

## *Karma in the Present*

*September 24, 2014*

When we hear the teaching on karma, we usually think about past karma—not only past karma in this lifetime but also in previous lifetimes—and it seems something far away.

Actually, we're creating karma all the time. Every time there's an intention in the mind, that's karma. Sitting here with your eyes closed, you're creating karma: mental karma. So make it good. The mental karma is the attitude you bring to something, and that shapes everything you do.

You need to practice making sure that whatever the situation, you're bringing something good to it. That's your contribution to the situation both within you and with other people.

In the teachings on dependent co-arising, the Buddha talks about how intention, which is karma, is shaped by the process of fabrication. You put things together, sometimes on a subconscious level—*often* on a subconscious level—and there are many layers of intentions going on in the mind that you're hardly aware of. When we meditate, we try to get quiet so that we can see these intentions and bring more knowledge to them, because if you fabricate these things out of ignorance you're going to suffer; if you bring skill and awareness to the process of fabricating these things, that turns them into a path, the path to the end of suffering.

So fabrication: What is it? You've got the breath coming in and out: That's bodily fabrication. There's an intentional element in how you breathe, so try to breathe in a way that creates a sense of well-being right now.

Then there's verbal fabrication: directed thought and evaluation. Direct your thoughts to the breath. Evaluate the breath. Do you like this breath? If you don't, you can try another one. It's like trying on a different set of clothes. You don't like this set of clothes, you change them for another one. You find something you like, then you wear it. If, after a while, you decide that you don't like it anymore, you can change. There's a wide range of possibilities in how you can evaluate the breath and make it comfortable, and then take the sense of ease that comes with the breath and think of it spreading around the body, to get the most use out of it.

Now, to do this requires perceptions, which is one type of mental fabrication. The other is feeling: You're creating feelings of ease with the breath, and it's all done by holding in mind a perception of the breath, preferably the breath as a full-body process. The whole nervous system is involved. In this way, there's a greater

sense of ease that courses through the body as you breathe in, breathe out. Everything feels opened up. Everything feels connected.

This is all karma—good karma, because you're bringing the right attitude to the present moment, realizing that you have some power to shape things in a good direction. You want to give the mind a good place to stay so that it has the strength to do what it knows is right.

Another way of bringing good karma to the present moment, a good attitude to the present moment, is developing thoughts of goodwill. This works in several directions: First it creates a basis for skillful ideas in your mind so that when you're dealing with someone who's difficult, you're much more likely to think of something that's good for them—and for yourself.

Goodwill also has an impact on what's coming in from the past. As the Buddha said, it's not the case that we have to suffer, tit for tat, everything we've done in the past. There are certain potentials coming into the present moment, and what you choose to water is going to determine what you experience. The image is of a field full of seeds. Some of the seeds are ready to sprout; some of them are not yet ready to sprout. You try to find the good ones that are ready to sprout and you water them. You may not know which ones are ready to sprout, but if you recognize something good coming up in the mind, encourage that.

Goodwill is one of those things, because when bad seeds come up regardless of what you're doing right now—and some of them will—if you have a broader state of mind, they won't have that huge an impact.

As the Buddha said, it's like someone who's very wealthy who's fined for a crime. If you've got a lot of wealth, the fine doesn't really matter. It's like those banks that make billions and billions. If you fine them a billion or so, it doesn't really have any impact on them. But if you take an ordinary person who doesn't have that kind of money and fine that person a billion dollars, the person will be ruined.

So you're making yourself wealthy here with thoughts of goodwill. In fact, as the Buddha said, this is a monk's wealth. As monks we don't have much material wealth but we do have the wealth of goodwill. So whatever negative things come up from the past, the state of the mind is big enough to encompass them and not be knocked over by them, to the point where there's a lot of the stuff you hardly notice.

So always remember that you're not just sitting here on the receiving end of the world. You're actually generating your experience, you're taking in potentials that come from the past and you're creating your experience of the world—every time you look, every time you listen, every time you deal with the senses in any

way. Every time you move the body, every time you speak, with every thought: You're a producer, you're a creator, you're a put-together-er. In this way, you shape your life.

This is one of the reasons why when the Buddha talks about harming yourself, it's not hitting yourself or killing yourself or anything like that. It's actually killing other people, stealing from other people, lying to them, having illicit sex with them, taking intoxicants. You harm yourself in these ways, because the part of you that's the karma-creator creating lots of bad stuff is going to have an impact on your experience now and on into the future.

In the same way, he said, when you harm other people, it's not that you go hit them or anything. You harm them by getting *them* to create bad karma. The worst thing you can do to somebody is to persuade them to do something really unskillful, because that karma then becomes theirs. If you hit them, it may be something in their past karma but now it's gone, it's been paid off. It's now your karma. But if you get them to do something unskillful, the impact of that on their experience is going to last for a long time.

So remember, you're a karma-producer; other people are karma-producers. Start some good productions by training your mind. Learn how to produce good karma. Learn how to do it well, because that's your only true possession.