I own my actions. I inherit the results of my actions. I am born of my actions. I form relations through my actions. I live dependent on my actions. Whatever I do for good or for ill, I shall inherit the results. — Kamma and Rebirth

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 25:51

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sambuddhasssa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So this is November and it's time for our lugubrious contemplations. We've done death, ageing, sickness and all that. Now it comes to the contemplations of *kamma*.

First of all, in the Pali, *kamma* just means action. Consequences are called *vipāka*. Now, of course, our language uses the Sanskrit term karma with an R to mean consequence. During this particular talk, when I talk about karma, I'm talking about the action.

The first little quote here is: beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions. They originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is action that distinguishes beings from inferior and superior. This is not the distinguishment according to artistic or intellectual or physical talent. This is to do with morals, to do with whether we are moral or immoral, virtuous. The equation is that the more deluded you are, the more unethical you will be, and the more wise you are, the more ethical.

We'll be using this normal way of contemplating karma: I own my actions. I inherit the results of my actions. I am born of my actions. I form relations through my actions. I live dependent on my actions. And then a final catch-all phrase: whatever I do, for good or for ill, I shall inherit the results.

Now, the first one: I own my actions. We are totally responsible for what we say, for what we think, and for what we do. It's coming out of us. That's the first thing to really grasp. The consequences that come from that are dependent upon the intention. Remember, the role of intention in the Buddhist teachings is crucial and to be separated from desire. There may be a desire to say something angry, but you see it and you let it go. But if you speak angrily, then that will have consequences.

Remember, it goes into a matrix. The inner matrix of our psychology making us more angry and the outer matrix, which is all these people coming together to listen to what you said and you don't know what the response will be. You can't tell what the consequence of an action will be because it is either enlarged or diminished by the milieu that it finds itself in, the environment that you speak into or do something into.

That's the reason that the Buddha constantly asks us to make wise reflections and why we need a guide at this point. I always think to myself how fortunate I am that I have such a wise person, the Buddha, to guide me. I doubt if there's anybody more wise than the Buddha. There may be somebody equal, but I doubt more wise, such is the profundity of his wisdom.

So something is a desire, nothing's happened. As soon as you empower that desire, if you remember the word *cetanā*, the will, then something comes of it. The general rule is that if something is good, some good will come of it. If something is not good, something not good will come of it.

The second reflection is: I am heir to my kamma or I inherit the results of my kamma. Here we have to again remind ourselves of the specific law of conditionality. We don't know what will happen once we say something or do something. In fact, we don't know inwardly what will happen when we allow thoughts to develop within ourselves.

The important thing for me here is to accept what comes back to us, even though it's not directly related to my personal karma. What that does away with, which I found a real freedom, a real liberation, is the need for punishment. Punishment comes on top of that. When we're self-criticising, when we're full of aversive self-blaming, when we're beating ourselves up, it's all completely unnecessary. You do something unwholesome. It comes back to you. You bear the consequences. You learn from it. You make an intention not to do that again. And that's the end of it. If you do it again, the same process. Habits are hard to overcome.

If you do something that's really beautiful, something that's wonderful, and the response of praise comes towards you, you accept it, but there's no need to go into how wonderful I am, what an amazing person I really am. All that's not necessary.

There's a little note here which concerns Hoddle. Hoddle was the England manager between 96 and 99. He somehow had this understanding, or at least this is what people thought was his understanding: that people who suffered some genetic disablement, that was the consequence of a past life. It created such a furore, he had to resign. According to the Buddha's teachings, that's not right. The body you receive is coming from all your past generations. What is your karma, no matter how unhappy you are with the body you've received? It might not be that it's disabled. It might be that it's just ugly. You don't like it. Whatever the body you end up with is not the direct consequence of your past actions, but the way you relate to it is.

Then we have: I am born of my actions. This is the understanding about habits. Remember that once you

create a set of actions, you then develop a habit. When we collect all our habits, that's our personality, that's our character, and it will drive us to our destiny. Our job is to see what is driving us to an unfortunate destiny, to perdition, and what is driving us towards a heavenly destiny.

This happens, of course, not only in terms of future lives—that's the normal understanding in Buddhism, that it does affect future life. In fact, your last consciousness as you die has a great effect on what's going to happen in the next life. It will drive you to do something about it. If you die, for instance, with a lot of guilt on your mind, you did something which has just come up as you die and you die with that on your heart, in the next life, you want to do something about that. If your last thoughts are what a wonderful life you've had, what a wonderful relationship you had, then you'll be seeking the same thing in the next life.

Remember that this also is happening in this present moment, and it's happening from day to day, from year to year. We're being reborn all the time. The only thing that happens at death is that the body falls off.

Going back to the idea of genetic evolution, there was a young man brought to the monastery at Amaravati who was severely disabled from a genetic illness. This is going back thirty-odd years now. Seemingly he was going to move into a flat and be quite fairly independent. We were asked to go and have a chat with him and all that. We would have to carry him to the toilet, things like that. He was perfectly happy as far as we could see. He was accustomed to his situation and he'd adapted to it.

It seems that his parents have been told that such a thing could never happen again or it'd be a million to one chance of such a disease coming again. They had a daughter and the daughter suffered exactly the same. Seemingly she was extremely embittered. Here we have a similar situation and two different ways of coping with it. That's the karma, the way they've coped with it.

The next one is: I form relations through my karma. It can be sobering, really, to think about one's past relations, relationships that one has had, and just to see what we did, what we said, which either made them flower into something beautiful or disappear and crumble into something horrible. I personally have lots of regrets of being unkind and things like that. It's reflecting on that that makes you want to be different in the future.

Here we have this interconnectedness. We're going back to this law, this specific law of conditionality. It's the understanding that we are all interconnected, interdependent, that even these words, even these thoughts that I'm giving to you, they're not mine. They don't belong to me. I've read them all. In fact, I also use GPT to give me some ideas. Then I normally just fill out around those ideas and maybe add something that I picked up from somewhere else. It's not as though anybody is completely original. I mean, that's very rare indeed. You'd have to be a Newton, an Einstein, you'd have to be an original musician, a composer, for instance. But all these people rest as, I think it was Jung, who sits on the shoulders of giants.

Nothing is original, original. Everything has been either said before or done before. We are this

interconnectedness. We're not this—it's very difficult for us Westerners to get away from the idea that we're little isolate modules, whole entire. And that we somehow have this enormous wall around us to say, well, this is me and I'm not you. Of course it does affect the way we relate to people.

The philosophy that I always point to here is the South African philosophy of Ubuntu which in short just says: I am because we are. It's just catching that relationship that we have and to realise that the relationships that we create with others affect the way they relate to us.

Then there's: I live dependent on my actions. This refers both to the inner and to the outer life.

Here we have, let's talk about a certain paradox, which is not understood in popular Buddhism. That is that you can purposefully suffer and yet be inwardly perfectly happy. I once asked somebody in Sri Lanka, a born Buddhist, brought up as a Buddhist, why he thought Jesus Christ suffered such a terrible death. He said, well, he must have done something terrible in his past life. That's the way, we might say, regular Buddhists, born Buddhists would think of that. Anything that happens to them, there must be some problem that is something they did in the past life. So there's very little understanding that you can put yourself out for a cause. You can become a martyr to a cause.

If we look at some of our modern day saints and martyrs, the obvious ones that come up are Nelson Mandela. And for me, the very tragic figure of Alexei Navalny. To lose someone with that clarity of vision and courage is really heart-rending. And especially when you hear that he would have been one of those released with the other people just recently.

So I live dependent on my actions. Then we have this summary, which captures all: Whatever I do for good or for ill, I shall inherit the results.

Now with these little reflections, we have to turn them into contemplations. The way we do that is by repeating these phrases into the heart. When you do that, you've got to be aware of any aversion. You don't want to know that. You don't want to feel what comes up when you say to yourself, I am heir to all my actions. You have to keep repeating it and feeling that negativity if the negativity is there. You have to wait until as the truth of that statement begins to penetrate that aversion begins to disappear. Finally, there's a feeling of digestion.

When a contemplative subject is being digested, that's when it's going to change us. That's when it's changing our attitudes. So that's what we're going to do. We're going to spend a moment with each statement, a minute actually. I'm going to spend a minute with each statement. During that time, if you just keep repeating it into the heart—this is not an intellectual exercise. This is an emotional exercise. This is a heart exercise. Just keep repeating it gently to yourself. Then after the five minutes, we'll go into the sitting. If you want to keep it up, that's fine.

Owner, inherit, born, relations, dependent. Whatever I do for good or for ill, I shall inherit the results.

If we go into a meditation, and I will repeat those phrases and tie them to about a minute. The first one. Again, remember repeating it into the heart.

I am the owner of my actions of mind, speech and body.

I inherit the results of my actions.

I am born each moment, each day, each lifetime of my actions.

I form relations through my actions.

I live dependent on my actions.

Whatever I do, for good or for ill, I shall inherit the results.

Now we can either continue that contemplation or return to *vipassanā*.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.