasures and pains you experience from the six senses are a manifestation of karma. In other words, I don't think the sky is blue because of your karma, but if you find blue really oppressive, that's a result of your past karma.

Q: During the talks, the memory of three people who intentionally acted together to harm me has been repeatedly returning to my mind. I consider them my friends. Is it my wish that the universe bring justice upon them? Is this wish of mine good or bad karma? That's one question.

The second question: I feel that justice through cause and effect should happen, but when I think like that, I also feel a loss of energy and focus, like a drain of energy. How can I let this go if the desire for justice still remains in me?

A: Justice is a hard thing to define, because you don't know what you did to those people in your previous lifetimes. To arrive at a just solution to a problem, you'd have to know when the problem began, who started the problem, and who responded in an unjust way. But with saṃsāra, you don't

know when the story began. So it's best to just say, "Whatever happened in the past, I'm just going to drop the whole affair. It's useless to try to settle the score, because no one knows when the score-keeping began." It's a bad, mud-slinging game, so get out of the game entirely.

When I was teaching in France, we had the chant for the sublime attitudes: "May all beings be happy. May all beings be free from suffering." But for equanimity, instead of saying, "All beings are heir to their actions," their chanting book said, "May all beings be heir to their actions." It sounds like a curse.

Q: Dear Bhante, do I have karmic debt toward someone to whom I did some harm, but they have done a lot more harm to me?

A: Here again, you don't know what you did to them in previous lifetimes. There's no scorecard. So again, just leave the issue. There are many better ways that you can spend your time. Try to act in a skillful way toward that person from now on. If the person refuses to be skillful in response, allow the relationship to grow distant.

Q: Could you explain how bad the karma is from having someone lie or steal for you?

A: *Very bad* karma. It's already bad enough when you break the precepts yourself, but it's worse to get other people to break them for you. They then have to suffer the results coming from what they did.

Q: How can the path of skillful thoughts, words, and actions be taught to a child? How can karma be taught?

A: The first thing to teach a child is gratitude. The second thing is generosity. Both of these qualities are meaningful because we have the power of choice in our actions. Generosity is meaningful because you have the freedom to choose to give something away. Gratitude for the help of others is meaningful because they had the freedom to choose to give or not to give that help. So when you teach these values, you're beginning to teach the principle of karma without having to mention it.

Then the most important precept to teach the child is the precept against lying. When the Buddha was teaching his own son, that was the first issue he brought up: how important it is not to lie.

Then he taught karma in this way, saying: “Before you do anything, ask yourself: ‘What do I think the results of the action I plan to do will be?’ If you think that the action will harm yourself or anyone else, don’t do it. If you don’t think there will be any harm, go ahead and do it.

“While you’re doing it, if you see that any harm is coming up, you stop. If you don’t see any harm, continue with the action.

“When you’re done, look at the long-term results. If you see that you did cause harm, even though you didn’t intend to, make up your mind not to repeat that mistake, and talk it over with someone you trust to see how you can avoid repeating that mistake. If you see that your action didn’t cause any harm, then take joy in the fact that you’re training yourself well, and continue training.”

That’s the proper way to introduce karma.

The Buddha taught this to his son when his son was seven years old. There are a lot of adults who could use this lesson, too.

Q: If karma refers to an intentional action, what would be a non-intentional action? Could you give an example?

A: An example would be walking down the sidewalk at night and stepping on a snail without knowing the snail was there. The fact that you killed the snail was not intentional.

Q: For an intention to produce good results, it needs to be free from greed, aversion, and delusion. Could you say a little more about aversion and delusion?

A: Aversion is when you act on anger; delusion is when you think that something will be skillful when it’s actually going to be harmful.

Q: Dear Taan Ajaan, in the readings we received, there’s a passage that mentions a trivial evil action. Could you explain this more clearly and give some more everyday examples?

A: A trivial evil action would be seeing a snail on the sidewalk and intentionally stepping on it. That's much less evil than killing a person.

Q: Taan Ajaan, is it true that you experience the results of karma quicker, the further you get on the path? If so, why is this? Have you somehow gradually been ending karma through applying the path?

A: There's no way of measuring that. I have known cases, though, where people are meditating in Thailand and they have visions of what they call karma debt collectors: in other words, people you wronged in a previous lifetime. They're following you around, hoping to see that you'll suffer for something you did to them. If you're not practicing, sometimes they'll leave you alone, thinking they can collect their debts anytime. But if you're practicing, they may be afraid you'll get away, in which case they may be in a rush to collect their debts.

There was a woman who came to our monastery in Thailand to meditate with Ajaan Fuang. A friend of hers, who had invited her there, told Ajaan Fuang that this woman had a problem: Every time she meditated, she would start shaking very violently. When she started meditating in Ajaan Fuang's presence, sure enough, she started shaking. Ajaan Fuang had a student who was psychic and he said to her, "Check her out. See what's happening."

To shorten the story: The student saw two beings standing behind the woman, shaking her. So she asked them, "Why are you doing this?" They said that in a previous lifetime she had been their child and she had killed them. They didn't want to see her get away. So the student asked them, "What kind of merit could she do and dedicate to you so that you would stop?" They said, "Build a Buddha image."

We happened to be building a Buddha image at the monastery at the time, but as Ajaan Fuang told the student, "We can't tell her. Otherwise, it'd be as if we're using our powers to gain money." Two years later, though, another one of the woman's friends invited her to help build a Buddha image at another monastery, and the shaking stopped.

It's for this reason that when Thai people are meditating or doing any kind of good deed, they say "If I have any karmic debt collectors, I dedicate this to them. May they rejoice in this merit."

Q: You state in one of your books that generosity, virtue, and meditation lead to happiness in this life and potentially in future lifetimes as well. In what way does meditation lead to happiness in this lifetime?

A: By creating a sense of well-being inside. Simply through focusing on your breath and allowing your mind to settle down steadily with a comfortable sense of the breath, you have a source of happiness and well-being inside that doesn't need to depend on anything outside. If your happiness depends totally on things outside, it's not safe. But if it can depend on your own internal skills, then you can be happy wherever you go.

Q: In yesterday's Q&A, you talked about becoming, and since then I cannot stop noticing it: every minute of every hour, one virtual world after another. It's overwhelming and I'm feeling discouraged. What would be your advice?

A: Don't be discouraged. You've been doing this for a very long time. Now, at least, you have an understanding of what you're doing. One of the things we do as we're meditating is creating a better becoming inside, so that when useless becomings appear to the mind, you have a better place to go. In other words, meditate more.

Q: Dear Taan Ajaan, can past karma determine where we will be reborn? Can the karma of people within the same family be intertwined in the same way?

A: When you die, certain possibilities will appear to your mind, and a lot of those possibilities will depend on your past karma. If you're mindful at the moment of death, you can choose a good possibility. This is why we advise people to try to be as alert as possible when they're dying.

Now, the fact that someone has been in your family this time around doesn't necessarily mean that you will both be in the same family the next time around. But if you have karma intertwined, you probably will meet up somehow. One time Ajaan Fuang made the comment that I was a person from Chiang Mai, Thailand, and I lost my way and was born in America. But even then, I've come to meet you all here in Brazil.

Q: So why is it sometimes easier to succeed in relationships outside of our family circle than in our own family? Is it their karma or my karma?

A: Both.

Q: But why is it easier to succeed outside the family circle sometimes?

A: This can happen when you have bad karma with the people in your family and good karma with people outside. Just because you're born in the same family doesn't mean you have good karma with one another. This is one of the reasons why you have to think twice before you want to have a child. You don't know what kind of monster is going to rear its head out of your gene pool.

Q: Do you bring your tendencies in how you fabricate—for example, bodily, verbal, mental fabrication—to the next lifetime? Perhaps to some extent, but a lot of this is already forgotten?

A: Even though you don't remember your old habits, they still are habits. This is why some children are very talented as musicians soon after they're born. They carry the habits over even though they don't remember them.

Q: So given that you cannot change your old karma, and we cannot change certain circumstances in our lives, the circumstances could make it more difficult for us to practice so as to enter the stream in this lifetime. How can we talk to ourselves if we arrive at death before achieving this and advancing further on the path? What should we do? What should we say to ourselves to make it more likely that we'll be reborn someplace where we can continue to practice?

A: One thing, in this lifetime, practice as much as you can and then, based on the power of that practice, as you approach death, just tell yourself, "May I be born where I can hear the True Dhamma and practice it." Then hold on to that determination. The Buddha said that the vows of virtuous people have a greater chance of coming true than the vows of people who are not virtuous.

Q: Would you please be so kind to repeat what the three fabrications are? What would be the role on the three fabrications on doing walking meditation and how should I keep doing it?

A: The first fabrication is bodily fabrication, which is your in-and-out breathing.

The second is verbal fabrication: how you talk to yourself. The Buddha divides this into two activities: One is directed thought, where you choose a topic to think about and stay focused on; and then evaluation, where you ask questions and make comments on the topic.

The third type of fabrications are mental fabrications: perceptions and feelings. Perceptions are the labels with which you identify things: what they are, what they mean. Feelings are feeling tones of pleasure, pain, neither pleasure nor pain.

When you're doing walking meditation, one, you're focusing your thoughts on the breath. Then you're evaluating how well the breath is flowing. You may have a perception that identifies how the breath comes in, how the breath goes out, how it flows through the body, so that you can create a feeling of well-being as you walk.

That's how you use the three kinds of fabrication during walking meditation. Then as you go through daily life, you'll begin to notice that you're doing these three kinds of fabrication all the time. The question is how to do them skillfully.

Q: I was reading a book saying that we need to understand the pain of our karma. How do we do that? What does it mean exactly to understand the pain?

A: What the Buddha taught was that you have to comprehend suffering, and that means understanding the fact that suffering lies in the act of clinging. You can cling to five things or activities called *aggregates*: the form of your body, feelings, perceptions, thought-fabrications, and consciousness. These are the things from which we create our sense of self. In fact, our sense of self is one of the main ways in which we cling to these things.

But the Buddha identifies altogether four kinds of clinging. You use the five aggregates—

- one, to create sensual fantasies you want to enjoy;
- two, to create views about the world;

three, to create ideas about how you have to act within that world;
and
four, to create your sense of who you are in that world.

Now, you may notice, this sounds like becoming. And that's what it is. We create becoming out of these five activities. When you can actually observe yourself doing that in the act of keeping the mind concentrated, that's when you comprehend suffering.

Q: During meditation, is it common to feel exhaustion after focusing on the point of pain and feel exhausted after the pain is relieved?

A: When you're contemplating pain, it does take a lot of energy. So, if you've been contemplating pain and you feel exhausted afterwards, try to find a spot in the body that's comfortable and focus there so that you can charge your batteries by being still and enjoying that sense of comfort.

Q: How does breathing affect emotions, and how is it affected by emotions? What approach should we take toward the breath? How should we breathe?

A: Your emotions and the way you breathe have a huge effect on each other. The skill we're learning here is to start with the breath. Just tell yourself, "If I'm breathing in a way that aggravates anger, I've got to calm my breathing down." The same with lust or any other unskillful emotion.

Q: I have trouble sleeping and waking up. I feel anguish and a lack of energy when I wake up, and I sleep only when I'm exhausted, usually late. How can I get better?

A: When you lie down to sleep, start thinking thoughts of goodwill for yourself, thoughts of goodwill for everybody around you, and just keep on thinking thoughts of goodwill in all directions. Even if you can't fall asleep right away, the fact that you're thinking calming thoughts like this will have a good effect on your body and mind.

To make the goodwill more interesting, you can think of all the different kinds of beings there are in the universe. There's a chant in Thailand that says, "May all human beings in all directions be happy." Then it goes through all

ten directions: East, West, North, South, Southeast, Northwest, Northeast, Southwest, above, and below. That's just for human beings. Then you do the same for other types of beings, thinking of all the devas, all the animals, all the hungry ghosts, all the hell beings, etc., in all ten directions in each case. That makes it more interesting and engrossing.

Q: Whenever I meditate later in the day, I end up having terrible nightmares. Early this morning I dreamed of an accident involving many cars that resulted in the deaths of several young people. Is there any way to avoid these nightmares?

A: Again, once you lie down to sleep: thoughts of goodwill for all beings in all directions. Then if you do happen to have a dream like that, when you wake up, extend goodwill to all the beings you saw in the dream, and goodwill for yourself.

Q: How can I maintain mindfulness while meditating lying down? Even when focusing on a part of the body, the mind starts to dream and when it comes back, there's a sort of a jolt from the dream.

A: When you're lying down, lie down on your side. If you're lying on your right side, place your left foot right on top of your right foot and pay a lot of attention to keeping it there. Just that little bit of tension should help keep you awake.

FEBRUARY 15, 2026, EVENING

Present Karma

As we've mentioned, your experience of the present moment is a combination of past karma and present karma. Past karma provides the raw materials from which you shape the potentials of past karma into an actual experience of the present moment.

Last night we focused on the potentials coming from past karma. Tonight and tomorrow night I'd like to focus on the skills of present karma that allow you to shape the present moment and the future skillfully.

There are two main issues with present karma. One is how not to suffer even from the potentials of past bad karma. The other is how not to create bad new karma based on past karma that can either be bad or good. This last point is important. You can react unskillfully even to the rewards of good past karma, which is why many people head upwards in the course of their lives but then start falling back down again — out of heedfulness. That's the issue I'll focus on tomorrow night.

Tonight I want to focus on the issue of how not to suffer from the results of past bad karma here and now.

A good way of perceiving the relationship between past karma and present karma is that you're like a cook trying to prepare good food from both the good and the bad produce coming in from your field of past karma seeds. The raw material coming in from the field: That's what's coming from your past karma. Your skills as a cook: That's your present karma.

Here it's important to note one of the most important features of present karma: You can look at the results of what you're doing, and if they're not going well, you can make adjustments. To put this in terms of the cooking analogy, you can taste the food you're making. If it doesn't taste good, you can add whatever you think is needed until it does taste good. The Buddha calls this process "commitment and reflection." You try your best, and then judge

the results. If they're not good, you can change your actions. This is how you train your good intentions to become skillful intentions — i.e., not just well-meaning, but actually yielding good results. To return to the food analogy, this is how you develop the skills needed to become a really good cook.

We've noticed that these cooking skills come under two main headings in the Buddha's teachings. Under the category of name, there's attention and intention. Under the category of fabrication, there are three kinds: bodily fabrication, which is the breath; verbal fabrication, which is directed thought and evaluation; and mental fabrication, which is perception and feeling.

Usually, we want to have a choice as to the kind of food coming in from the field, but sometimes the field is producing nothing but bad karma. You can't really feed directly off the crop then. So you have to feed off your present karma instead.

This will also include the skills and right views that you've developed over time, which means that they're another type of past karma: in other words, our experiences and skills gained from our past sessions of meditation. Having experience in meditation is like having a spare field to produce alternative crops when the main crop is bad.

This is one of the reasons we have to keep practicing meditation again and again: so that these alternative crops will always be ready to sprout. We keep applying right view to our actions so that it becomes habitual. Otherwise, think of how badly the mind will thrash around when faced with illness and death.

The Buddha talks about how your present state of mind can make a huge difference in your experience of past karma. He gives the image — or perception — of a large salt crystal, which stands for past bad karma. If you put the salt crystal into a small cup of water, you can't drink the water, because it's too salty. But if you put the crystal into a large, clean river, you can drink the river water because there's so much more of it. In the same way, if your mind is narrow, the results of past bad karma can really cause you to suffer, but if your mind is expansive, you hardly feel the effects of past bad karma at all.

Then the Buddha lists the skills that make the mind expansive: the four sublime attitudes of universal goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity; virtue; discernment; and the ability not to let your mind be overcome by pleasure or pain.

The basic principle here is that karma is not tit-for-tat. In other words, if you kill three people, you don't have to be killed three times in response. The actual principle is that karma *tends* to create a certain type of result, in terms of pleasure or pain—notice the word, “tends”—but the strength of that result depends on the state of mind when the karma ripens. The skills in the Buddha's list make all the difference when past bad karma is ripening.

Virtue helps minimize suffering and pain because you can face it with a clear conscience. Discernment helps in enabling you to see that the pain and suffering don't have to invade the mind — we'll focus on this topic more tomorrow morning.

Then there's the skill of being large-hearted. This is a matter of fabricating goodwill and all of the other brahma-vihāras, or sublime attitudes. If you can develop these qualities of heart and mind, they'll mitigate the results of bad past karma by filling your mind with clean, clear water. As your awareness expands to cover the whole universe, your own pains and difficulties will seem small in comparison.

The four brahma-vihāras are attitudes of unlimited goodwill, unlimited compassion, unlimited empathetic joy, and unlimited equanimity. The first one, goodwill, in Pāli is *mettā*. Often *mettā* is translated as “loving-kindness,” but that's a misunderstanding. *Mettā* has nothing to do with love, because love is partial by nature. *Mettā* actually means goodwill, a wish for true happiness. That's an attitude that can be universal. You can have goodwill for people without loving them and even without liking them—in fact, when you don't like people, that's when you need to develop *mettā* the most, so that you're not tempted to treat them in an unskillful way.

When understood in the light of karma, goodwill is the wish that people understand the causes for happiness and be willing and able to act on that understanding. This is something you can wish for anyone without hypocrisy, even people who are very evil or whom you dislike intensely.

A second misunderstanding about mettā is that universal mettā is an innate quality of the mind. Actually, unskillful and skillful habits are both innate to the mind, and you have to learn how to develop the skillful ones very consciously and work to maintain them, because the mind is quick to change direction. You need to keep developing goodwill and the other brahma-vihāras because ill will, harmfulness, resentment, and passion are no less innate to the mind than they are. This is why the Buddha says you have to be determined to develop an attitude of universal goodwill as a task to always keep in mind: Partial goodwill is easy; universal goodwill is hard.

In some instances, this will require more effort than in others. With some people, you just think about them and you immediately feel mettā for them. In other cases, you really have to exert a fabrication. And this involves all three of the fabrications we've been talking about this week.

First you try to breathe calmly to get a feeling of ease and fullness in the body—this is bodily fabrication combined with one aspect of mental fabrication.

Then you direct your thoughts toward that person and you evaluate why you find it difficult to feel goodwill for him or her. Then you reason with yourself, reminding yourself that there really is no good reason not to feel goodwill. And however skillfully you can think your way into an attitude of goodwill, that would count as verbal fabrication.

Then you try to use whatever perceptions would make it easier for you to feel goodwill. This would be the other aspect of mental fabrication. For example, if it so happens that you can't think of any good qualities in a person you're angry at, you have to cultivate compassion. Here the perception to hold in mind is the Buddha's image of seeing someone out in the desert lying alone on the side of the road, sick, with no one to help him. Instinctively, you would feel compassion for that person whether you knew him or not. In the same way, if you see people with no good qualities at all, you really have to feel sorry for them: They're creating a lot of bad karma for themselves. This is a skillful use of perception. That's the first brahma-vihāra.

The next two brahma-vihāras—compassion and empathetic joy—are extensions of mettā. Compassion is what you feel if you have goodwill for all

beings but you see that there are some beings who are suffering or are doing actions that would lead to suffering. You have to feel compassion for them and wish that they would stop suffering, or the actions leading to suffering.

Empathetic joy is what your goodwill feels for people when you see that they're happy or are doing things that will lead to happiness. You don't feel resentful of them; you don't feel jealous of them. If you do feel some jealousy, the Buddha recommends this perception: In the many, many lifetimes you've been through, you've experienced the same pleasure that that person is experiencing now. It left you, and in time it will leave the other person. The fact that the other person may be better off than you right now means very little in the larger scheme of things. There's no need to be jealous. It's the same way with compassion. If you see someone suffering, you remember that you've suffered in that way, too.

In this way, your compassion is not condescending and your empathetic joy is not a hypocritical disguise for jealousy.

The fourth brahma-vihāra is equanimity. Equanimity is expressed in a different manner from the other three. The first three are expressed with the phrase, "May all beings be happy," "May they do this," "May they do that." In other words, it's a wish. Equanimity is expressed by a statement of fact. "All living beings are the owners of their actions, heir to their actions," and so forth. This is not a wish; it's a statement of fact. There's no "may" there at all.

Equanimity is the appropriate emotion to feel when you see that there are beings who are doing things that will cause suffering and that no matter what you do, they will not stop. Or they're suffering from something in their past actions, and no matter how hard you try to help them, you cannot stop that suffering. So for the time being, you have to put your concern for their happiness aside, remembering—being mindful of the fact—that you have limited abilities and a limited amount of strength. If you waste your energy trying to help people you cannot help, it saps the strength that you could have devoted to people you *can* help. So for the time being, you have to put aside your concern for the people you can't help and focus instead on the areas where you *can* make a difference—realizing that some day there may come a time when you can help, but for the time being you have to be patient. In this

way, equanimity is not hard-heartedness. It's simply bringing discernment to your goodwill.

If you can develop these unlimited mind states, you can begin to trust yourself more as you deal with difficult people and difficult situations. In this way, the brahma-vihāras provide you with protection from the results of any unskillful karma you did in the past.

So they're good attitudes to keep in mind, and skillful qualities to develop with ardency. They help put your sufferings into perspective as you allow your mind to encompass the entire universe.

Then there are the skills of not being overcome by pleasure or pain. The purpose of working both with pleasure and with pain in our meditation is to develop these two skills.

One of the ways we learn not to be overcome by pleasure is by learning how to develop the pleasure of concentration. By gaining mastery over this type of pleasure, we can learn to see sensual pleasures as less and less important. And in the course of mastering concentration, we also have to learn how not to be overcome by the pleasure of the concentration itself. You may have noticed when the breath becomes pleasant and you've dropped your focus on the breath to focus on the pleasure, the mind gets very fuzzy and then begins to drift away. To maintain your concentration, you have to maintain your focus on the breath.

That means that you have to learn how not to be overcome by the pleasure. You let the pleasure do its work, whereas your work is to stay with the breath. As you master this aspect of concentration, you learn an important skill in not being overcome by the effects of past karma, whether good or bad.

When dealing with either pleasure or pain in the present moment, attention plays a major role: asking the proper questions when either pains or pleasures arise. For instance, when dealing with pleasure, you treat pleasure not as a goal but as a tool. In other words, you don't try to wallow in the pleasure as much as you can, asking yourself, "How much happiness can I squeeze out of the pleasure by indulging in it?" Instead you ask, "What can I do with this pleasure in order to improve the quality of the mind?"

The reason you don't want pleasure to take over your mind is because if you open the door to let it in, pains will come in as well. So to protect yourself from pain, you have to protect yourself from heedless attitudes toward pleasure, too.

These are some of the skills that protect us from suffering from the results of past bad karma. When you use the three fabrications to develop the brahma-vihāras, virtue, and discernment, and to train the mind not to be overcome by pleasure or pain, then you'll find that you can deal much more skillfully with bad karma that's coming in from the past, without really suffering from your past karma at all.

So try to develop these skills on a daily basis. That way, you'll have your alternative field of karma ready to draw on when your other fields yield nothing but rotten vegetables.

FEBRUARY 16, 2026, MORNING

The Karma of Pain

Yesterday morning we talked about how to treat the problem of distraction in light of the Buddha's teachings on karma. This morning I'd like to talk about using the same approach to dealing with pain.

As with distraction, pain can arise either from past karma or from present karma. Whether you suffer from it or not will depend on the choices you make right now, along with the skills you've developed in terms of fashioning the present moment with acts of attention, intention, and the three fabrications. Sometimes you can use these present-moment actions to make the pain go away. But even if you can't make the pain go away, you can still learn not to let it invade your mind and remain. In fact, that's the ideal intention to have with regard to pain: that it not invade your mind or remain there.

The ways to deal with pain are directly related to the Buddha's instructions on how to use the breath as a topic for understanding feelings. There are four steps altogether.

The first step is to breathe in and out sensitive to rapture—and here the word “rapture,” *pīti*, can also mean fullness or refreshment.

The second step is to breathe in and out sensitive to pleasure or ease.

The third is to breathe in and out sensitive to mental fabrication: feelings and perceptions.

The fourth step is to breathe in and out calming these mental fabrications.

Now, of the various forest ajaans, Ajaan Lee gives the most detailed instructions on the first two steps, and Ajaan Maha Bua gives the most detailed instructions on the last two. Let's look at what they have to say.

With regard to breathing in and out sensitive to rapture, Ajaan Lee recommends, when there are pains in the body, not to focus on the pains

immediately. Focus instead on the parts of the body that you can make comfortable and refreshing with the breath.

This requires some mental fabrication: perceptions. First, you have to perceive that there is breath energy already permeating your body. Sometimes as you breathe in and breathe out, there will be a sense of movement in the breath energy in different parts of the body. Other times, it'll be still, but either way, it's an energy. Hold that perception in mind. That's the perception, the mental fabrication, you'll use in order to spread the breath energy, together with the fullness and pleasure, throughout the body.

There are different perceptions you can hold in mind to help you feel the sense of the breath energy moving. For instance, you can think of the body as being like a sponge: As you breathe in and out, the breath comes in and out through all the pores of the sponge, and there's nothing getting in the way. Another perception is that there's a column of energy going down the middle of the body, and as you breathe in, energy comes in from the outside and goes into the column of energy, and as you breathe out, it goes out of the body in all directions from that column of energy. As you hold in mind the possibility that breath energy can do this, you will begin to sense that, yes, there is a movement.

Even though you use images to induce this sensitivity, that doesn't mean that the energy is imaginary. It's like telling a child that the world is round. As far as the child is concerned, the world doesn't look round, so he has to imagine it as round. But as the child grows up, he begins to realize that, yes, the world is round. If you're going to fly the quickest route from, say, Los Angeles to Bangkok, you have to fly over Alaska. If the world were flat, that wouldn't work. But because the world is round, that's the way you have to fly to save time. In the same way, you use your imagination to allow yourself to think that the breath energy does flow, and then as you get more and more sensitive to the body, you begin to realize that it actually does.

When you feel secure in that good breath energy—accompanied by a sense of pleasure and fullness—the next step is to think of the energy radiating from the comfortable spot and going through the pain.

For instance, suppose you have a pain in your knee. Ajaan Lee recommends imagining the breath energy going down the leg and not stopping at the knee, but going through the knee and out the foot. If you think of the energy stopping right at the pain, that'll reinforce the sense of tension around the pain, which is part of the problem.

In some cases, you'll find that the pain will actually go away. That's a sign that the pain was caused by something you're doing right now. In other cases, though, the pain will still be there, which is a sign that the pain is caused by something that you did before you sat here or simply by the fact that your body is not yet used to this posture.

If you're new to the meditation posture, there will inevitably be a period in which there's pain in the legs as the blood is being blocked or being squeezed out of the part where the legs are folded. This forces the blood out of the main arteries into the capillaries. It's as if there were a traffic jam on a main road, and the traffic has to go down through the small streets, where it gets even more jammed.

The difference with your body, though, is that if you keep forcing the blood through those capillaries by sitting in this posture again and again, the capillaries will eventually begin to expand. In other words, you're turning them into new arteries. Streets can't do this, but blood vessels can. If you have some patience with these kinds of pain, eventually they will go away over time as your body gets more adapted to the meditation posture.

You'll notice that a large factor in making use of feelings of rapture and pleasure lies in the perceptions you bring to them. The same principle applies to feelings of pain. Your perceptions of pain play a huge role in the impact it has on the mind.

This brings us to the third and fourth steps in the tetrad, getting sensitive to mental fabrication and calming it. To sensitize yourself to how perceptions of pain may be affecting your mind, Ajaan Maha Bua recommends that you ask questions about how you perceive the pain. This would be an example of applying appropriate attention to the pain.

For example, he says, suppose there's a pain in your hip: Is the pain the same thing as the hip? Or are there two different kinds of sensations in the

same place? In other words, the sensation of the body is one thing and the sensation of the pain is something else. Now, your rational mind knows that these are two separate things, but all too often in our direct experience of the pain, something in the mind says that the pain and the body have become one and the same thing. The pain has invaded the body, and you're trying to push it out.

So here, to calm the perception, you have to change it. The body and the pain are two separate things even though they're in the same spot. The sensations of the body are the four elementary physical properties of earth (solidity), water (liquidity), fire (warmth), and wind (energy), but the sensation of pain is none of these things. It's as if it's on a different frequency—like radio waves going through the air. You put a radio in one spot, you adjust the dial to one frequency, and you get one station. If you adjust it to another frequency, there's another station.

You don't have to move the radio to a different spot to get a different station, because the waves are all in the same place, and yet you can separate them out because their frequencies are different, and you've got something that can detect the difference. See if you can do the same thing with the sensations of the pain and sensations of the body in that one spot.

Another perception that might be playing a role in your experience of pain comes from the notion that we have to be responsible for our pains. In other words, right now you think you've got to warn the next moment in the future that there's a pain right here. To correct that tendency, tell yourself, "I don't have to tell the future. The future will find out on its own." Otherwise, you use perceptions to keep sending a message from one moment to the next to the next, which stitches the pains together, adding to the pain and suffering.

A similar problem is with verbal fabrication: You're sitting with some pain and you keep telling yourself, "I've been sitting with this pain for the past 15 minutes and the session's going to last for another 45 minutes." That's 60 minutes of pain placed on top of one moment, and then, of course, the present moment will break down.

Ajaan Lee has a good image for problems of this sort: You're plowing a field, and next to the plow you've attached a big bag. As the dirt falls off the

plow, you put it in the bag. Of course, you're going to get weighed down. So, simply get rid of the bag and let the pain fall off at the first moment. You don't have to feel responsible for it; you don't have to keep a record of it. Just stay with the sensation in the present moment.

Ajaan Maha Bua notes that you can also ask yourself if the pain has a bad intention toward you. If you have a perception that it means to hurt you, remind yourself that the pain has no intentions at all. Or you can ask: "Is the pain one solid thing? Does it have a shape in your imagination or is it simply different moments of pain arising and passing away?" If you look very carefully, you see that it is made up of individual moments. So, try to drop the perception that the pain is solid or has a shape.

Then you look at those moments of pain and ask yourself: "As they appear, are they coming at me or are they going away?"

If you have the perception they're coming at you, that will make you suffer more from the pain. You feel like a target. But if you can hold in mind the perception that as soon as they appear they're going away from you, you'll suffer a lot less. It's like sitting on a truck facing backwards. As you go down the road, as soon as anything appears in your range of vision, it's already going away from you. This perception can help make you suffer a lot less from the pain.

Another question Ajaan Maha Bua recommends asking is, "Where is the sharpest point of the pain?" Then try to track it down.

Or ask yourself, as you breathe in, "Which direction is the breath coming from as it goes through the pain? Can I switch the direction?" See what that does.

The important thing, though, is that you show that you're not afraid of the pain. You'll find that even if you don't change the direction of the breath, the spot of the most intense part of the pain keeps shifting around. This teaches you two lessons. One is that the pain is not as solid as you thought it was. The second is that as long as you keep pursuing questions about how you perceive the pain, the mind becomes a moving target. When you're a moving target, it's harder for the pain to hit you. If you just sit there and suffer from the pain, complaining to yourself about it, then you're an easy target to hit. But if you

make it your purpose to understand the pain, then you're going to suffer a lot less from it.

This is precisely what the Buddha has you do. He says your duty with regard to pain is not just to endure it, and it's not to make it go away. The duty is to comprehend it. That should be your ideal intention when dealing with the pain. You comprehend it by asking questions and being curious about it. That would be an example of applying appropriate attention.

The ideal intention and way of paying attention require that you be fearless of the pain, which requires in turn that you have a good foundation inside. This is why we first work to make the breath comfortable so that when the pain gets too intense for us, we know we have a comfortable place to retreat to. But as the Buddha said, if you really comprehend the suffering that you create around the pain, then you'll find that you can locate the cause of suffering and abandon the cause. And the cause will be in the mind: right around the perceptions you have around the pain. When you find the mental act that causes the mind to suffer around the pain, you can drop it.

That way, even though the pain may still be there, you don't have to suffer from it. That's the duty with regard to right view.

One of the insights you gain by trying to comprehend pain in this way is seeing the extent to which you're making choices in the present moment that you normally are not aware of. As we've said, the present moment is not simply given to you from the past. You're also shaping it in the present moment as well. You come to see that if you shape it with ignorance, it's going to cause suffering. If you shape it with knowledge, it becomes part of the path to the end of suffering. We suffer not because of our past karma but because of our present karma: what we're doing right now. If you can see your present karma clearly, you can get rid of the suffering with which you're weighing your own mind down. And that's the only suffering that places a weight on the mind.

One day, when a group of us were sitting at the monastery in California, Ajaan Suwat pointed to the mountain across the valley and asked, "That mountain: Is it heavy?" Now, when an ajaan asks a question like this, it's a trick question. So nobody answered. He finally said, "Only if you try to pick it

up is it going to be heavy. If you don't try to pick it up, it may be heavy in and of itself, but it's not heavy on you, and that's all that matters." In the same way, the suffering that we cause in the present moment is like picking up the mountain. If you stop creating that suffering, the other pains and disappointments in the world will not impinge on the mind. They may be heavy in and of themselves, but they're not heavy on you. And that's all you're responsible for.

So, it's important that you not be afraid of pain. But if you're just getting started in meditation, don't try to force your endurance too much. If the pain is so intense that you can't focus on the breath, then very mindfully change your position. But if you find that you can stay with the breath in spite of the pain, then use the breath to create that foundation you need in order to understand the pain. And maybe you'll gain some important insights of your own.

FEBRUARY 16, 2026, AFTERNOON

Q&A

Q: You often encourage us to start the meditation with thoughts of goodwill before focusing on the breath. What is your opinion about mettā as a primary practice? Are there people who may benefit from dedicating all of their time to mettā?

A: Mettā is one of the standard topics of concentration that you can use both to develop concentration and as a basis for insight. Some people really need to spread thoughts of goodwill for a long time before their minds can settle down.

There's a famous incident in the forest tradition. Ajaan Khao—one of the Ajaan Mun's students—was married before he ordained. He went away from home for a long time on a business trip. When he returned home, he discovered that his wife had been having an affair. His first impulse was to kill the wife and the other man. But then he realized, "No, that's not a good idea." He ordained instead. Ajaan Mun realized that Ajaan Khao had a big problem with anger, so he had him practice mettā for a long time. In the same way, if you have a problem with anger, then mettā would be a good practice.

The texts talk about how you can use mettā as a way of getting the mind into the different states of jhāna. You start out with directed thought and evaluation. You think about what goodwill means and what it would mean to have goodwill for all beings in all directions. If there's someone that you have trouble extending mettā to, then you should think about why you have trouble having goodwill for that person. After all, if that person is misbehaving, mettā means that you wish for the person to see the error of his or her ways and to be willing to behave more skillfully. Is there any good reason for not being able to extend that wish to that person?

Then—as you find it easier and easier to spread goodwill to all beings, including the people you really don't like—then you can drop the evaluation and just stay with the perception of goodwill extended in all directions. This

way, you get the mind into more and more subtle levels of concentration, at the same time that you gain some insight into the process of fabrication, as you deal in directed thought, evaluation, and perceptions. But it's important to realize that mettā on its own is not a complete practice. In one way or another, you have to augment it with insight practice.

Q: Could you please explain again the steps that the mind goes through in creating suffering? What is this process? Could you give an example from daily life?

A: The Buddha has a teaching called dependent co-arising, which explains how suffering arises. If I tried to explain all the steps now, we'd be here until late in the night. The important thing to realize is that the process starts with an ignorant desire, either for sensuality, for a state of becoming, or to destroy what state of becoming you have now. So, focus on the question of sensuality first. Sensuality is not sensual pleasures, it's your fascination with thinking about sensual pleasures. Try to notice, as you go through the day, how much of your time is spent in that kind of thinking, and how much suffering it causes. That'll get you off to a good start.

Q: Is there anything in life that is not karma, or the result of karma?

A: The Buddha says that everything you experience through the six senses is the result of past karma. The only thing that's totally not karma is nibbāna.

Q: Does collective karma exist? How does it work? Would it be the case that wars, massacres, natural disasters, floods, plane crashes all count as collective karma?

A: There is no such thing as collective karma, but there are lots of cases where many people have the same karma in their background, done at different times and in different places, and they receive the same result all at the same time. In other words, they did the same thing, but they did it individually. It then so happens they get born in the same place or they go to the same place when there's a disaster. If they have that karma in common, then they can experience a similar result. But it may happen that there are other people in the same place or in the same situation who don't have that

kind of old karma, so they don't experience that bad result. Which is why some people survive plane crashes that kill a lot of other people.

Q: I have great difficulty believing in the doctrine of rebirth and past and future lives. However, karma as present conditions shaped by past causes, and future conditions shaped by present causes, seems plausible. Is it possible to follow the noble eightfold path, the doctrine of karma, be a Buddhist, but suspend judgment regarding rebirth, past and future lives?

A: As long as you have an open mind about the topic, you're okay. It's important to realize, though, it's not the case that the present moment is shaped totally by past actions. There are also choices we make in the present moment that are not determined by the past, and yet they help to shape the present moment. As long as you understand that point, you're fine.

But still, try on the idea of rebirth every now and then as a possible working hypothesis. For example, "How would I live today differently if I really believed in rebirth?" If it has a good effect on your actions, then try continuing with it as a working hypothesis.

Q: In [MN 135](#) it says that one who is bad-tempered and easily perturbed will be reborn in hell or as an ugly human being. I'm a person who gets easily perturbed, easily disturbed. Here, for example, in the room, the sounds disturb me, the sounds, the smells—lots of things. To summarize, I don't want to end up in hell. I don't want to end up being born ugly. What can I do to overcome this excess sensitivity?

A: Look carefully at how you fabricate the present moment, the way you breathe, the way you talk to yourself, the perceptions you hold in mind. It's usually the case that if you're easily angered, you're breathing in a way that's already adding unnecessary stress to the way you just feel in the present moment. Then look carefully at the way you talk to yourself and the perceptions you hold in mind about the disturbances around you. If you're creating an unnecessary burden for yourself through these activities, learn how to change them so that you're not burdening yourself so much. Tell yourself that the disturbances are not really so bad. They're not killing you, so you can stand them. That way, it'll be a lot easier to bear with all these other

things that disturb you. Right now, it's as if you're already carrying a heavy load: Someone puts a feather on top of it and it breaks your back.

Q: I have anxiety attacks and sometimes my blood pressure rises a lot. I have increasingly been able to control the attacks, but sometimes they're too strong. I feel very bad about my lack of self-control. The doctor prescribed meditation for anxiety. However, when I use it, I believe I'm breaking the precept of not using intoxicants. Does the use of this kind of medication violate the Buddhist precepts?

A: No, this would not be against the precepts. The precept has to do with substances that cause you to lose your sense of heedfulness. These medications don't have that effect.

Q: Gratitude for the monks. I have been meditating for 10 years and I'm currently in perimenopause. My symptoms are terrible, but the worst one is a mental fog. It's overwhelming. Within seconds, I feel that all my efforts to calm the thoughts disappear and I find myself in a constant whirlwind. At many moments, I feel like I'm a different person. What should I do? Thank you.

A: Try to find some spot in your body that's not affected by these symptoms and focus your attention there. Think of the breath energy there being good energy and then hold on to that spot until the symptoms in the rest of the body pass. If you can't find any spot in your body where it's calm, think of the space immediately around your body and focus your attention there—again, until the symptoms pass—and then you can return to the body.

Q: Lots of gratitude. I've been noticing we've been talking a lot about anger, but what I'm realizing is that fear is usually in the background of a lot of things. It can be fear of anything: fear of karma, fear of death, fear of getting old, fear of ghosts. Could you please tell us how to deal with fear?

A: There are two kinds of fear. There's the fear you feel when you're in a position of powerlessness, and there's the fear that comes when you sense that you do have some power and you're afraid of misusing it. The Buddha emphasizes that the second kind of fear is actually something you should pay attention to. You can actually use that fear to become skillful. In other words,

you realize that through the power of your thoughts, your words, and your deeds, you're going to have an influence on your own life and on the lives of others. You don't want that influence to be bad. This is why he gives you advice on how to act and think and speak. If you follow his advice, you can be confident that you're handling this power well. When you've taken care of this fear, then the other fears become less and less important.

As for fear of ghosts, if you think there are some ghosts around you, fill your body with good awareness and with good breath energy, and then spread lots of goodwill for the ghosts. They'll leave you alone.

Q: What is delusion in Buddhism? Why do people fall into it? How can one get out of delusion or reduce its effects?

A: Delusion in Buddhism is basically thinking that unskillful actions are actually skillful—in other words, believing that you will benefit in the long run by killing, stealing, having illicit sex, lying, or taking intoxicants. The Buddha provides the precepts in order to give you some guidance here. Once you start taking the precepts, if you find there are parts of the mind that still want to do what's unskillful, then you can ask yourself, "What are your reasons for wanting to do that?" When you see that the reasons are bad, that's how your right view develops more and more, and you can overcome your delusion.

Q: How can I silence the music in my mind? I let thoughts pass, but every time I try to concentrate to meditate, I connect to some song, some music, and it keeps repeating over and over. Thank you.

A: Two things. One is, if there's music in the background, try to start chanting in your mind. It's better to have a good chant in your mental background than some stupid pop song.

The second approach is to remember the third way of dealing with distracting thoughts: Leave them there. In other words, it's as if you're doing some work in a corner of a large room, the music is in another corner of the room, and you don't have to listen to it. You hear it, but you don't have to listen to it. You've got work to do. If you pay attention to it, it pulls you away from your work.

When I was in Bangkok one time, I was staying at the back corner of a monastery, and behind the monastery was a store that opened to sell rice porridge at 4:00 in the morning. It seemed as if all the taxi drivers in Bangkok would go there. To let the drivers know that the store was open, they played really loud rock music. Thai rock music. At first, it filled my awareness, and the more I tried to block it out, the worse it got.

I discovered, though, that I could think of my awareness as being like a screen on a window. The wind was going through the screen, and because the screen didn't catch the wind, the screen was not disturbed. In the same way, if I didn't try to resist the music, if I simply let it go through my awareness and out the other side, I was okay. I could stay focused on the breath.

In other words, don't pay attention to the music in the background. Just stay focused on your breath.

Q: Dear Taan Ajaan, when I skip dinner, I get a little angry and intolerant. How to deal with it?

A: If you're skipping dinner because of the eight precepts, just focus on your breath. Try to notice exactly where the sensations of hunger are and then breathe through those sensations. Breathe in a way that gives rise to a sense of fullness in their place.

Q: Does the consumption of red meat interfere with the meditation?

A: If it did, no one in Brazil could meditate. No, it doesn't interfere.

Q: How can I tell whether I'm truly meditating or just feeling drowsy?

A: In meditation, the mind should be clear and alert. If you're not sure if you're meditating or feeling drowsy, move your attention around in the body. Start doing the survey of the body like we did in the morning.

Q: A question about back pain: Is it valid to try a little bit of mobility in the act of meditating when we've been sitting for a long time? One of the instructions to relieve the pain was to try to look for sensations in the body that bring pleasure, so that we can focus less on the pain. From there, I tried to do some subtle movements that bring some mobility to my spine. During the in-breath, I would feel like that the abdomen was expanding and would result

in the expansion of the whole body. During the out-breath, I would feel the contraction spread from the abdomen to the rest of the body, as if it were a jellyfish. This movement brought me some pleasure through relieving the pain. So, can this kind of mobility be okay to use when meditating?

A: Yes, the mobility is perfectly fine. You do have to learn how to take care of your spine while you're meditating. One way of dealing with back pain is to focus on the movement of the abdomen. That's a principle that's applicable throughout the body. If there's a pain in your stomach, focus on your back; pain in the back, focus on your stomach; pain in your right side, focus on the left, and so forth.

Q: Should we go beyond breathing in the body at some point?

A: When meditating, you'll find there comes a time when the breath actually stops and you feel no need to breathe. That's because the breath energy is filling the body and your brain is using less oxygen. Stay with that sense of stillness, and after a while you'll find that the sense of the shape of the body will begin to dissolve. It's as if the body becomes a fog or a cloud of little droplets of sensation. Then you can focus on the space between the drops. Hold on to that perception of space, and the sense of the shape of the body will disappear. You're still right here, you haven't gone anywhere else, but the mind isn't holding on to the perception of the body at that point.

That's the first step in going into what are called the formless states of concentration. When you can do that, we'll talk about the next step.

Q: With the known distinction between in-breath and out-breath came the understanding of known distinction between pleasure and pain as being merely sensations. Is this understanding correct?

A: It's not that we're making no distinction between the in-breath and the out-breath. It's more a question of not creating a dividing line between the two. That way, there can be a lot less tension in the body as you focus on the breath. But for the idea that there's no distinction between pleasure and pain, if you could stick your finger into a fire and say, "This is pleasant," then there would be no distinction. Many pleasures and pains are pleasurable or painful independent of whatever perceptions you might slap on them. But there are

cases of sensations in the body that you can either make pleasant or make painful by the way you perceive them. Some sensations are like that. Those are the sensations that you want to study, where you see that it really is your choice as to how you perceive them that makes the difference. But that's not the case with all sensations.

Q: Dear Ajaan, I hope you're doing well. In the meditation today, my breath got really short and calm, almost stopping. All of a sudden, the breath changed from short to fast, as if it was afraid. I investigated what happened, but I didn't identify anything apparent in the memory about any trauma or anything like that. Could you please make a comment on what happened?

A: Sometimes there are unconscious associations with certain kinds of breathing that you're not aware of, but they will have an impact on changing the way you breathe. In a case like that, consciously return to slow, calm breathing. If there is a past memory buried someplace in your mind that makes the body want to breathe quickly, it may come up into your consciousness. When it comes into your consciousness, then you can deal with it. If nothing comes up, just keep on breathing calmly.

Q: How to counter lust that is not body-centered? One example would be a shape-focused lust, when even a line drawing or a silhouette of a face feature can look attractive. Others are more psychological—desires for a certain emotion, power dynamics, self-expression, etc., that are included in every relationship. How to deal with that kind of lust?

A: In terms of the silhouettes, you might ask yourself, what associations do you have with that particular shape? Then see if you can think of something really ugly that has the same shape. In other words, rewire the associations.

As for the psychology of power dynamics in a relationship, this is usually where the real problem is. Even when a case of lust starts with lust for a particular body, and you've dealt with seeing the body divided up into its different parts, you'll see that the real problem lies in your fantasies about the relationship with that person. This is where psychologists say that you should poison the fantasy. In other words, imagine that the person you're having sex

with is actually cheating on you or despises you. In other words, the original fantasy is lying to you.

There's a famous short story in English in which a man is at a party with his wife and at one point he sees her from across the room. She's looking very pensive and he thinks, "Maybe she's thinking about me?" All of a sudden, he feels strong lust for her. They go back to their hotel room and he starts thinking about all the special times in their relationship, about why she would love him.

But then she bursts into tears and tells him about a memory from when she was young. There was a young man who came to see her one time. It was during the winter, they were in love, and he was going to be shipped away to the army. He had to see her one last time before he left, so he trudged through the cold and the snow to see her at her window. As a result, he caught pneumonia and died. That's all she could think about, that there was once a young man who had died for love of her. The husband realizes he cannot compete with that. That's the end of his thoughts of lust.

The story is called, "The Dead," by James Joyce. It's one of the best short stories in the English language.

Q: Dear monk, is there a positive role for sexuality, for exercising a life without suffering?

A: You're asking the wrong people. If you're in a relationship, just don't cheat on the other person. Someone asked me for relationship advice one time and I mentioned that when I was still a lay person, if I was interested in a particular woman and the relationship was getting serious, I wanted to do something to make her angry, just to see what her anger was like. That may be one of the reasons I'm now a monk. I still think it's a wise tactic in a developing relationship, though. You don't want to find out about the other person's anger only after you've gotten married.

Q: What's the vision of Buddhism in terms of contraceptives? Is there any karma generated with this?

A: The only contraceptive that's against the precepts is the kind that would kill a fertilized egg. If the contraceptive prevents conception, then there's no

problem.

Q: What does it mean to make the Buddha bleed?

A: Literally to wound the Buddha with malicious intent and to make him bleed. Fortunately for us, that's not a possibility right now.

FEBRUARY 16, 2026, EVENING

Responding with Skillful Karma

Last night we talked about past karma, and in particular the skills you need to develop in constructing the present moment so that you don't have to suffer from the results of past karma. Tonight I'd like to talk about the skills you need to develop so that you don't *respond* unskillfully to the results either of past bad karma or of past good karma.

We usually think of past bad karma as an enemy, and past good karma as a friend, but the results of past good karma are also dangerous because they can make us heedless and complacent, and we can end up destroying ourselves with the good things we worked so hard to produce. As we see all around us, wealthy people can destroy themselves with their wealth; powerful people can destroy themselves with their power. It's for this reason that Māra, the embodiment of death and temptation in the Buddhist cosmos, is not the ruler of hell. He's a heavenly being.

In responding to **past bad karma**, you have to develop endurance. That starts with verbal fabrication and a strong intention. If you tell yourself, "I can't stand this," you've already weakened yourself. Instead you have to make a firm intention that when bad things happen, you don't want to take them as an excuse to something unskillful in response, because that will create more bad karma seeds in your field. That means you have to look for strategies and strengths within you that can make it easier to endure whatever is happening. You may not think that you have to the potentials to endure, but when you firmly intend to look for them, you'll find that they're there.

Now, you have the ability to shape the present moment through the three types of fabrication. Take advantage of the Buddha's recommendations for how to use them.

For instance, if someone has done something to make you angry, look at the way you're breathing. Usually when you're angry, your breath is disturbed,

which aggravates the anger. So remember what you've learned to do with the breath in meditation: Calm the breath down, breathe through any tightness you may feel in your chest or your abdomen, and in this way you begin to reclaim your body from the anger, which has hijacked it. You make the breath your own again. That's bodily fabrication.

When the body feels calmer, it's easier to think clearly about the situation. This is where you apply directed thought and evaluation. You can start asking yourself, "What, in the long term, would be the most skillful thing to do in this situation?" In other words, you're not going just by your emotions or impulses. You're looking at the long-term results, which is the beginning of wisdom and discernment. That's verbal fabrication.

Finally, with mental fabrication, you can ask yourself, "What perceptions are you holding in mind that are aggravating the situation? For example, do you perceive yourself as a victim? Are you carrying perceptions of other times when you were a victim? Can you change those perceptions?" Instead of thinking that you're in a weakened position, think of your goodwill and endurance as strong: large like the earth, cool like an enormous river. We'll come back to these perceptions in a moment.

Another perception that's a troublemaker when you're angry is that, when passing judgment on the other person, you subconsciously perceive yourself as a judge in a court and you're free to decide whether the person is guilty or innocent, without perceiving that the judgment will have any effect on you. But when you perceive that the consequences won't touch you, you tend to get heedless. To prevent this, the Buddha advises changing the perception: Regard yourself as a person traveling through the desert. You're hot, trembling, and thirsty. You see a small puddle of water in the footprint of a cow. You need the water, but you realize that if you try to scoop it up with your hand, you'll make it muddy. So what do you do? You get down on all fours and you slurp up the water. Even though this is not a dignified position, and you wouldn't want anyone to come and take a picture of you and put it on Instagram, it's what you need to do.

In the same way, we sometimes need the perception that other people have at least some goodness to them, because that will nourish our ability to do good

in response to them. The perception of their goodness is like water nourishing our own. So, even though we may be angry with the other person and we don't feel in the mood to look at the person's good traits because it hurts our pride, we should still realize that we need their goodness to nourish our goodness.

Otherwise, if we see the entire human race as basically bad, it's going to be very difficult to treat people well. If we look for their goodness, we benefit in being more inclined to act skillfully. This comes from applying a totally different perception to the situation.

This is one example of how you can use these different kinds of fabrication or the factors of intention and attention to respond to the present moment with strength and with clarity. That way, you'll be more likely to do the most skillful thing.

There are some other examples from the Pali Canon on how to use the three fabrications to help you endure a particular instance of past bad karma: the hurtful or untrue speech of other people.

First, from Majjhima 28: The next time somebody curses you, just tell yourself, "An unpleasant sound has made contact at the ear." See if you can leave it at that. Don't add any extra stories. Don't ask any questions that would add more pain to the unpleasant contact, such as, "Why is this person saying this, why is he abusing me, why doesn't he like me, why is he evil" etc., etc. Try to keep the sound just at the ear and don't suck it into the mind.

There's an analogy that I've found useful—and, of course, this didn't come from the Buddha—and that's to make sure that your mind is not like a vacuum cleaner. When a vacuum cleaner goes through a room, it leaves all the good things behind and takes in all the bad things: the dust and the dirt. So if you find yourself taking in those unpleasant sounds and making them into big issues in the mind, do what you can to turn the vacuum cleaner off.

That covers the Buddha's first strategy for depersonalizing unpleasant words.

The Buddha's second strategy, from Majjhima 21, is to reflect on the different types of human speech that can occur in the world. There are kind words and unkind words. There are true words and untrue words. There are words that are helpful; there are words that are unhelpful. There are words

said with a well-meaning mind, and words said with an ill-intentioned mind. This is normal human speech. So when something unkind, untrue, unhelpful is said to you through someone's ill intent, tell yourself, "This is normal human speech. The fact that you're being subjected to this is nothing unusual." This helps to depersonalize the words.

It also reminds you that, given that this is ordinary human speech, the fact that someone speaks to you in an insulting way doesn't give you extraordinary rights to break the precepts in response.

Several years back, a friend of mine gave me a dictionary of recent Thai slang. In Thailand, they have a Royal Academy very much like the Brazilian Academy, which, among other things, creates the official dictionary of the Thai language. The slang dictionary is called the Outside-of-the-Academy Dictionary. As I was reading through the dictionary, learning about new Thai slang words, it struck me that more than half were insults. Modern society is very creative at developing new ways to insult one another. So when you're being insulted, just remind yourself, "This is normal." That makes it a lot easier to take.

The Canon gives two other stories that help give additional skillful perceptions for dealing with hurtful speech. One, also in Majjhima 21, is called the Simile of the Saw. Suppose, the Buddha says, that a group of bandits has pinned you down. They take a two-handed saw and try to cut you into little pieces. Even in a case like that, the Buddha says, you should not let your mind be overcome by ill will. Instead, you should try to develop goodwill even for the bandits. In fact, start with them and then expand your goodwill to fill the entire universe. Make your goodwill as expansive as the Earth—something no one can harm. Make your goodwill even more expansive, as vast as space, which no one can harm. They can try to write words in space, but the words don't stick. In other words, try to develop and maintain the perception that your mind is expansive, much bigger than the harm that anyone can do to you, and that the words they say to you don't stick in your mind.

If you keep this simile in mind—that even if someone is trying to kill you, you should still have goodwill for that person—then, the Buddha asks, "Is there any type of speech that you could not bear?" No. The pain of the speech

is so much less, and with that perception in mind, any ill will you might feel seems too petty to be worthy of your attention. You're less likely to respond in unskillful ways.

That's the first perception to hold in mind.

The second perception comes in Majjhima 145, in the story of a monk named Puṇṇa. Ven. Puṇṇa was going to a very uncivilized section of India, so went to say goodbye to the Buddha. The Buddha said to him, "Those people in that area are very uncivilized. They're known to be very rough. What will you do if they insult you?"

Puṇṇa replied, "If they insult me, I will say to myself, 'These are very good people in that they're not hitting me.'"

And the Buddha said, "What if they hit you?"

"I will say to myself, 'These are very good people in that they're not stoning me.'"

"Suppose they stone you?"

"I'll say, 'These are very good people in that they're not stabbing me.'"

"What if they stab you?"

"I'll say, 'These are very good people in that they're not killing me.'"

"What if they kill you?"

"I will tell myself, 'At least my death wasn't a suicide.'"

And the Buddha said, "You're fit to go."

So the way you talk to yourself—verbal fabrication—can make a huge difference in how well you can endure a situation that comes from your past bad karma. Which means that it's good to learn how to control your inner conversation so that you're confident that you have the strength always to do the skillful thing.

Now, with the results of past *good* karma, the problem is different. You're less under pressure, and not immediately faced with difficulties. Instead, you're faced with a wider range of temptations. The main danger is that you become complacent. Things are going well and you don't sense that you're in any immediate danger of their falling apart. That attitude of complacency and

heedlessness is precisely the problem, as you start getting lazy in acting on ways that are needed to maintain your good position in life, and start falling for temptations that will eventually lead you down.

The way to counteract this complacency is, one, be mindful of the principles of karma, and two, develop a conscious practice of empathetic joy.

Empathetic joy is the least discussed of the brahma-vihāras, but it can also teach you the most. As you contemplate people who are happy and develop the wish that they not be deprived of the good fortune they have attained, it makes you reflect on two things for the sake of developing heedfulness.

The first is: How do people enjoying good fortune ordinarily behave? Look around and you'll notice that they tend to abuse it. Powerful people abuse their power; beautiful people abuse their beauty; wealthy people use the power of their wealth to take unfair advantage of others, and so on. When people abuse their good fortune this way, they tend to turn a deaf ear to the Dhamma, and so they end up using their good fortune to harm not only others but also themselves. This sort of things is easier to see in other people than it is to see in yourself, so it's a good lesson to dwell on, and then use those people as a mirror: Do you have those tendencies in yourself? If so, this is what it looks like from the outside. This thought can make you more heedful.

One of the main problems of good fortune is that it fosters pride. This pride can be dangerous in two ways. First, you realize that you can get away with things that people less fortunate than you cannot get away with, and it's hard to resist the temptation to see how far you can go in that direction. Second, pride can get in the way of the humility needed to accept the Dhamma. There was the case of Prince Jayasena, who was so immersed in the pleasures of his harem—and so proud that he had those pleasures—that he couldn't even conceive of anyone getting the mind into a state of pleasure free from sensuality. That meant he had closed his mind to the Dhamma. There was also the case of Jenta, a young man who was so extremely handsome that he didn't respect anyone else, even his parents. He was lucky that the Buddha was even more handsome than he was. Otherwise — if he had only met an old decrepit teacher like me—he wouldn't have been open to listening to the Dhamma.

It's because of dangers like this that the Buddha noted that when devas pass away from heaven, only a small minority go to a good rebirth. The rest have consumed all their good karma, and so they fall hard. They have to meet up with the results of their bad karma with nothing to cushion their fall.

The second reflection that comes from developing empathetic joy is that it forces you to think over the long term: How can beings maintain their good fortune over time? The world says that you often have to engage in unskillful behavior to maintain your wealth and power, so you have to make the effort to keep reminding yourself, through verbal fabrication, of what the Dhamma has to say: that the only way to maintain genuine happiness is to keep on doing skillful actions. Use your good fortune in such a way that other beings benefit from it, too. Use your power and wealth to foster the wellbeing of others. Use your beauty to make the practice of Dhamma attractive. That's the only way you can maintain good fortune over the long term.

Of course, these reflections, if you follow them sincerely, will lead you to admit that good fortune, as defined by the world, has its dangers. As Ajaan Lee said, the truth of the world isn't good; the goodness of the world isn't true. When you can see this, you'll want to aim at a truth and goodness that's even higher. The karma that can take you there will be the theme of tomorrow night's talk.

FEBRUARY 17, 2026, MORNING

Patterns of Karma

You may remember that I noted at the beginning of the retreat that the teachings of karma concern patterns of cause and effect — what kinds of actions tend to lead to what kinds of results — but that the causal principles underlying those causes and results grant you the freedom to manipulate the pattern so that it can lead to results that you want. So far, we've been focusing on the freedom allowed by those principles, and how you can best put it to use for good results here and now. This morning I'd like to focus on the patterns that yield results over time.

We've mentioned many times that karma is complex and that it's very difficult to draw direct connections from one action to its results or to predict how soon those results will come to fruition. This is why the Buddha listed some of the lessons he learned about the long-term results of karma to help those of us who don't have the long-term memory that he developed in the course of his awakening. For him, by the way, a memory that lasts 40 eons was short. His was much longer.

The lessons he learned from that long time lay out patterns of cause and effect from which we can learn, so that we don't have to reinvent the Dhamma wheel every time we act. These patterns are most clearly related to the practice of virtue, but we will see that they relate to the practice of concentration and discernment as well.

Remember, these are all patterns of *tendencies*. Given that we, for the most part, are doing all kinds of things all the time, our karmic mix may weaken or strengthen these tendencies. But knowing what the tendencies are will help give us guidance as to which actions are good to add to the mix and which are best avoided.

To begin with, there are eight principles of unskillful actions that tend to lead to specific kinds of undesirable results in the next life. Taking life leads to

a short life in the next lifetime. Stealing leads to the loss of one's own wealth. Illicit sexual behavior leads to rivalry and revenge. Telling lies leads to being falsely accused. Divisive tale-bearing leads to the breaking of one's friendships. Abusive speech leads to unappealing sounds—an interesting connection. Frivolous chattering leads to words that are not worth taking to heart. The drinking of fermented and distilled liquors—and this includes even the best wines—leads to mental derangement. That's one set of patterns.

Another set of patterns: If you harm beings with your fists, with clods, sticks, or knives, it leads to being sickly when you're reborn. If you're ill-tempered and easily upset, even only when lightly criticized, if you grow offended, provoked, malicious and resentful, if you show annoyance, aversion, and bitterness, then when you're reborn you will tend to be ugly. If you're envious, if you envy, begrudge, and brood about other people's gains, their honor, respect, reverence, then when you're reborn you'll tend to be uninfluential. Nobody will want to listen to you or do what you say. If you're not generous — if you don't give food, drinks, cloth, or other gifts to people worthy of respect — then you'll tend to be poor when you're reborn. If you're obstinate and arrogant, if you don't give respect to those who deserve respect, then you'll tend to be low-born whenever you're reborn. If you don't ask reliable people about how to act in a way that leads to long-term welfare and happiness, you'll tend to be reborn without much wisdom or discernment.

That's the negative side of the list. There's also a positive side: If you refrain from harming other beings physically, you'll tend to be reborn with good health. If you're not easily provoked to show anger, you'll tend to be reborn beautiful. If you're not envious of others, you'll tend to be influential. If you give gifts, you will tend to be reborn wealthy. If you're respectful to those who deserve respect, you will tend to be high-born. If you ask reliable people about how to act in a way that leads to long-term welfare and happiness, you'll tend to be reborn with wisdom and discernment. Note that last pattern. We'll talk about it more tonight.

There's another general principle, which is that if you engage frequently in one kind of act, it tends to lead you to do other similar acts. For example, if you harm other beings in your search for power, then you don't want the truth to be found out. Because you go into denial, you have less and less opportunity

to learn the truth about anything worthwhile. As a result, you'll find it easy to engage in actions that become more and more unskillful: a vicious circle that leads in a downward spiral. On the other hand, if you're virtuous—which includes being truthful—any vows you make tend to succeed. If you use that success wisely, that becomes a positive feedback loop that leads upward.

Many of these principles are codified into precepts and rules, but don't think that they relate only to external behavior. If you practice in line with them, they also translate into internal virtues in the practice of concentration and discernment. Ajaan Lee, for example, gives some nice similes for how those first eight principles also apply to concentration practice.

To begin with, the taking of life: When you're sitting and concentrating and your mind is beginning to settle down, don't kill your goodness. Don't kill your concentration. Look after its life carefully.

As for stealing, don't steal other people's bad qualities to think about. You never asked their permission to take their bad qualities and to brood over them. If you're going to steal their qualities, take their good ones and think about those instead. Ajaan Lee also says that if you take the bad words of other people and brood over them, it's like taking something they've spit out and then eating it yourself. And then when you get sick, who are you going to blame?

As for avoiding illicit sexual behavior, this refers to not getting involved in sensual fantasies while you're meditating.

As for the precept against telling lies: Don't lie to yourself about your meditation, and don't lie to others. "Lying to others" refers to this: When you're sitting here, you look like you're meditating, but are you really meditating? If you're not, you're lying.

Divisive tale-bearing: Don't get involved in any thoughts that would split you away from your friends, i.e., your breath and your body here in the present moment.

As for abusive speech, don't get involved in any inner tirades against yourself that would get you discouraged. Sometimes you'll hear of Thai ajaans yelling at their students, criticizing their behavior, but as they explain it, they're trying to strengthen the student's morale, not weaken it. So if you have

to criticize your behavior to yourself in order to get back on the path, do it in a way that lifts your spirits—and sometimes the criticism will have to be strong to get the desired effect—but don't do it in a way that gets your spirits down.

Frivolous chattering refers to any random, pointless thoughts that come in and pull you away from the breath.

And as for the drinking of fermented and distilled liquors, this refers to sitting here with no mindfulness and alertness at all. Your mind is supposed to be following the path, but it's weaving back and forth, and finally falls down on the side of the path in a stupor and passes out.

These are some of the ways in which the eight unskillful external actions are related to the internal action of practicing concentration.

As for discernment, the practice of abandoning unskillful actions and developing skillful ones develops discernment on two main levels. On the first level, discernment deals with clearly seeing which is which: what's skillful, what's not. On the next level, you develop your discernment by learning how to motivate yourself effectively to develop what's skillful and to abandon what's not. In some cases, this is easy; in others, not. The cases where it's hard: Those are the ones that force your discernment to grow.

A sutta passage describes four kinds of actions: There are actions that are pleasant to do and give a beneficial result, and actions that are unpleasant to do and give an unbeneficial result.

These two are no-brainers. It's easy to motivate yourself to do the first sort of action and to avoid the second sort. However, there are also some kinds of actions that are unpleasant to do, but they are beneficial in the long term. There are others that are pleasant to do, but are unbeneficial in the long term. It's in reference to these last two types of actions that the Buddha says you can be known either as a fool or a wise person.

In other words, you have to learn how to use psychology with yourself and talk yourself into wanting to avoid things that are pleasant to do but unprofitable. At the same time, if something is unpleasant to do but you know that ultimately the results will be good, a sign of discernment is knowing how to talk yourself into wanting to do it. In either case, discernment here is pragmatic, strategic. It doesn't deal with abstractions. It grows by learning

how to look for the good results and using psychology to get yourself to act in a way that will yield those results.

So, in looking at these various good courses of action, you can see that skillful karma is not just a matter of precepts or of external virtue. It also relates to concentration and discernment. All levels of skillful action are interrelated. This also means, though, that having good virtue and understanding the principles of karma are an important foundation for the entirety of the path. The skills you develop when dealing with actions on the external level will help you on the internal level, too.

And don't think that this training stops at the foundation. It can actually take you all the way to the end of the path.

Over the years, a number of people have asked me why we focus on the issue of skillful and unskillful actions when instead we could focus on a sense of emptiness or space around those actions. The questions seem to assume that the issues of skillful and unskillful action are like a briar patch that you'd rather avoid if possible. But in reality, you can't avoid it. Awakening isn't in the air or the space around us. Awakening is found by going through the middle of the briar patch, but the briars are only on the outside of the patch. Once you get to the inside of the patch, the plants inside are a lot nicer.

As we'll discuss this evening, ultimate freedom is found next to our freedom of choice in the present moment, and we get to know that freedom of choice best by trying to get more sensitive as to what is skillful and what is unskillful in our actions. In the beginning this may be difficult, but as you get more and more adept at it, the path becomes more joyful. And it's in the middle of the patch of briars that the ultimate happiness lies. The emptiness and spaciousness outside the briar patch are conditioned things. Only when you understand that they're conditioned and will eventually let you down: That's when you'll be willing to go into the patch to find the rewards hidden inside.

FEBRUARY 17, 2026, AFTERNOON

Q&A

Q: When I practice walking meditation, I notice something interesting. People pass by me, coming and going, as if they were thoughts. All of them are interesting. They catch my attention and make me want to look, but the exercise is precisely not to cling to any of these thoughts and not to pay them any attention. The funniest part is that in this symbolism, I myself am just another passing thought. I'm trying to keep a serious face, but it's hard not to laugh. Am I going crazy?

A: A little bit. You don't have to be grim while you're doing the meditation. But still remember that there's a serious purpose for this, which is learning how to hold on to the original thought of staying with the breath, to increase your powers of concentration. So hold on to that thought. If you lose it, pick it up again. That's the only way that the meditation will make a difference in your mind.

Q: Dear Taan Ajaan, what is the relationship between the ego, the sense of I, control, and the act of pre-judging others without knowing the facts? I would like to understand these relationships clearly, as I'm finding it difficult to feel compassion for a friend who has been pre-judging me without knowing the facts.

A: There is such a thing as a skillful sense of I and an unskillful sense of I. The same holds for the sense of wanting to have some control. There are areas in life where it's skillful to try to have some control, and others where it's not skillful. Pre-judging another person is always unskillful, but it doesn't necessarily have to do with a sense of I or a sense of control. Usually, it has to do more with the sense of not seeing that it's important to take the time and energy to know the facts of the situation. That's an attitude that's hard to have compassion for. In other words, your friend doesn't see that it's worth the time or the energy to get to know the facts before passing judgment on you. So

your friend is clinging to some views about what should and should not be done. If you want to, you can sit down with your friend and say, “Look, this is the problem: I feel that you don’t give me enough importance.” If the friend doesn’t want to take the time to sit down with you, then maybe you should find another friend.

Q: Considering our field, our karmic seeds, how can we have the wisdom to know the right time to accept the bad karma and when to act against the bad karma?

A: Your first response should always be to try to act against the bad karma. If you’ve tried everything you can think of and the situation cannot be changed, then you tell yourself, “Maybe it is my past bad karma?” In Thailand, doctors have learned this as a category of disease. I doubt that you have this category in Brazil. There the doctors try everything they can think of but then, if nothing works, they say, “Maybe this is a karma disease. Go out and make some merit.” The important point is that they don’t say that right off the bat. They first try to alleviate the situation through medical means.

Q: Is it correct to say that it’s okay not to have control?

A: You have to try to exert some control over your mind and learn how to do it skillfully. That’s what meditation is all about; that’s what mindfulness is all about. This is one of the points that’s most misunderstood about the Buddha’s teachings. We think that mindfulness means just allowing things to arise and pass away on their own, without trying to exert control over them. But the Buddha taught that when you have mindfulness in charge of your mind, if there are skillful qualities that you don’t have yet, you consciously try to give rise to them. Once the skillful qualities are there, you consciously try to maintain them so that they don’t pass away. As for control over things outside, this will depend on the situation. The Buddha didn’t teach his students to be do-nothings. He himself was a very active person. But there were cases when even he couldn’t exert control over a situation, so he had to let it go with equanimity.

Q: What is important to consider in a process of creating my personal and professional identity in a skillful way?

A: The important thing is that if you have a profession, you want to be able to do it well. You want to be the sort of person who's always willing to learn from your mistakes—and also to do whatever you can do to improve your abilities in your profession.

Once I was sitting on a plane after there had been an orthopedic surgery convention in San Diego. There were two orthopedic surgeons sitting in the row in front of me: an older one and a younger one. The younger one said, "I don't see why we need to have these continuing education programs. I think my skills are good enough as they are." The old surgeon said, "No, you can't think like that. There's always something to learn."

I told myself, "I don't want that younger surgeon operating on me."

Q: You mentioned that craving to be in becoming and also wanting to stop being in becoming are both ways for producing suffering. Even when becoming is related to the desire to carry out positive things such as good projects that will bring benefit, does it generate suffering? And why does wanting to put an end to becoming also generate suffering? In other words, why does the desire to get out of becoming also cause suffering?

A: There are two questions here. The first question is, are there some states of becoming that are worth the suffering involved in order to do something good? The question will depend on the situation. It is possible there are some states of becoming that actually are beneficial for you and for other people. For instance, you take on the state of becoming of being a good parent. As anyone among you who has been a parent knows, there will be suffering in that state of becoming. But you've decided that it's worth it.

And, of course, the suffering involved in creating the becoming of a state of right concentration is always worth the effort involved.

The second question is about wanting to put an end to becoming. This is one of the more subtle points in the Buddhist teachings. The general desire to not have to come back to any more states of becoming is one of the things that motivate us on the path. But you don't accomplish that by destroying the states of becoming you already have. If you want to destroy a state of becoming, you have to take on the identity of the destroyer, and that's another state of becoming.

The Buddha's strategy is to ferret out the steps that lead up to a new state of becoming and to try to develop dispassion for those steps before they result in a new state of becoming. As for the states of becoming already there, you allow them to pass away on their own. You don't have to destroy them. They'll naturally pass away at some point.

Q: What will be the most skillful action one can do with regard to the aggregates in the process of dying?

A: The most skillful thing would be to let go of them. If you're not ready to totally let go of them, try to hold on to the fabrication aggregate that says, "If I'm going to be reborn, I want to be reborn in a place where I can practice the True Dhamma." Some of the skills you've learned as a meditator will also come in handy at that time. The ability to see your awareness as one thing and pain as something else will be very useful. Your ability to get let go of distracting thoughts will also be very useful. So think of the meditation as practice in learning how to die skillfully without fear or distraction.

We had an old layman who was dying at the monastery. Bit by bit he was losing his faculties and abilities. Then one night, some people were invading the monastery and burning some of the trees. He found out about this. He hadn't stood up for two weeks, but he suddenly got up on his feet and started yelling at the people who were burning the trees. We had to tell him, "Don't get distracted, okay? Calm down, calm down." If he had died at that moment, he would have gone to a bad place. As the body approaches death, you'll see how quickly distracting thoughts can take over the mind, so the ability to say No to your distracting thoughts will be very useful at that time. So work on that skill.

By the way, the old man was able to calm down, and two days later he died peacefully.

Q: Are the jhānas important to make progress on the path? If so, how should one train in order to enter the jhānas?

A: The jhānas are essential. The Buddha treats them as the heart of the path, saying that the other factors of the path are their supports or requisites. The guided meditations we've been giving you every morning are instructions

on how to enter jhāna. We're secretly trying to get you in jhānas without your knowing it (laugh).

Q: What are insights and what is the explanation for these events?

A: An insight is when you see what you're doing that's causing suffering, you realize that you don't have to do it, and you can stop. As your practice develops, those insights will get more and more subtle, but that's the basic structure of every insight: "I'm doing this, it's causing suffering, but I don't have to do this, so the suffering is unnecessary. Why am I doing it?" And you stop doing it.

Q: Is it possible to make use of experiences of becoming such as dreams or images that arise during meditation when the focus is lost? If so, how can they be used? Because they arise anyway, how can this experience be used on the path?

A: In the beginning stages of the path, whatever comes up in your meditation, aside from the topic you're focused on, you have to let it go, let it go, let it go. When you get really good at letting these things go, then you can start letting them in bit by bit. You ask yourself "What insight does this give into what I'm doing to cause suffering that I don't have to cause?" If there's no answer, then you just let it go. If there is an answer, and it seems to be in line with what you know of the Dhamma, test it to see if the lesson is valid.

Q: About becoming: For a long time, I've noticed in myself a difficulty in being 100% present. My mind always tells me or makes me imagine that it could be in other places, even when the place where I am is a good place, like now on a retreat. Is always being in a becoming a way of producing karma in the present, or basically: Is becoming also producing karma?

A: It is a form of present karma. You have to ask yourself, "Am I making the best use of my time?" It's the mind's natural habit to keep on creating these states of imaginary becomings. One of the purposes of the meditation is learn how to turn the process off and on. If you can't turn off the process, you're wasting your time, so it is a kind of karma.

Q: Why does a person attract many responsibilities in life? What's the reason that a person is like a magnet that attracts various responsibilities? Is it karma?

A: Yep. The question is, how do you learn how to say No? There are times when, if you take on too many responsibilities, none of them get done well.

When I started translating the teachings of the ajaans from Thai into English. Ajaan Fuang told me, "Watch out. People will ask you to translate more, taking up all of your time, and you have to learn how to say No." One of the monks who worked and lived at the monastery was a construction monk and again, he was often asked to work on construction projects. So, every construction project he worked on, he always left one little corner unfinished. That way, if someone asked him to work on another project he didn't want to take on, he could say, "Well, this other project isn't finished yet."

One time I had to get the signature of the Supreme Patriarch in Thailand for some documents. As we were chatting for a bit, he could see that my Thai was pretty good. He said, "Could you translate some of my books into English?" Remembering the trick I had learned from the construction monk, I told the Supreme Patriarch, "I still haven't finished translating Ajaan Lee." So he said, "Okay, finish with Ajaan Lee first." I still haven't finished with the Ajaan Lee.

One of my favorite pastimes is to collect stories of how people could politely say No to the king in Thailand. It's not easy to say No to a king, but there was one time when Ajaan Suwat—the founder of our monastery in San Diego—was back in Thailand for the cold season. The king invited him to the palace for a meal. After the meal, the king asked him "Why do you keep going back to America? If Westerners want to study the Dhamma, they can easily fly here to Thailand. Why don't you come back and help the Thai people?" Ajaan Suwat answered, "I'm in America, not for the Westerners, but for the Thai people who have no one to depend on."

Q: Considering the karmic debt to one's parents, what if you have abusive parents who demand emotional closeness and presence in their lives, despite continuous bad treatment during contact with them?

A: Basically, your responsibility to your parents is to make sure they don't fall into poverty and that they have someone to look after them when they get sick and die. If they're emotionally abusive, you can stay at a distance and send monetary help. That's your responsibility. We have lots of Thai people in America who are doing just that with their parents in Thailand. They've come to live in America because their parents are abusive.

Q: Is there something like an individual karma in the sense of a mission to be fulfilled during one's lifetime?

A: It's like the people landing in the airport in Sao Paulo. Some people come to Brazil because they have a particular mission; some come to say, "What the hell? I'll just come and see what I find." Human birth is like that. Some people are born with a sense of something they really want to accomplish. Others came just because this looked like a good place to explore. Either way, once you're here, try to make good use of your opportunities to develop your perfections: generosity, virtue, renunciation, discernment, persistence, endurance, truth, determination, goodwill, and equanimity. That way, you'll have something good to take with you when you fly to your next destination.

Q: When I'm meditating, sometimes I don't feel my arms and legs. At that moment, if an image of a person arises in my mind, I can't access any feeling to practice mettā. I don't feel joy or sadness. Is this a good or a bad thing?

A: This is a state of equanimity, but you have to ask yourself whether it's small-hearted equanimity or large-hearted equanimity. If it comes after a sense of joy in the meditation and the mind settles down, that's large-hearted equanimity. It's good. But if there has been no sense of joy or well-being before that, it's small-hearted and is sometimes accompanied by a defeatism or resentment. Try to back up and induce a sense of joy.

Q: The people who are important in our lives, who make a good impact on our lives: Are they all people with whom we have past karma? The people in our families, people with whom we have relationships and friendships: Are we all related through past karma?

A: The Buddha said it would be hard to find someone who has not been your father or your mother or your sister or your brother or your son or your daughter in some previous lifetime. And he added that the proper reaction to that thought would be, “I need to get out of saṃsāra.” Just think about that. You’ve had a relationship like that with everyone in this room; at the time, the relationship was very meaningful. But now you look at these people and you feel nothing at all. That’s the nature of human relationships. Scary.

Q: When I notice unskillful actions being carried out by others, should I act only when it apparently doesn’t pose a risk to me?

A: That’s really going to depend on the situation. When protecting your child involves some risks, you have to be willing to take the risks.

Q: Yesterday you addressed the fear related to power and suggested how to deal with it, but within the Buddha’s teachings, what is the origin of fear and what is it related to?

A: Fear comes from clinging, from the fact that there’s something you’re very attached to and you’re afraid you’re going to lose it. Now, living in this world, many of the things on which your happiness is based are eventually going to leave you. So, from the Buddhist point of view, the best thing to do is to find a basis for your happiness inside your mind, so that when the things you’re dependent on outside leave you, you’ll still not feel helpless or abandoned. You still can depend on the good qualities of your mind.

For instance, you’re very dependent on your body, you’re very dependent on your brain working well, but there’s no guarantee that these things will last very long. So, the Buddha’s approach is to use these things as best as you can to develop something of more solid value inside.

A: Before the Buddha went off on his own to practice, he studied with two teachers who taught methods of formless concentration. But he realized, after he’d reached these attainments, that these were not the deathless. They were fabricated states of mind, and everything that’s fabricated is eventually going to fall apart. Now, if you attain these formless states and then die in them, there are levels of the heavens where you’re in a formless of state and you’re basically incommunicado. It’s as if you’ve turned off your cell phone. After the

Buddha gained awakening, those two teachers were the first two people he thought of going to teach, but even he couldn't get in touch with him, because they had died and taken rebirth in the formless realms, and so were totally cut off from the world outside them.

Q: I have difficulty with “worship” and “reverence.” I’m grateful for the knowledge that the Buddha left us, but I don’t understand why it’s necessary to worship or revere him. Can you help me understand?

A: In Asia, when you bow down to someone, that doesn’t mean that you’re going to obey that person. It means simply that you’re opening your heart to learn from that person. I think that explains a lot.

Q: Why the three salutations to the Buddha and the monks?

A: The three salutations represent what’s called the Triple Gem. The Triple Gem basically is the Buddha, the Dhamma—his teachings—and the noble Sangha.

Now, these are also called the three refuges, because you take them as your guides in how to find true happiness and safety.

The traditional teaching is that you can take refuge on three levels. On the external level, the Buddha was Prince Siddhartha 2,600 years ago, who left home and then became awakened. The Dhamma is the teachings that he left behind and that have been recorded. The Sangha is all those who have followed his teachings and attained at least the first level of awakening.

Then there’s the internal level of each refuge. In the case of the Buddha, you take his qualities and try to develop them within yourself. The same with the Dhamma and the same with the Sangha: In other words, you make yourself your own refuge by developing the qualities that they used to become refuges. In the Buddha’s case, this would be qualities of wisdom, compassion, and purity.

Finally, on the ultimate level, all three refuges come together as you attain the ultimate safety of nibbāna.

So when we bow down, that’s what we’re thinking: “These are the people I want to learn from, and I want to develop their qualities within my own heart.”

Showing reverence physically is a reminder to keep your mind open to learning from the Triple Gem.

Q: Dear Taan Ajaan, is it appropriate to extend the sublime attitudes to loved ones who have already passed away? And to whom should the merit be dedicated?

A: You develop thoughts of goodwill and the other sublime attitudes for everybody, living and dead, because dead people are still alive someplace else in a new birth.

As for merit, if there are specific people who were close to you who have passed away, you may want to dedicate the merit specifically to them. At the end of a practice like this, you just say, “May they know that I have done this for them, and may they rejoice in the merit I’ve done.” Now, there may be a lot of people who’ve passed away who don’t know that the merit has been dedicated to them, in which case, the merit comes back to you. Merit doesn’t get lost. It’s not like a package you try to send through the post office. You always gain merit from dedicating merit. Whether the recipient gains it is up to his or her present condition and state of mind.

Alternatively, you can dedicate merit to all those who may know of the good you’ve done and would appreciate a share of it. You don’t have to limit it just to relatives or to people you know personally.

FEBRUARY 17, 2026, EVENING

Karma for the End of Karma

We noted this morning that the way to develop discernment and wisdom is to ask wise people: “What, when I do it, will lead to my long-term harm & suffering? What, when I do it, will lead to my long-term welfare and happiness?”

This shows that discernment begins with questions of karma: What kinds of actions lead to the best results? It also shows that discernment is not concerned exclusively with the present moment. It’s concerned with how actions in the present moment yield results now and into the future.

These two principles apply not only to the beginning levels of discernment and right view. They apply all the way to the highest levels of discernment that lead to the cessation of suffering.

This is clearest to see in the fourth noble truth: the noble eightfold path, the path of practice leading to the end of suffering. The Buddha calls it the karma that leads to the end of karma. But the same principle applies to all four noble truths. After all, right view is one of the factors of the path, and it includes all four of the noble truths. This is an important point to keep in mind. If you want to understand the Buddha’s wisdom teachings, such as the three perceptions of inconstancy, stress, and not-self, you have to understand them in the context of karma. They’re things you do, tools you use for a higher purpose. We practice, not to arrive at right view. We use right view to take the mind to a dimension that’s beyond views.

So just as the path is karma that leads to the end of karma, right views are views that lead to the end of holding to views.

Take, for instance, the first noble truth, the truth of suffering and stress. You may know that the Buddha defines suffering as the five clinging-aggregates: clinging to form, feelings, perceptions, thought-fabrications, and consciousness.

Form is the body as you feel it from within.

Feelings are feeling tones of pleasure, pain, and neither pleasure nor pain.

Perceptions are the mental labels by which we define things and give them meaning: this microphone, my robe.

Thought-fabrications are the thoughts that we build out of perceptions: This microphone is useful. Please don't take my robe.

Consciousness is what's aware of these things.

As I said, you may already know about the aggregates, but you may not know that the Buddha defines them as activities: feelings feel, perceptions perceive, and so forth. Even the form of the body deforms. You have to keep doing things to maintain it.

So the aggregates are a type of karma. And just as the Buddha describes the present moment as a combination of past and present karma, he describes the aggregates as a combination of past and present actions. Past actions provide the raw material, the potentials from which you then fabricate actual aggregates in the present moment. And as the Buddha notes, you fabricate them for the sake of something—usually, your ideas of happiness.

But the Buddha notes that you do this out of ignorance, so that you actually end up fabricating suffering. Suffering is not something of which you're just on the receiving end. It's something you're actually doing.

Now, part of your ignorance is that you rarely think in terms of aggregates. It's like being told that when you drink water, you're drinking hydrogen and oxygen. But you do know the aggregates in their mode as clinging-aggregates. You are very familiar with what you make out of them through clinging.

The Buddha lists four types of clinging:

The first is clinging to sensuality: This is your habit of looking for pleasure by fantasizing and planning sensual pleasures: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. We spend more time in our fantasies than we do in actually enjoying sensual pleasures, and we can have very strong opinions—and even define ourselves very strongly—around the kinds of sensual pleasure we fantasize about and those that we don't fantasize about.

The second form of clinging is clinging to views, particularly about what the world is, what the universe is, our place in the world, and especially what pleasures and happiness are possible in this world.

The third form of clinging is clinging to habits and practices: our views about how we should act, how other people should act, what actions we think are appropriate for finding happiness. Even criminals are very attached to their ideas of how they should act to find happiness.

The fourth form of clinging is clinging to doctrines of the self: your ideas about who you are, your place in the cosmos, and what you're capable of doing to find happiness.

These are all things that we cling to very strongly, because they constitute what the Buddha calls becoming: the process by which we identify what we want, the world in which the things we want are located, what actions should and shouldn't be done to find what we want, and our ability to find the happiness we want. We feel that when we have these issues pinned down, we'll know how to act. Which is why we cling to them, and feel threatened when they change, or when other people deny them. Only when things are nailed down do we feel that we live in a world where we can confidently look for happiness. We crave the security of a world we can understand and manipulate for our own purposes, which is why we keep clinging to our views of reality and our place in it.

Yet the Buddha points out that all these notions that we cling to for security are made of aggregates—feelings, perceptions, thought-fabrications, etc.—that are very unstable and require constant upkeep and management. That's why clinging is suffering.

So the problem he faced as a teacher was how to get people to let go of the things that are making them suffer and yet they cling to dearly. The problem is compounded by the fact that the word for clinging—*upādānā*—can also mean to feed.

We're feeding off our ideas of our self and the world, so it's going to be hard to stop feeding in this way.

The Buddha's solution to this problem was to teach us to change our feeding habits by looking for pleasure and sustenance in skillful forms of

clinging along the path. Think of the image of the raft: We're on one shore of a river where there's danger. There's safety on the far shore. We have to build a raft out of the things we find on this shore: the five clinging-aggregates. We then cross over the river and, when we reach the safety of the far shore, we can let go of the raft. But while we're still crossing the river, we need to hold on. Otherwise, our old forms of clinging will sweep us away to whirlpools and monsters downstream.

We cling to the raft in four skillful ways:

We cling to a view of the world in which karma has power, and our skillful intentions can lead us to the end of suffering.

We cling to the habits and practices of generosity, virtue, and meditation.

We cling to a view of ourselves as being confident that we will benefit from following the path, confident that we can do it, and responsible in seeing that we stick to the path in spite of difficulties.

Instead of clinging to sensuality, we cling to the finer pleasures of mastering right concentration. This accomplishes two things: (1) It weans us off our unskillful feeding habits, helping us see that the happiness of a centered mind is much greater than the happiness provided by the world, and (2) it helps us get familiar with the aggregates from which our clingings are constructed.

Let's focus on the second point, on how the act of doing concentration gets you familiar with the activities of the five aggregates.

To begin with, to get the mind in a good state of concentration, grounded in the present moment, you start with form: the breath and other properties of the body as you sense them from within.

Then there's the feeling of pleasure that you try to create through the way you breathe.

There are the perceptions of how the in-and-out breath connects with the other energies in the body in a way that allows that feeling of pleasure to be maintained and spread through the body.

Thought-fabrications start with the intention to stay with the breath, along with the directed thoughts and evaluations by which you analyze how well the

breath and the mind are staying together, and what needs to be done to keep them together.

Consciousness is what's aware of all this.

As you master concentration, you are not only dealing directly with the aggregates, you're also seeing that the Buddha was right: They're activities that you keep on doing. Concentration is a kind of karma: It's not a place of shelter where you can simply rest. It's something you have to keep on fabricating, as we noted on the first morning of the retreat. It's a shelter where the roof and walls have to be constantly repaired.

As you get more sensitive, you begin to yearn for a pleasure that doesn't have to be maintained. You look at the world around you, and now that you're familiar with the aggregates, you see that your sense of the world and your place in the world is composed of aggregates. They're not as solid or reliable as you used to think. There's nowhere in space or time where you want to go.

The Buddha provides perceptions to help you see the world in this way. This is where he brings in the three perceptions of inconstancy, stress, and not-self. You see that anything you fabricate, because it's composed of actions, has to be inconstant. To look for security in inconstant things is stressful: It's like trying to sit comfortably on a chair whose legs are uneven. And compared to the prospect of the third noble truth, anything that's inconstant and stressful is not worth claiming as you or yours.

The Buddha supplements these perceptions with images: Three of the images deal with the image of the river in flood. Form is like a glob of foam floating down the river; feelings are like bubbles that form and disappear on the surface of the river when it rains. Neither foam nor bubbles are things that offer any safety. As for the other aggregates, perceptions are like mirages; fabrications are like a banana tree in that there's no core or essence to them; and consciousness is like a magic show, making things appear and disappear in a flash.

When you see the truth of these perceptions, and agree with the value judgment they imply—that there's no security in anything composed of aggregates—that's when the mind lets go. It sees no more value in fabricating the present moment—either for its own sake or for the sake of the future—so

it drops all present-moment intentions. And that's when the opening to the deathless occurs: a happiness outside of space and time that isn't fabricated and doesn't need to be maintained. That's the end of suffering.

It was this experience, by the way, that taught the Buddha about the power of karma. His skillful karma was what got him to the threshold of this experience, but more than that. When present intentions dropped away, space and time and the present moment dropped away as well. That's how he knew that present karma was required for there to be an experience of the present moment.

The fact that he survived this experience and came back to his experience of the six senses showed him the power of past karma: That's what brought him back and enabled him to keep on teaching until all his karma—past and present—came to an end.

The texts say that the Buddha and all other fully awakened people still have intentions until the moment of their death, but their intentions no longer create karmic consequences. The image in the texts is that they burn their karmic seeds as soon as they create them, but how they do that, and what it means, we'd have to be fully awakened ourselves to understand. Just leave it as one of the many amazing things about fully awakened beings that the Buddha said only fully awakened beings can understand. As for the rest of us, we can still take heart in the fact that it is possible to reach a state where karma no longer has power over us. The freedom of that state may be hard to comprehend, but it does offer us hope: that there can come a day when our minds will be totally freed.

Karma as Context

On the first night of the retreat, we noted that the topic of karma tends to be unpopular in modern Buddhist circles, largely because it seems to be teaching fatalism and determinism: Your old bad karma is going to get you, and there's nothing you can do about it. As a result, people often say that karma is either irrelevant to the quest for the end of suffering or that it was a mistake: a teaching that's inconsistent with the rest of the Dhamma that someone got added to the Dhamma from beliefs in ancient Indian culture.

For the past few days, we've tried to show how wrong these attitudes are.

To begin with, while it may be true that other Indian religions have taught a fatalistic view of karma, the Buddha's teachings on karma are not fatalistic at all. We've shown that he taught that actions *tend* to give certain results, immediately or over time, based on the quality of the intention that motivates them, but that the word "tends" there is important. Past actions simply provide the raw material from which your choices in the present moment actually shape your present experience. If your present-moment choices are skillful, then you don't have to suffer, even when past bad actions yield their results.

We've illustrated this principle with several images: From the Canon, the image of the field full of seeds, some of which are ready to sprout, and where you can choose which seeds to water with your attention. Another image from the Canon is the lump of salt: If you put it in a cup of water, you can't drink the water because it's too salty. But if you put it in clean, wide river, the water is still fit to drink. Another image, not from the Canon, is of a wise cook who knows how to make good food even out of unpromising ingredients.

The fact that karma follows a pattern that allows you to exercise your freedom of choice within the pattern is what makes it possible to learn the skills needed to shape the present moment well: Without a pattern, nothing

your learned today would give you any good guidance tomorrow. Without freedom of choice, you wouldn't be able to direct the pattern in the direction you want: the end of suffering.

The practice of the Buddha's teachings in terms of generosity, virtue, and meditation offers trainings in precisely those skills. In particular, in meditation, you learn to use the three types of fabrication—bodily, verbal, and mental—along with acts of intention and paying attention to the right questions, as your body of skills to shape your experience of the present moment—and the future—in the best way possible. In fact, it's possible to see all the Buddha's teachings as instructions in how to master these five mental qualities: what to aim at, how to talk to yourself, what questions to ask, what perceptions and feelings to focus on, even how to breathe.

The fact that you can master these skills shows that the teaching on karma is not fatalistic.

And because these skills are actions, it's obvious that the teaching on karma is not irrelevant to the rest of the Dhamma. Because the Buddha's noble eightfold path is a path of action leading to a result — the end of suffering — the nature of action and of cause and effect is the one philosophical issue that the Buddha had to address directly, to show how a fabricated path could lead to an unfabricated goal.

As for the issue of whether karma is inconsistent with the rest of the teaching, we noted on the first night that people often like to ask, "If there's no self, who does the action and who is there to receive the result?" We also noted that this question has the context backward, starting with the assumption that not-self means no self, and that no self forms the context, whereas karma has to fit into that context — and it doesn't fit. The correct question, we noted, reverses the context: The teaching on karma — as instructions for how to use the freedom of choice allowed by the pattern of cause and effect to the best effect — is the context. "Self" and "not-self" are perceptions, and as perceptions they're forms of fabrication — mental fabrications — so they have to fit into the context of karma. So then the questions become, "Which kinds of perceptions of self and not-self are useful? When are they useful? And why?"

By now you should understand why this is the most profitable way to approach this issue.

The noble eightfold path is, as we noted, a path of karma: the karma to put an end to karma. It's based on the intention to develop dispassion for the craving that causes suffering.

We learn about this intention from one of the factors of the path — right view — which teaches the four noble truths and the duties or actions appropriate to each truth. Because right view is part of the path, it is also a type of action — fabrications and perceptions aimed at the end of suffering.

To end suffering, you have to develop the path that enables you to develop dispassion for the cravings that cause you to cling to the aggregates in your search for happiness. To follow the path, you need to perceive yourself as capable and responsible, and that you'll benefit from following the path. That type of perception of self is skillful. You need these perceptions of self especially to develop the central skill of the path: right mindfulness leading to right concentration. And to develop these skills, you have to cling to the path.

The aggregates that you cling to have their pleasant side — if they didn't, we wouldn't cling to them — and in fact, the practice of concentration is composed of aggregates. So for the time being, you focus on the pleasant side of the aggregates that keep you in concentration, but you focus on the unpleasant side of aggregates that would pull you out of concentration. So you have to be selective in how you apply perceptions of self and not-self, because these perceptions are based on value judgments as to what's worth clinging to and when. In terms of the raft analogy, as you're crossing the river, you have to be careful to cling to the raft and not to the flotsam and jetsam that flow past you on the river.

As you approach the far shore, you have to let go of the raft. That's when you fabricate perceptions of not-self that apply to everything you experience, for the sake of developing dispassion for every type of aggregate, even the aggregates of the path, and even any clinging you might feel on first encountering the deathless.

That, by the way, is the meaning and purpose of the phrase, “All phenomena” — fabricated or unfabricated — “are not-self.” Liberating

dispassion has to be all-around.

Now, that phrase “All phenomena are not-self,” is a verbal fabrication. In other words, it’s a type of karma, which means that it, too, has to be abandoned when it’s served its purpose.

It’s in this way that we practice, not to arrive at right view, but to use the karma of right view as a tool to arrive at the unfabricated, the cessation of suffering, the highest possible happiness.

As Ajaan Suwat used to say, “When you arrive at the highest happiness, it doesn’t occur to you to ask if there’s a self experiencing it or not. The happiness is that complete.”

Now, this may seem far away, but it’s necessary to make an important point that has immediate bearing on your life: The efforts you make to be responsible in acting skillfully in thought, word, and deed, are an important part of the path to the end of suffering. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. It’s not the case that there’s nothing to attain and nobody to attain it. The ultimate happiness can be attained, and it can be attained through your actions.

This is the ultimate lesson of adopting right view on the topic of karma. When you do, it gives meaning to your life. The Buddha saw that the universe as a whole has no meaning, but you can make your life and your actions have meaning by trying to be as skillful as you can in what you do, say, and think. The happiness that you can create through your actions is directly related to the goodness you develop in your heart and mind.

The fact that you are free to choose your actions means that good qualities of the heart like generosity and gratitude have meaning. In fact, when the Buddha introduced his teaching on karma to people, he would focus on how his explanation of the role of free will is what allows for generosity and gratitude to be meaningful.

If we weren’t free to choose our actions, an act of generosity would have no meaning at all: People would give because they were forced to by outside power. It would be like receiving praise from AI. At the same time, the fact that other people have freedom of choice means that when they went out of their way to help you when they didn’t have to, gratitude would be an appropriate response on your part.

These attitudes are nourishing to the heart, and it's good to believe that they are genuinely meaningful. They make life worthwhile.

At the same time, the fact that you can reflect on the results of your actions and learn from them how to become more skillful means that attitudes of compassion, responsibility, and integrity are genuinely worthy of praise. If we couldn't develop the qualities of mind that allow us to become good judges of the results of our own actions, again, we'd be like machines, capable of doing only what we were programmed to do. But we *can* learn, and the integrity we bring to the process of learning is what gives dignity to human life.

This is why the Buddha said that the Dhamma is nourished by commitment and reflection: You commit yourself to doing your best, and when, on reflection, you see that the results are not good enough, you try to figure out where you went wrong so that you can avoid making the same mistake next time.

This is where skillful intentions differ from mere good intentions. Good intentions can still have some delusion in them, but skillful intentions have reduced that delusion to a minimum. This is why, as you try to develop a skillful sense of self to help you on the path, the best sense of self is one that's always willing to admit mistakes and to learn from them. That's when your practice is truly mature.

So the teaching on karma not only gives us guidance as to what is skillful and what's not, it also affirms the importance of the good qualities that we can develop in our hearts and minds. We're not just spectators in this world. We're agents, capable of developing our hearts and minds so that our actions can lead to true happiness, both within ourselves and in our good influence on the world around us.

Readings

§ 1. “This is the way leading to discernment: when visiting a contemplative or brahman, to ask: ‘What is skillful, venerable sir? What is unskillful? What is blameworthy? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What, when I do it, will be for my long-term harm & suffering? Or what, when I do it, will be for my long-term welfare & happiness?’” — [MN 135](#).

§ 2. *Mundane right view*: “There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits & results of good & bad actions. There is this world & the next world. There is mother & father. There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are contemplatives & brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.” — [MN 117](#)

Transcendent right view: “Knowledge with reference to stress, knowledge with reference to the origination of stress, knowledge with reference to the cessation of stress, knowledge with reference to the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress.” — [MN 141](#)

§ 3. At that time Ven. Rāhula [the Buddha’s son who, according to the Commentary, was seven at the time] was staying at the Mango Stone. Then the Blessed One, emerging from his seclusion in the late afternoon, went to where Ven. Rāhula was staying at the Mango Stone. Ven. Rāhula saw him coming from afar and, on seeing him, set out a seat & water for washing the feet. The Blessed One sat down on the seat set out and, having sat down, washed his feet. Ven. Rāhula, bowing down to the Blessed One, sat to one side.

Then the Blessed One, having left a little bit of the remaining water in the water dipper, said to Ven. Rāhula, “Rāhula, do you see this little bit of remaining water left in the water dipper?”

“Yes sir.”

“That’s how little of a contemplative there is in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie.”

Having tossed away the little bit of remaining water, the Blessed One said to Ven. Rāhula, “Rāhula, do you see how this little bit of remaining water is tossed away?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Rāhula, whatever there is of a contemplative in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie is tossed away just like that.”

Having turned the water dipper upside down, the Blessed One said to Ven. Rāhula, “Rāhula, do you see how this water dipper is turned upside down?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Rāhula, whatever there is of a contemplative in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie is turned upside down just like that.”

Having turned the water dipper right-side up, the Blessed One said to Ven. Rāhula, “Rāhula, do you see how empty & hollow this water dipper is?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Rāhula, whatever there is of a contemplative in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie is empty & hollow just like that.”

“Rāhula, it’s like a royal elephant: immense, pedigreed, accustomed to battles, its tusks like chariot poles. Having gone into battle, it uses its forefeet & hindfeet, its forequarters & hindquarters, its head & ears & tusks & tail, but will simply hold back its trunk. The elephant trainer notices that and thinks, ‘This royal elephant has not given up its life to the king.’ But when the royal elephant... having gone into battle, uses its forefeet & hindfeet, its forequarters & hindquarters, its head & ears & tusks & tail & his trunk, the trainer notices that and thinks, ‘This royal elephant has given up its life to the king. There is nothing it will not do.’

“In the same way, Rāhula, when anyone feels no shame in telling a deliberate lie, there is no evil, I tell you, he will not do. Thus, Rāhula, you should train yourself, ‘I will not tell a deliberate lie even in jest.’

“What do you think, Rāhula: What is a mirror for?”

“For reflection, sir.”

“In the same way, Rāhula, bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions are to be done with repeated reflection.

“Whenever you want to perform a bodily action, you should reflect on it: ‘This bodily action I want to perform—would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful bodily action with painful consequences, painful results, then any bodily action of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction... it would be a skillful bodily action with happy consequences, happy results, then any bodily action of that sort is fit for you to do. [Similarly with verbal actions & mental actions.]

“While you are performing a bodily action, you should reflect on it: ‘This bodily action I am doing—is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to affliction of others, or both... you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not... you may continue with it. [Similarly with verbal actions & mental actions.]

“Having performed a bodily action, you should reflect on it.... If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful bodily action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should confess it, reveal it, lay it open to the Teacher or to a knowledgeable companion in the holy life. Having confessed it... you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction... it was a skillful bodily action with happy consequences, happy results, then you should stay mentally refreshed & joyful, training day & night in skillful mental qualities. [Similarly with verbal actions.]

“Having performed a mental action, you should reflect on it.... If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful mental action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should feel horrified, humiliated, & disgusted with it. Feeling horrified... you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you

know that it did not lead to affliction... it was a skillful mental action with happy consequences, happy results, then you should stay mentally refreshed & joyful, training day & night in skillful mental qualities.

“Rāhula, all the contemplatives & brahmans in the course of the past who purified their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions, did it through repeated reflection on their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions in just this way.

“All the contemplatives & brahmans in the course of the future.... All the contemplatives & brahmans at present who purify their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions, do it through repeated reflection on their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions in just this way.

“So, Rāhula, you should train yourself: ‘I will purify my bodily actions... my verbal actions... my mental actions through repeated reflection.’ That’s how you should train yourself.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, Ven. Rāhula delighted in the Blessed One’s words. — [MN 61](#)

§ 4. “Intention, I tell you, is kamma. Intending, one does kamma by way of body, speech, & intellect.

“And what is the cause by which kamma comes into play? Contact....

“And what is the diversity in kamma? There is kamma to be experienced in hell, kamma to be experienced in the realm of common animals, kamma to be experienced in the realm of the hungry shades, kamma to be experienced in the human world, kamma to be experienced in the heavenly worlds. [In the Buddhist cosmology, sojourns in hell or in heaven, as in the other realms, are not eternal. After the force of one’s kamma leading to rebirth in those levels has worn out, one is reborn elsewhere.]....

“And what is the result of kamma? The result of kamma is of three sorts, I tell you: that which arises right here & now, that which arises later [in this lifetime], and that which arises following that....

“And what is the cessation of kamma? From the cessation of contact is the cessation of kamma; and just this noble eightfold path... is the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma.

“Now when a disciple of the noble ones discerns kamma in this way, the cause by which kamma comes into play in this way, the diversity of kamma in this way, the result of kamma in this way, the cessation of kamma in this way, & the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma in this way, then he discerns this penetrative holy life as the cessation of kamma.” — [AN 6:63](#)

§ 5. “Monks, these four types of kamma have been directly known, verified, & announced by me. Which four? There is kamma that is dark with dark result. There is kamma that is bright with bright result. There is kamma that is dark & bright with dark & bright result. There is kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma.

“And what is kamma that is dark with dark result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates an injurious bodily fabrication, fabricates an injurious verbal fabrication, fabricates an injurious mental fabrication. Having fabricated an injurious bodily fabrication, having fabricated an injurious verbal fabrication, having fabricated an injurious mental fabrication, he rearises in an injurious world. On rearising in an injurious world, he is there touched by injurious contacts. Touched by injurious contacts, he experiences feelings that are exclusively painful, like those of the beings in hell. This is called kamma that is dark with dark result.

“And what is kamma that is bright with bright result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates a non-injurious bodily fabrication... a non-injurious verbal fabrication... a non-injurious mental fabrication.... He rearises in a non-injurious world.... There he is touched by non-injurious contacts.... He experiences feelings that are exclusively pleasant, like those of the Beautiful Black Devas. This is called kamma that is bright with bright result.

“And what is kamma that is dark & bright with dark & bright result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates a bodily fabrication that is injurious & non-injurious... a verbal fabrication that is injurious & non-injurious... a mental fabrication that is injurious & non-injurious.... He rearises in an injurious & non-injurious world.... There he is touched by injurious & non-injurious contacts.... He experiences injurious & non-

injurious feelings, pleasure mingled with pain, like those of human beings, some devas, and some beings in the lower realms. This is called kamma that is dark & bright with dark & bright result.

“And what is kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma? Right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is called kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma.

“These, monks, are the four types of kamma directly known, verified, & announced by me.” — [AN 4:237](#)

§ 6. “Having approached the contemplatives & brahmans who hold that... whatever a person experiences—pleasant, painful, or neither pleasant nor painful — is all caused by what was done in the past, I said to them: ‘Is it true that you hold that... whatever a person experiences... is all caused by what was done in the past?’ ... They admitted, ‘Yes.’ Then I said to them, ‘Then in that case, a person is a killer of living beings because of what was done in the past. A person is a thief... unchaste... a liar... a divisive speaker... an abusive speaker... an idle chatterer... covetous... malevolent... a holder of wrong views because of what was done in the past.’ When one falls back on what was done in the past as being essential, monks, there is no desire, no effort [at the thought], ‘This should be done. This shouldn’t be done.’ When one can’t pin down as a truth or reality what should & shouldn’t be done, one dwells bewildered & unprotected. One cannot righteously refer to oneself as a contemplative.” — [AN 3:62](#)

§ 7. “When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this isn’t, that isn’t. From the stopping of this comes the stopping of that.” — [AN 10:92](#)

§ 8. “From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.

“From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.

“From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form.

“From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.

“From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.

“From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.

“From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.

“From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance.

“From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming.

“From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.

“From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering....

“And what is *name-&-form*? Feeling, perception, intention, contact, & attention: This is called name. The four great elements & the form dependent on the four great elements: This is called form. This name & this form are called name-&-form...

“And what are *fabrications*? These three are fabrications: bodily fabrications, verbal fabrications, mental fabrications. These are called fabrications.

“And what is *ignorance*? Not knowing stress, not knowing the origination of stress, not knowing the cessation of stress, not knowing the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called ignorance.

“Now from the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications... the cessation of consciousness... the cessation of name-&-form... the cessation of the six sense media... the cessation of contact... the cessation of feeling... the cessation of craving... the cessation of clinging/sustenance... the cessation of becoming... the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering.”

{“And what is the way to the cessation of ignorance? Just this noble eightfold path.”} — [SN 12:2](#) { [MN 9](#) }

§ 9. “What is old kamma? The eye is to be seen as old kamma, fabricated & willed, capable of being felt. The ear... The nose... The tongue... The body...

The intellect is to be seen as old kamma, fabricated & willed, capable of being felt. This is called old kamma.

“And what is new kamma? Whatever kamma one does now with the body, with speech, or with the intellect. This is called new kamma.

“And what is the cessation of kamma? Whoever touches the release that comes from the cessation of bodily kamma, verbal kamma, & mental kamma. That is called the cessation of kamma.

“And what is the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma? Just this noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is called the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma.” — [SN 35:145](#).

§ 10. Moliyasivaka: “There are some contemplatives & brahmans who are of this doctrine, this view: ‘Whatever an individual feels—pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain—is entirely caused by what was done before.’ Now what does Master Gotama say to that?”

The Buddha: “There are cases where some feelings arise based on bile [i.e., diseases and pains that come from a malfunctioning gall bladder]. You yourself should know how some feelings arise based on bile. Even the world is agreed on how some feelings arise based on bile. So any contemplatives & brahmans who are of the doctrine & view that whatever an individual feels—pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain—is entirely caused by what was done before—slip past what they themselves know, slip past what is agreed on by the world. Therefore I say that those contemplatives & brahmans are wrong.

“There are cases where some feelings arise based on phlegm... based on internal winds... based on a combination of bodily humors... from the change of the seasons... from uneven [‘out-of-tune’] care of the body... from attacks... from the result of kamma. You yourself should know how some feelings arise from the result of kamma. Even the world is agreed on how some feelings arise from the result of kamma. So any contemplatives & brahmans who are of the doctrine & view that whatever an individual feels—pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain—is entirely caused by what was done before—slip past

what they themselves know, slip past what is agreed on by the world. Therefore I say that those contemplatives & brahmans are wrong.” — [SN 36:21](#)

§ 11. There are these four inconceivables that are not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about them. Which four?

“The Buddha-range of the Buddhas [i.e., the range of powers a Buddha develops as a result of becoming a Buddha] is an inconceivable that is not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about it.

“The jhāna-range of a person in jhāna [i.e., the range of powers that one may obtain while absorbed in jhāna]....

“The [precise working out of the] results of kamma....

“Conjecture about [the origin, etc., of] the world is an inconceivable that is not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about it.” — [AN 4:77](#)

§ 12. “There are, headman, some contemplatives & brahmans who hold a doctrine & view like this: ‘All those who kill living beings experience pain & distress in the here-&-now. All those who take what is not given... who engage in illicit sex... who tell lies experience pain & distress in the here-&-now.’

“Now there is the case where a certain person is seen garlanded & adorned, freshly bathed & groomed, with hair & beard trimmed, enjoying the sensualities of women as if he were a king. They ask about him: ‘My good man, what has this man done that he has been garlanded & adorned... as if he were a king?’ They answer: ‘My good man, this man attacked the king’s enemy and took his life. The king, gratified with him, rewarded him. That is why he is garlanded & adorned... as if he were a king.’

“Then there is the case where a certain person is seen bound with a stout rope with his arms pinned tightly against his back, his head shaved bald, marched to a harsh-sounding drum from street to street, crossroads to crossroads, evicted through the south gate, and beheaded to the south of the

city. They ask about him: ‘My good man, what has this man done that he is bound with a stout rope... and beheaded to the south of the city?’ They answer: ‘My good man, this man, an enemy of the king, has taken the life of a man or a woman. That is why the rulers, having had him seized, inflicted such a punishment upon him.’

[The Buddha then cites similar cases where some people are rewarded for stealing, engaging in illicit sex, and lying, whereas other people are punished.]

“Now, what do you think, headman: Have you ever seen or heard of such a case?”

“I have seen this, lord, have heard of it, and will hear of it [again in the future].”

“So, headman, when those contemplatives & brahmans who hold a doctrine & view like this say: ‘All those who kill living beings [etc.] experience pain & distress in the here-&-now,’ do they speak truthfully or falsely?”

”Falsely, lord.”

“And those who babble empty falsehood: Are they moral or immoral?”

“Immoral, lord.”

“And those who are immoral and of evil character: Are they practicing wrongly or rightly?”

”Wrongly, lord.”

“And those who are practicing wrongly: Do they hold wrong view or right view?”

”Wrong view, lord.”

“And is it proper to place confidence in those who hold wrong view?”

“No, lord.” — SN 42:13

§ 13. “There are four kinds of person to be found in the world. Which four? There is the case where a certain person takes life, takes what is not given [steals], engages in illicit sex, lies, speaks divisively, speaks abusively, engages in idle chatter; is covetous, malevolent, & holds wrong views. On the break-up

of the body, after death, he reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell.

“But there is also the case where a certain person takes life...holds wrong views [yet], on the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.

“And there is the case where a certain person abstains from taking life, abstains from taking what is not given...is not covetous, not malevolent, & holds right views. On the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.

“But there is also the case where a certain person abstains from taking life, abstains from taking what is not given... is not covetous, not malevolent, & holds right views [yet], on the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell....

“In the case of the person who takes life... [yet] on the break-up of the body, after death, reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world: either earlier he performed fine kamma that is to be felt as pleasant, or later he performed fine kamma that is to be felt as pleasant, or at the time of death he adopted & carried out right views. Because of that, on the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world. But as for the results of taking life... holding wrong views, he will feel them either right here & now, or later [in this lifetime], or following that....

“In the case of the person who abstains from taking life... [yet] on the break-up of the body, after death, reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell: either earlier he performed evil kamma that is to be felt as painful, or later he performed evil kamma that is to be felt as painful, or at the time of death he adopted & carried out wrong views. Because of that, on the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. But as for the results of abstaining from taking life... holding right views, he will feel them either right here & now, or later [in this lifetime], or following that.”

— [MN 136](#)

§ 14. “Monks, for anyone who says, ‘In whatever way a person makes kamma, that is how it is experienced,’ there is no living of the holy life, there is no opportunity for the right ending of stress. But for anyone who says, ‘When a person makes kamma to be felt in such & such a way, that is how its result is experienced,’ there is the living of the holy life, there is the opportunity for the right ending of stress.

“There is the case where a trifling evil deed done by a certain individual takes him to hell. There is the case where the very same sort of trifling deed done by another individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment.

“Now, a trifling evil deed done by what sort of individual takes him to hell? There is the case where a certain individual is undeveloped in [contemplating] the body, undeveloped in virtue, undeveloped in mind, undeveloped in discernment: restricted, small-hearted, dwelling with suffering. A trifling evil deed done by this sort of individual takes him to hell.

“Now, a trifling evil deed done by what sort of individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment? There is the case where a certain individual is developed in [contemplating] the body, developed in virtue, developed in mind, developed in discernment: unrestricted, large-hearted, dwelling with the unlimited. A trifling evil deed done by this sort of individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment.

“Suppose that a man were to drop a lump of salt into a small amount of water in a cup. What do you think? Would the water in the cup become salty because of the lump of salt, and unfit to drink?”

“Yes, lord....”

“Now suppose that a man were to drop a lump of salt into the River Ganges. What do you think? Would the water in the River Ganges become salty because of the lump of salt, and unfit to drink?”

“No, lord....”

“In the same way, there is the case where a trifling evil deed done by one individual [the first] takes him to hell; and there is the case where the very

same sort of trifling deed done by the other individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment.” — [AN 3:101](#)

§ 15. “Monks, the taking of life — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from the taking of life is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to a short life span.

“Stealing — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from stealing is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to the loss of one’s wealth.

“Illicit sexual behavior — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from illicit sexual behavior is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to rivalry & revenge.

“Telling lies — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from telling lies is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to being falsely accused.

“Divisive tale-bearing — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from divisive tale-bearing is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to the breaking of one’s friendships.

“Abusive speech — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from abusive speech is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to unappealing sounds.

“Frivolous chattering — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the

realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from frivolous chattering is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to words that aren't worth taking to heart.

“The drinking of fermented & distilled liquors — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from drinking fermented & distilled liquors is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to mental derangement.” — [AN 8:40](#)

§ 16. “There is the case where a woman or man is one who harms beings with his/her fists, with clods, with sticks, or with knives. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in the plane of deprivation.... If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is sickly wherever reborn. This is the way leading to sickness: to be one who harms beings with one's fists, with clods, with sticks, or with knives....

“There is the case, where a woman or man is ill-tempered & easily upset; even when lightly criticized, he/she grows offended, provoked, malicious, & resentful; shows annoyance, aversion, & bitterness. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in the plane of deprivation.... If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is ugly wherever reborn. This is the way leading to ugliness: to be ill-tempered & easily upset; even when lightly criticized, to grow offended, provoked, malicious, & resentful; to show annoyance, aversion, & bitterness....

“There is the case where a woman or man is envious. He/she envies, begrudges, & broods about others' gains, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, & veneration. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in the plane of deprivation... If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is not influential wherever reborn. This is the way leading to being uninfluential: to be envious, to envy, begrudge, & brood about others' gains, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, & veneration....

“There is the case where a woman or man is not a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, or lighting to priests or contemplatives. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death he/she reappears in the plane of deprivation.... If instead he/she comes to the human state, he/she is poor wherever reborn. This is the way leading to poverty: not to be a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, or lighting to priests or contemplatives....

“There is the case where a woman or man is obstinate & arrogant. He/she does not pay homage to those who deserve homage, rise up for those for whom one should rise up, give a seat to those to whom one should give a seat, make way for those for whom one should make way, worship those who should be worshipped, respect those who should be respected, revere those who should be revered, or honor those who should be honored. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in the plane of deprivation.... If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is low-born wherever reborn. This is the way leading to a low birth: to be obstinate & arrogant, not to pay homage to those who deserve homage, nor rise up for... nor give a seat to... nor make way for... nor worship... nor respect... nor revere... nor honor those who should be honored.” — [MN 135](#).

§ 17. “Monks, there are these three roots of what is unskillful. Which three? Greed is a root of what is unskillful, aversion is a root of what is unskillful, delusion is a root of what is unskillful.

“Greed itself is unskillful. Whatever a greedy person fabricates by means of body, speech, or intellect, that too is unskillful. Whatever suffering a greedy person — his mind overcome with greed, his mind consumed—wrongly inflicts on another person through beating or imprisonment or confiscation or placing blame or banishment, [with the thought,] “I have power. I want power,” that too is unskillful. Thus it is that many evil, unskillful qualities/events /actions—born of greed, caused by greed, originated through greed, conditioned by greed—come into play. [Similarly with aversion and delusion.]

“And a person like this is called one who speaks at the wrong time, speaks what is unfactual, speaks what is irrelevant, speaks contrary to the Dhamma, speaks contrary to the Vinaya. Why...? Because of having wrongly inflicted suffering on another person through beating or imprisonment or confiscation or placing blame or banishment, [with the thought,] ‘I have power. I want power.’ When told what is factual, he denies it and doesn’t acknowledge it. When told what is unfactual, he doesn’t make an ardent effort to untangle it [to see], ‘This is unfactual. This is ungrounded.’ That’s why a person like this is called one who speaks at the wrong time, speaks what is unfactual, speaks what is irrelevant, speaks contrary to the Dhamma, speaks contrary to the Vinaya.

“A person like this—his mind overcome with evil, unskillful qualities born of greed... of aversion... of delusion, his mind consumed—dwells in suffering right in the here-&-now—feeling threatened, turbulent, feverish—and at the break-up of the body, after death, can expect a bad destination.”—[AN 3:69](#).

§ 18. “As for the course of action that is unpleasant to do but that, when done, leads to what is profitable, it’s in light of this course of action that one may be known... as a fool or a wise person. For a fool doesn’t reflect, ‘Even though this course of action is unpleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is profitable.’ So he doesn’t do it, and thus the non-doing of that course of action leads to what is unprofitable for him. But a wise person reflects, ‘Even though this course of action is unpleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is profitable.’ So he does it, and thus the doing of that course of action leads to what is profitable for him.

“As for the course of action that is pleasant to do but that, when done, leads to what is unprofitable, it’s in light of this course of action that one may be known... as a fool or a wise person. For a fool doesn’t reflect, ‘Even though this course of action is pleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is unprofitable.’ So he does it, and thus the doing of that course of action leads to what is unprofitable for him. But a wise person reflects, ‘Even though this course of action is pleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is unprofitable.’ So he doesn’t do it, and thus the non-doing of that course of action leads to what is profitable for him.” — [AN 4:115](#).

§ 19. “There’s the case, headman, where a certain teacher holds this doctrine, holds this view: ‘All those who take life are destined for the plane of deprivation, are destined for hell. All those who steal.... All those who indulge in illicit sex.... All those who tell lies are destined for the plane of deprivation, are destined for hell.’ A disciple has faith in that teacher, and the thought occurs to him, ‘Our teacher holds this doctrine, holds this view: “All those who take life are destined for the plane of deprivation, are destined for hell.” There are living beings that I have killed. I, too, am destined for the plane of deprivation, am destined for hell.’ He fastens onto that view. If he doesn’t abandon that doctrine, doesn’t abandon that state of mind, doesn’t relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would thus be placed in hell.

“[The thought occurs to him,] ‘Our teacher holds this doctrine, holds this view: ‘All those who steal.... All those who indulge in illicit sex.... All those who tell lies are destined for the plane of deprivation, are destined for hell.’ There are lies that I have told. I, too, am destined for the plane of deprivation, am destined for hell.’ He fastens onto that view. If he doesn’t abandon that doctrine, doesn’t abandon that state of mind, doesn’t relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would thus be placed in hell.

“There is the case, headman, where a Tathāgata appears in the world, worthy & rightly self-awakened, consummate in clear knowing & conduct, well-gone, a knower of the cosmos, unexcelled trainer of those to be tamed, teacher of human & divine beings, awakened, blessed. He, in various ways, criticizes & censures the taking of life, and says, ‘Abstain from taking life.’ He criticizes & censures stealing, and says, ‘Abstain from stealing.’ He criticizes & censures indulging in illicit sex, and says, ‘Abstain from indulging in illicit sex.’ He criticizes & censures the telling of lies, and says, ‘Abstain from the telling of lies.’

“A disciple has faith in that teacher and reflects: ‘The Blessed One in a variety of ways criticizes & censures the taking of life, and says, “Abstain from taking life.” There are living beings that I have killed, to a greater or lesser extent. That was not right. That was not good. But if I become remorseful for that reason, that evil deed of mine will not be undone.’ So, reflecting thus, he abandons right then the taking of life, and in the future refrains from taking

life. This is how there comes to be the abandoning of that evil deed. This is how there comes to be the transcending of that evil deed.

“[He reflects:] ‘The Blessed One in a variety of ways criticizes & censures stealing... indulging in illicit sex... the telling of lies, and says, “Abstain from the telling of lies.” There are lies I have told, to a greater or lesser extent. That was not right. That was not good. But if I become remorseful for that reason, that evil deed of mine will not be undone.’ So, reflecting thus, he abandons right then the telling of lies, and in the future refrains from telling lies. This is how there comes to be the abandoning of that evil deed. This is how there comes to be the transcending of that evil deed.

“Having abandoned the taking of life, he refrains from taking life... he refrains from stealing... he refrains from illicit sex... he refrains from lies... he refrains from divisive speech... he refrains from abusive speech... he refrains from idle chatter. Having abandoned covetousness, he becomes uncovetous. Having abandoned malevolence & anger, he becomes one with a mind of no malevolence. Having abandoned wrong views, he becomes one who has right views.

“That disciple of the noble ones, headman—thus devoid of covetousness, devoid of malevolence, unbewildered, alert, mindful—keeps pervading the first direction [the east] with an awareness imbued with good will, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with good will—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without malevolence. Just as a strong conch-trumpet blower can notify the four directions without any difficulty, in the same way, when the release of awareness through good will is thus developed, thus pursued, any deed done to a limited extent no longer remains there, no longer stays there.

“That disciple of the noble ones... keeps pervading the first direction with an awareness imbued with compassion... empathetic joy... equanimity, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with equanimity—

abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without malevolence. Just as a strong conch-trumpet blower can notify the four directions without any difficulty, in the same way, when the release of awareness through equanimity is thus developed, thus pursued, any deed done to a limited extent no longer remains there, no longer stays there.”—[SN 42:8](#)

§ 20. “Now, based on what line of reasoning should one often reflect... that ‘I am the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator. Whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir’? There are beings who conduct themselves in a bad way in body... in speech... and in mind. But when they often reflect on that fact, that bad conduct in body, speech, & mind will either be entirely abandoned or grow weaker....

“A disciple of the noble ones considers this: ‘I am not the only one who is the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator; who—whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir. To the extent that there are beings—past & future, passing away & re-arising—all beings are the owners of their actions, heir to their actions, born of their actions, related through their actions, and have their actions as their arbitrator. Whatever they do, for good or for evil, to that will they fall heir.’ When he/she often reflects on this, the [factors of the] path take birth. He/she sticks with that path, develops it, cultivates it. As he/she sticks with that path, develops it, & cultivates it, the fetters are abandoned, the obsessions destroyed.”—[AN 5:57](#)

Glossary

Ajaan (Thai): Teacher; mentor.

Arahant: A “worthy one” or “pure one;” a person whose mind is free of defilement and thus is not destined for further rebirth. A title for the Buddha and the highest level of his noble disciples. Sanskrit form: *Arhat*.

Brahma-vihāra: Sublime attitude of unlimited goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, or equanimity.

Deva: Literally, “shining one.” An inhabitant of the terrestrial or heavenly realms higher than the human.

Dhamma: (1) Event; action. (2) A phenomenon in and of itself. (3) Mental quality. (4) Doctrine, teaching. (5) *Nibbāna* (although there are passages in the Pali Canon describing *nibbāna* as the abandoning of all *dhammas*). Sanskrit form: *dharma*.

Jhāna: Mental absorption. A state of strong concentration focused on a single sensation or mental notion. Sanskrit form: *dhyāna*.

Kamma: Intentional act. Sanskrit form: *karma*.

Mettā: Goodwill; benevolence. See *brahma-vihāra*.

Nibbāna: Literally, the “unbinding” of the mind from passion, aversion, and delusion, and from the entire round of death and rebirth. As this term also denotes the extinguishing of a fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. Sanskrit form: *nirvāṇa*.

Pali: The name of the earliest extant canon of the Buddha’s teachings and, by extension, of the language in which it was composed.

Samsāra: The wandering-on through rebirth and redeath.

Saṅkhāra: Fabrication.

Sutta: Discourse. Sanskrit form: *sūtra*.

Tathāgata: Literally, “one who has become authentic (*tatha-āgata*),” or “one who is really gone (*tatha-gata*),” an epithet used in ancient India for a person who has attained the highest religious goal. In the Pali Canon, this usually denotes the Buddha, although occasionally it also denotes any of his arahant disciples.

Vinaya: The monastic discipline, whose rules and traditions comprise six volumes in printed text.

Vipassanā: Insight. Originally, this term meant insight as a quality of the mind, but over time it has come to mean a type of meditation aiming at insight into inconstancy, stress, and not-self.

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