Kamma: Specific Conditionality, the Five Laws, Ethical Behaviour, and Social Kamma—Neoliberalism

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 53:24

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

So we're going to approach the problem of karma.

The first thing is the question of how does the Buddha describe how anything happens? How do things happen? It's called the law of this and that—also called specific conditionality. I shall read the equations:

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.

When I first read it, I thought, "What?" But if we now put two statements together, it becomes a little more obvious.

The first pairing is: from the arising of this comes the arising of that, and from the stopping of this comes the stopping of that. This is linear cause and effect. The fact that you came here—you decided at some point to come on the course, you made that decision, you empowered it, and you came here. So from the arising of that, you arose at Gaia House. If you had thought about it, or you had some reason that you couldn't come, because you stopped coming, you did not arise at Gaia House. This is a linear way that we would normally think about cause and effect.

The other pairing is: when this is, that is, and when this isn't, that isn't. Now that brings us directly into the present moment where things happen simultaneously. We all arrive here and the course begins, and every time you arrive it's a new occasion for meditating together, listening to a talk. If you didn't arrive, it wouldn't happen. It's extremely simple.

Now, if it were just linear, then where would creativity come in? Wouldn't it suggest a repetitiveness, a monotony, one after the other? There'd be nothing to stop the original intention; it would just keep repeating itself. But if it were just immediate, then there would be no order—it would be chaotic. Things would arise, collapse, and then for no other reason things would arise and collapse again.

When you put these two together, you get a cause coming from the past into the present moment where it meets other causes coming from the past into this present moment. So it's much clearer to talk about how

things happen as a process of contingency. Every moment, lines of decisions—not only that, but nature, whatever's happening in the outside world, the birds—constantly coming to meet in this present moment.

When we think about karma in that sense, you can see it's very difficult to sort out what's my personal karma, what's the karma from somebody else, what's the karma of the situation. But we'll come to that in a minute.

If we have this idea of contingency rather than some linear process, we're getting close to what the Buddha talked about. This is suggestive of chaos theory, which some of you might know, where an initial impulse supported by conditions just changes and grows or diminishes. The example that's normally given is the weather. One scientist said that a butterfly wing in the south of America, with supporting conditions, becomes a tornado in North America.

In any given moment, we don't actually know what is coming into that present moment. Luckily, when you live in a peaceful country, you can almost predict what's going to happen. But of course, that would lead us into a delusion that the future is predictable.

This specific conditionality underlies everything. It not only underlies what's happening in the world out there, it underlies our own minds. Because you don't know what is coming in from the outside and how you're responding from the inside. So it's a constant moment-after-moment creativity. Nothing can repeat itself.

Now, when we come to the actual karma that's important—which is our moral actions, our ethical actions—again, it's very difficult to know what is actually happening. When we're receiving something, when something is happening, it's hard to know whether it's personal karma or not.

The Buddha talks about five different laws. The first one is called the law of heat, and it refers to just basic chemistry and physics. Something like a tsunami, for instance. A tsunami is caused by shifting plates, and when the tsunami hit Sri Lanka, Thailand, places like that, of course a lot of people died.

Some would have thought that this was caused by bad karma in the past. Somewhere in the past they'd done some harm—they'd have to find some sort of excuse for that tsunami creating such suffering. Others would have been a bit more philosophical, in the sense of saying, "Well, everything's impermanent." These sorts of perspectives can undermine the strength of trauma that people can have when something like that happens.

I was told that when Western counsellors went out there to see if they could help, they found that people weren't particularly traumatized because they have this understanding. Nothing is safe, nothing is permanent. Things happen.

So that's one law, which is to do with nature, you might say.

The next one is to do with seed—that's what it's called—so it's genetics. The body you've ended up with is

not your personal karma. We know it's part of the family, coming from your family's genetic history. So if somebody is born with a genetic disease, that is not personal karma. That is something that has happened through the birth process. If somebody has a difficult birth and ends up with trauma, that isn't their personal karma. It's not as though they were meant to have that. It's just that when you enter into this life form, things happen, and that's the end of it.

You have to be careful here because sometimes people get confused, thinking that what happens to them physically through their genetics is somehow caused by some bad action, always in the past life.

The third one is citta, the mind. This is our psychology—the basic ability of the mind, its capacity to think, to speak, to solve problems. It's what we would normally think of as our psychology. We're born with this body, and perhaps the brain is not quite so quick as somebody else's brain, but if you were to say that this is your personal karma, that you've caused it because of some action in the past, that would be either untrue or unprovable. It seems the whole body-mind process that we have is not specifically caused by moral or immoral actions in the past.

The fourth one is karma, but I'll move on to the fifth, which is dharma. That's all the teachings of the Buddha—the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, Dependent Origination. All these are dharma, the teachings which allow us to escape from suffering.

So if we go back to karma: an intention comes, we've seen that clearly, we empower it, and it produces an action. When you repeat similar actions, you develop a habit. When you put all your habits together, that's your personality. Once you've got a personality and character, you're moving towards your destiny. Things will happen because of your character and personality. Our job from a karmic point of view is to realize that it's our moral decisions that will determine whether we suffer or not.

In the Buddha's own experience, when he went through the process of awakening, he saw three things clearly. He saw all his past lives, which showed him how he ended up being fully liberated. He saw how beings moved from one realm to another according to their moral and ethical actions. And he knew that he himself had no more defilements—he was purified. What was a personal insight for him, seeing the process of his life after life and how he became fully liberated, then became a universal law as far as he was concerned.

So our actions, our intended actions, even habitual actions—actions that we don't consciously decide but which have a moral or ethical quality to them—are going to produce certain results. The general law is: if you do something good, good comes of it. If you do something harmful, harm comes of it.

But it's a case of recognizing that even if you do something good, you could undermine it by doing something harmful. And if you do something harmful, you can undermine its effect by doing something good. For instance, if I were to say a sharp word to somebody and upset them, I can very easily stop the possibility of their hating me by simply apologizing. It's not as though there's some rigid process where

once we do something harmful, a fixed consequence will follow. Because it goes into a sort of matrix out there in the world and a matrix in us. The effect we can never be absolutely sure of.

There was a charity, for instance, which sent secondhand clothes to an African country. What happened was it undermined the local tailor trade, and in doing so, undermined the local economy. They had to pull out. Compassionate action also has to be accompanied by wisdom, by knowledge. You can't just do something because you think it's a good thing. They did something they thought was good, and it was—there's no problem with it—but within the situation it created an unfortunate outcome and they had to withdraw.

So you can see that the whole process of karma is very difficult to work with if you're going to be logical, if you're going to try and think about consequences. A person might do something terrible, but because of the surrounding situation, nothing happens from it. We know that so many burglaries aren't even being approached by the police. There are many burglars out there who are getting away with it.

Now, they might be getting away with it in terms of society, but not within the heart. Because every time they burgle, they are actually developing that desire of taking something not freely given and enjoying it, taking it for their own personal enjoyment. At some point there has to be some reflection of that—either in themselves as something harmful, where there's a sense of guilt and shame, or they get caught and end up in prison.

In the process of rebirth, it's not as though it's a linear thing—that in the next lifetime they will be caught and punished. It's not quite like that. It simply is that when they are reborn, they take with them that attitude. And at some point, the universe, you might say, or the cosmos, or the people around them—perhaps a bit more grounded—begin to mirror back to them exactly what they're doing. So there's a sort of moral justice that's written into this process, as far as the Buddha's concerned.

Now, some of the talks mention this rebirth business. Do remember that this isn't a belief system. It's not as though you have to believe any of this stuff, because the process of liberation is the process of investigation. If you believe something, then there's a possibility you don't make it true for you. It doesn't work to just say, "I believe what the Buddha said, and therefore I'll become enlightened." It doesn't work like that. He's always putting to us certain propositions and saying, "Is this true for you?" So it's not a matter of whether we believe in rebirth or not. It's a case of just leaving open that possibility. Don't shut it down.

I'm reminded of Pascal's dictum. Pascal was an eighteenth-century mathematician, and during that era of growing science, there were people who didn't believe in God anymore—positivists and such. What he said was: there may or may not be a God, but it might be wise to act as if there was one. Similarly, there may or may not be rebirth, but it might be wise to act as if there is.

So that actually takes us to this law. We've understood this basic underlying conditionality, which has to

do with contingency. It's not linear. You never know exactly what's going to happen. And then within that we have all these laws—laws to do with nature, with heredity, with psychology, which of course is also connected to society—and I'll come back to that when we discuss social karma. And then finally there's karma itself, which is this specific area to do with suffering, and finally the dharma.

So be clear about the ethical part. What the Buddha is saying is that it's the way we behave ethically which is either going to make us happy or unhappy. And that's what we've been really investigating with this whole business of eating, for example. We notice that when we fall into a habit of "me" or "mine," some level of greed or self-service, there's always going to be this dissatisfaction. That's where the suffering lies—in trying to seek happiness in the wrong place. And this seeking of happiness in the sensual world is the cause of all our mental diseases.

If we go back to, say, a child—and this is quite difficult to accept—if a child is abused, the reaction is the child's reaction. It's not caused directly by the person who abused the child. The abuse is physical, it may be emotional, but the suffering comes because of that reaction. The trauma is an inward process.

For instance, if somebody came and hit me on the nose and shouted at me, the pain stops here, and the feeling of anger hits me here. Everything else is an internal process, a reaction, and that's my trauma. That's why I can be cured of it. If my suffering was caused by you, in order to bring about the end of my suffering, I'd have to get rid of you. It's only because my suffering is caused by me that I can be rid of it.

Now, when we think about that, it doesn't excuse the abuser. It's not a case of saying, "Oh well, the abuser didn't cause the trauma, so we don't have to worry about that." No. The abuser also has to accept that he was the initial impetus that caused the whole problem.

And the triggers? They're just opening up that trauma. So it's an occasion for the person to work with it. Why not? In my own experience, I've had true childhood traumas come up. When we talk about traumas, there's undoubtedly harm done by parents, family members, and others to children—that's the last word on it. But remember also that the child comes in with their own mentality. So, in my own experience, I walked into the front room—

My grandfather was sat on a chair. I couldn't have been much more than two years old—two, three months, four months. And I went to shake him and he didn't move. So I said to myself, "They've killed him. Now they're going to kill me."

When that memory came to mind, I was that child. That's always the sign of a trauma—that you relive that moment totally. And it's the same with past lives. If you have a memory from a past life, you remember it as that person. You're not this person remembering something. That's the telltale sign of a past life memory. And my body was suffused with fear. It was total.

Fortunately, my father was still alive, so I said to him, "It was me that found grandfather dead in a chair in the front room." He said, "No, he was in bed when he died." You see? So the child—somewhere in me there

was a fear, and I can only presume that my parents were arguing, and I decided they were arguing against me. I don't know, but that's what happened.

It's good for us to remember that a child is also living this imaginative life arising out of their own particular conditioning.

Now I want to move to an area which isn't often dealt with. Sometimes we talk about collective or social karma. The last century saw three secular ideologies unfold. The first was communism, the second was national socialism, and the third was neoliberalism.

An ideology always has some Shangri-La that you're moving towards. If you do this and this and this, you end up tremendously rich, or tremendously happy, and so forth. In which case, it always loses its grounding in what's happening in the present moment. And as Marx said of capitalism—and he could have said it of communism as well—all these isms have the seeds of their own destruction. The reason is that they're always trying to fit the present moment into some future heavenly place.

I'm fortunate to be old enough to have lived through two different systems. The system that came here after the war had many effects of socialism, a sort of very watered-down communism. This was expressed through the National Health system, through support for people to move from one class to another, through the system of grammar schools. The caring was taken on by the state. There was a whole movement after the war to create a state-based service which was for the benefit of the people.

Running alongside that was industry. I remember being told that if you went into industry, you got more money, but your job was insecure. But if you worked in one of the government-based systems, your job was secure. So if you became a teacher, your job was secure. That was the little bargain between the two, and they ran fairly parallel.

But then, as always, there's this grit which is going to undermine the system. What happened was the workers began to gain tremendous power, and perhaps it can be argued they went over the top. I know that the union boss, the head of the automobile union, Scanlon, confessed that he'd actually ruined the auto industry because they were demanding more and more and more. And of course then we got Mrs. Thatcher.

Now what Mrs. Thatcher did was to begin changing the system to neoliberalism. This neoliberalism is another ideology. It's a sort of corruption of capitalism in a way. I'm not an economist, by the way—this is just general knowledge, and you'll have to check it all out for yourselves.

When Adam Smith wrote the basic paper on capitalism, he always had a sense of social justice in there. And when he talked about "the hidden hand," what he was being, according to one writer, was sardonic. Because all these selfish, self-serving businessmen were unwittingly creating jobs that helped people who would have been poor. It was a side effect. That's what he meant by the hidden hand.

What neoliberalism did is make the market the purpose and be-all of society. Everybody has to be part of the market. Everybody is an entrepreneur.

You've got to make your way in the market. We've seen Uber in London trying to do exactly that. And there's an immediate lowering of wages because you have to bid for a lift—to take the person, you have to bid for it. Three or four bids come up, and of course it's the lowest that gets the job. So there's a constant pushing down of wages. It just happens naturally. Luckily, they were taken to court, and now they have to employ people properly.

But we saw a worse case just recently with the P&O ferries, where they simply fired eight hundred people. They were losing a hundred million a year, but they'd just paid out two hundred and seventy million to their shareholders. So the idea that the money will trickle down is actually a tsunami going up, as we know.

The fundamental attitude driving all this is acquisitiveness—it's to get money, because when you get money you can do what you want. So greed is actually driving the system, and what it does is put us into an aggressive competitiveness. This was never clearly defined. It was just slipped in as a sort of economic program, and nobody quite articulated what the underlying understanding actually was.

And it's coming to something. I think Carl mentioned that on these programs, from America especially, when somebody offers to do something, they're always asked, "How much do you want?" Everything has to be some sort of transaction. The idea of giving something or doing something for nothing goes out of the window. This has become a sort of general feeling in our societies, so that when Covid hit, everybody suddenly realized they were neighbors and they started helping each other. People said, "Oh look, we're neighbors—we can help each other!" It was like a revelation, because before you just worked out your own life and they lived over there.

So now what happens is that it's the one with the best talent, with the greatest greed, with the ability to fight this competition that's going to win. But that's not what Darwin said. It's not greed that determines survival. He said it wasn't the strongest or the most intelligent, but the most adaptable. Yet it's been translated through neoliberalism as "greed is good" and competition—aggressive competition—is what we really want.

In a pure neoliberal situation, the worker has no rights. They have to negotiate individually with the employer. The government must keep away from restricting the market. Those of you who remember Gordon Brown's "light touch" regulation—well, it led to this huge collapse in 2008 because the banks were greedy. Everybody's greedy.

Trade unions are simply not to be allowed because they undermine this bargaining, this entrepreneurial spirit. Just recently, Amazon fired all the managers in New York because the workers were beginning to form a union. And charities—charities are a real bind because they're doing something you could make

money out of. So these things are not particularly welcomed; they undermine the entrepreneurial spirit.

What about the unemployed? What about the sick, the aged, and the mentally ill? Well, they become drags on the whole system. They're just drawing money out. And you shouldn't tax people who've made all this money—that's simply not fair, because they've actually won in the system. So the only way to make it work within a neoliberal framework is to privatize it. Then somebody makes the money. Somebody rents the system out to you.

This is exactly what's happening now with our GPs. They're selling practices to a company called Centene, which even the Daily Mail calls rapacious. And it's going on all the time. I hate giving you all this bad news.

In this system, there's no particular social responsibility. Everything, of course, is privatized—the water, the electricity, the transport. Everything becomes owned by somebody else who takes their little percentage. The electricity companies, for instance—I know because we had to have three-phase electricity put into our center. I was talking to the man who organized it, and they take ten percent. Now, I don't know whether that's ten percent after they've paid their shareholders or before, but they take ten percent.

So they're all 10-percenters. All these companies have taken their little 10%.

And this really comes down to that wonderful phrase which most of you will remember from Margaret Thatcher: that there is no such thing as society, there's only individuals. Now in doing that, you see, you isolate people. One person is up against the other. And what's missing there, of course, is that the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts. When you have people together, you create community.

And that's why the miners were so angry when they gave her a state funeral—because she completely ruined their community and gave them nothing back. It wasn't as though she said, "Well, you know, I'm taking the coal industry away from you, but instead I'm going to put this in its stead so you can earn money and maintain your community." No, she just took everything.

I was in the midst of that process. I was teaching at the time at an FE college, a Further Education college, and when she took away all the support for industry, the Chamber of Commerce was going berserk. There were so many collapses of businesses. And the unemployment rose from 6% to 16% in six months. That's what happened. And if you look at what happened in Chile and to Russia after the collapse of communism, you'll see that's exactly what they did, and it just created enormous poverty. And it's something that sticks in the craw of somebody like Putin, that they were so humiliated.

Sorry about that. I'm on my hobbyhorse, as you can see.

And of course, when it comes to opposition, then we're beginning to see this suppression and oppression. A bill has just been passed—the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill—and you can now be arrested

for being a single protester. If you go out with a placard and protest, you can be arrested. So you can see, they don't like people who try to buck the system.

Now the real point of this from a Buddhist point of view—and I'm really getting to it—is that the report from Davos, where all the rich and mighty meet, was that they were absolutely overjoyed at hearing about mindfulness and stress reduction. Because now, when their workers said, "Look, I'm absolutely stressed out," they could say, "Take this course, go sit in the corner for a while." And it's been called the religion of neoliberalism.

So this amazing technique that the Buddha has given us to liberate ourselves from suffering is actually being used for a system which is so contrary to the Buddha's teachings. It's unbelievable. It's based on greed, for instance.

So finally, what can we do in this sort of situation? Well, it's the usual thing about consumerism, because that's what's powering it. And remember that boredom is a big underlying engine to greed. Because if you're in a bored state, well, you go out and do some retail therapy again. And it's a case of recognizing that what we buy is fuel in the system. That doesn't mean you can't buy anything, but you might just consider where it's made, and whether you need it.

And the other thing, from a personal point of view, is just to get back to generosity. Have you noticed—you might not have noticed—but when you do something good for yourself, like you might buy some thermal underwear... I say that because I did it for myself. And it feels fantastic, it feels so warm, you know, you think, "My God, why haven't I discovered this before?" And you feel very good about yourself, you've been so kind to yourself, you see.

Now, if I had bought thermal underwear for somebody else, and they had said, "I'm really grateful for this thermal underwear," the joy that I get from that would have lasted longer. Check it out. When I do something for myself, I get a joy, and it lasts a little bit. But when I do something generous and beautiful for somebody else, it lasts. And every time I bring that to mind, it gives me that little lift of the joy of having brought some happiness into somebody else's life.

And I want to quote the Buddha here, and it's around eating:

If beings knew, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would the stain of miserliness overcome their minds. Even if it were their last bite, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared if there was somebody to receive the gift. But because beings do not know, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they eat without having given. The stain of miserliness overcomes their minds.

So I'm done with neoliberalism. The next topic is something which brings us into what's happening in Ukraine: what was the Buddha's position when it came to war? He himself was involved in three conflicts of one sort or another.

The first instance involved his own clan, the Sakyans, and the neighboring Koliyans. They shared a river and had gotten into a real dispute about it—they were preparing to go to war over this water. The Buddha happened to be in the area, and he must have spoken to them about the unwholesomeness, the unskillfulness of war. What he asked them was simply this: "What is more precious—the water in the river or the blood in your veins?" This question seemed to bring them to their senses around the conference table, and they came to an agreement.

There's another case involving King Vidudabha, who was the king of Kosala. His father, Pasenadi, had been a great supporter of the Buddha. This young fellow was now the ruler, and he had asked for a bride from the Sakyans—aristocracy marrying into aristocracy, though the Sakyans were vassals of Kosala, under the Kosalan king. It came about that Vidudabha discovered this woman he'd married was actually of low caste, and he was furious. He vowed to wipe out the Sakyans and gathered his fourfold army—elephants, chariots, cavalry, and infantry.

The Buddha must have heard about this because he went to speak with him. Who knows exactly what he said, but probably arguments on an ethical basis—the idea of rebirth, how carrying hatred and revenge in your heart creates ongoing problems. So Vidudabha turned back. But no sooner had he returned than he got back on his elephant, and the Buddha was out there again. Once more he was able to convince him to turn around. No sooner had the king returned than he mounted his elephant yet again, and once more the Buddha was there to meet him and convince him to turn back. But when he got on his elephant the fourth time, the Buddha said, "I can't do any more."

So Vidudabha went and razed Kapilavatthu, the capital of the Sakyans. I don't know whether he killed anybody—presumably they just fled. He damaged the city and then went back home. They built another capital, it seems. Interestingly enough, one site is in India and one in Nepal, with just a border wall between them. But at least it gives some credence to that story. So again, the Buddha is trying to stop war, and I presume his arguments concerned morality.

The final case is a rather interesting one involving Ajatasattu, who was the son of Bimbisara—another great supporter of the Buddha and the king of Magadha. Ajatasattu sent his counselor to talk to the Buddha and ask him—it's rather remarkable when you think about it—whether it was a good time to attack the Vajjian Confederacy.

The Buddha did not reply directly; he didn't say it might be good or it might not. Instead, he gave principles about what makes a society strong—principles that also applied to the monastic order. This particular counselor went back to Ajatasattu and reported, "Well, he gave these principles for a strong sangha, so he must be telling us that the Vajjians are strong." That's how they interpreted it. But what they did was send in spies, and through bribery and setting people against one another, they finally undermined the Confederacy, and Ajatasattu simply walked in and took it.

So in all these cases, the Buddha is definitely working against conflict, against any form of conflict. Now,

some writers argue that while he would never have supported an offensive war, he would have supported a defensive war. But frankly, I don't really see that.

These two kings I've mentioned—Pasenadi of Kosala up toward Delhi, and Bimbisara down on the Ganges—at one point Bimbisara attacked Kosala and defeated them. But Pasenadi gathered his army and came back and defeated Bimbisara in return. In those days, believe it or not, armies just fought against each other. There's a Greek ambassador who recorded that he watched a battle between two armies, and while that was happening, the farmers were still working in the fields around them. Those were the days of chivalry.

Now, by this time, especially as the Buddha's order grew, his community was everywhere. There were Buddhist monks everywhere, disciples, lay disciples, stretching right across the north of that Gangetic plain—from about a bit east of present-day Benares all the way up toward Delhi. He gave talks to people called the Kurus who lived close to present-day Delhi. So he was walking around this whole area throughout his life, always on the move.

If he were to side with anybody—and this is the Buddha being pragmatic—obviously the king he argued against would have expelled all his monks and all his community members from that kingdom. Now, that makes the Buddha sound like a schemer, but on the other hand, he was pragmatic. He was grounded in the reality of what would happen if he were to support one king against another.

But there's, I think, a deeper reason why he doesn't talk about defensive or offensive war. And that's because his teaching is always concerned with the individual. It's always about you. And I think what he would say to somebody who was going to war would be: can you kill another human being without anger or hatred in your heart? And if you can't do that, then there's going to be consequences for you, and the violence will carry on. The Chinese have a saying: those who seek revenge should prepare two graves. So there's no end to that violence if you're going to meet violence with violence.

In Buddhist history, in China for instance, the monks, the orders, and the Buddhists were persecuted or supported depending on the winds of the emperor. And that's why the monks disappeared into the jungles and developed this form of fighting—Kung Fu. The idea was that you stop the enemy from damaging you, from killing you, but without any hatred, without anything in your heart. This ethos passed over to Japan. There's the story of a samurai who has beaten his opponent and raised his sword to cleave him in two—and he walks away. When they ask him why he did that, he said, "I felt angry."

So here's, I think, a more nuanced way of looking at the Buddha. He's not supporting any sort of war. But if you are going to go to war, then you have to be very careful that you're doing it not from a heart of hatred or revenge.

I read an article about this actually. It's very difficult to kill a living human being—to actually stand in front of them and kill that person. They did a survey of American soldiers, and I can't remember the

percentage, but it was shockingly high, around forty-five to fifty percent who did not shoot to kill. They either shot over the enemy or around them. They couldn't bring themselves to do it. That tells you it's something very difficult for a human being to do. And the way they can do it is by giving them an object of hate. So if you want to get a Russian soldier in a truly hateful mood, you tell them their enemy are Nazis—because they lost twenty million in the war against the German invasion. And that's what happened.

So I think that brings me to the end of my little effort here. We've been through this whole business of karma, and the real message in terms of ourselves, our personal self, is to purify the heart of what is unwholesome and to build up wholesomeness. And then to try to enact that wholesomeness in society in one way or another. And then society begins to mirror back to us the wholesomeness that we have put into it.

So we are intimately connected. Intimately connected. In fact, we are our relationships. That's what we actually are. We're in a constant state of relationship—either with the physical world, the human world, the animal world. As soon as you get up in the morning and hear the birds, you're in relationship. And our job is to get that relationship into a place which has rid itself of this wrong attitude of seeking happiness in the sensual world. But that doesn't mean we cannot enjoy life, or that we can't enjoy pleasures. It's just recognizing that this is not the end-all and be-all of our existence.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused confusion, and that by your commitment to the ethical and spiritual life, you will be relieved of all suffering sooner rather than later.

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