Karma

Joseph Goldstein · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2007) · 59:40

There are two overarching perspectives that are at the heart of the Buddhist teachings. These principles provide a bridge between our meditative understanding, our meditative insight, and our lives in the world. These are the teachings on emptiness and on karma.

Questions often arise about how these two basic principles relate with one another. If there's no self, who experiences karmic results? If there's no self, who is reborn? If everything is empty, what does it matter what I do?

What we come to understand through our practice is that although things are empty of self, although things are insubstantial, still the unfolding happens lawfully. There is a lawful continuity to the process. To say that things are insubstantial does not mean that things are happening chaotically.

Think of planting a seed in the ground. The seed is in the ground and it germinates—there's water and the sun and all the nutriments—and the seed germinates and becomes a bigger plant and then grows into a sapling, into a tree, into a fruit. Is it that the seed travels somehow? That the seed remains the same and is carried up into the tree, into the fruit? No. The seed in every moment is in a process of transformation. It's like this, becoming this, becoming this, becoming this—lawfully.

To say that things are selfless means that there's nothing carried, but rather there is a continuity to the process. It's the process of becoming. And it's precisely this lawfulness which explains why when you plant an apple seed you don't get a mango tree. It's happening according to lawful causes and conditions.

We can see this in the unfolding of our lives in just the same way. Each moment's experience conditions in various ways the arising of the next. The Buddha talked of this not only within one lifetime, but from life to life. The quality of mind at the moment of death—it's called death consciousness, the last moment of consciousness in this life—the quality of that death consciousness conditions the arising of the first moment in the next life, what's called rebirth consciousness, in the same way that it is happening within this lifetime.

An example used to give the sense of continuity without things being carried over: if you imagine a seal imprinting into a piece of wax, and you take the seal away, the imprint is there, the influence is there, the conditioning is there, but there's nothing of the seal that has gone into the wax. There's no unchanging element that's carried through, and yet the process of imprinting, the process of conditioning is happening.

Another way of understanding what's carried over, whether it's moment to moment within this life or

from life to life: someone once asked Trungpa Rinpoche, "What is it that's reborn?" And he said, "Your neuroses." I thought that was a very good expression of exactly what's carried over. It's the greed and craving and wanting in the mind, all the habituated tendencies—that's the force that conditions the arising of rebirth consciousness.

The possibilities for happiness in our lives rest on our understanding of how this process is happening. It's really an understanding of the nature of mind and how the unfolding is proceeding. The Buddha was very clear. He said that it all unfolds out of our minds. In the famous opening verses of the Dhammapada: "Mind is the forerunner of all things. If we speak or act with an impure mind, suffering follows, as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox." It's an agricultural simile, but the image is very clear. "And if we speak or act with a pure mind"—again it says mind is the forerunner of all things—"if we speak or act with a pure mind, happiness follows like a shadow that never leaves."

So we need to understand how this is working in our lives. We've talked in terms of the model for understanding the mind quite a few different times now. There's the basic moment of consciousness, which is simply knowing—the bare knowing of sight or sound or smell or taste or sensation or mind objects. Then along with each moment of consciousness, there arises in a variety of ways different mental factors, different mental qualities. These mental factors color or condition the consciousness according to their function. And it's these mental factors which are continually conditioning and reconditioning the patterns of our lives—love and fear and anger and joy and compassion and cruelty, mindfulness, ignorance. All of these are mental factors, and each one has its own function.

Each one colors and conditions that moment of consciousness. And each moment of consciousness is imprinting in various ways the one that follows. And so all lives unfold.

In our meditation practice, and with wise attention to our lives in the world, we come to a very clear and immediate experience of what leads to more suffering and what leads to happiness. This is no longer secondhand knowledge. We really are looking at our minds and seeing for ourselves what factors bring about suffering, what factors bring about happiness. It is in this direct seeing that knowledge is transformed into wisdom. It's no longer just intellectual knowledge—we're seeing it, we know it for ourselves.

The Buddha expressed this wisdom, and clearly, as he said, he was seeing it and expressing it from his own direct experience. He expressed this wisdom of what leads to what as the law of karma. It's interesting how this concept—perhaps in a more superficial way—is making its way into our Western culture. There are so many situations where it's referred to. I happened to read in the New York Times about a racing car champion. The first line read: "Karma rewards Ferrari champion. When Kimi Räikkönen won the 2007 Formula One Championship, it definitely had the feeling of karma finally coming back around for him, although it took a long time to develop." So it is getting into our culture. People are beginning to have some understanding, in some way, of things having effects.

Of course, the Buddha was a little more precise than the New York Times reporter. The Buddha identified karma very specifically. He identified it as volitional activity in the mind—that's what karma is. The karmic force in our lives comes from the volitional activity in the mind. This is the understanding that all volitional actions of our body, of our speech, of our mind, have the power to bring about results. This is what karma means: that every volitional action of body, speech, or mind has the power to bring about results.

When we look in our practice and experience, it's very helpful to look carefully and to get a good experiential understanding of what volition is. Again, we're going beyond just the conceptual level to really experiencing it. This is not hard to do because there are countless volitions during the day. Here we're using volition and intention synonymously.

The next time you're about to do something, in that about-to moment, see if you can get a sense—it doesn't have to be exact or precise—but even just a sense of what's going on in the mind, that quality of willing something to happen. It's the about-to moment, that impulse to do, the command moment. We just watch. We just watch in our minds: how are we experiencing it?

The caution here is don't get terribly uptight trying to pinpoint it. It's much more a question of just settling back and knowing: yes, there's a volition, there's an intention behind the act, there's some force which is impelling it. In a very relaxed and open way, it's almost like intuiting or getting a sense or a feeling. What is that like in the mind? That quality of willing something to happen, of volition.

It's interesting that volition is very noticeable at the beginning of an action, but actually volition is happening all through the action in order to keep the action going. If at any point in the middle of an action—even something as simple as taking a step—if the volition stopped in the middle of the step, the movement would stop. So volition is like that electric current which just keeps the action going.

Although these moments of volition are very quick and very small, they contain a huge power. This is not an insignificant thing. Each volition contains a huge power—the power to bring about future results. And not only just one result; each intention is like a seed that can bear many fruit. This is a very important piece of information because it's not necessarily obvious in the normal course of our lives. It is for this reason that the Buddha put understanding the law of karma right at the heart of what he called Right View: this understanding that intention contains the power, the force, to bring about results.

I've just been reading an autobiography of Einstein, in the section where they're talking about his famous formulation of $E=mc^2$, energy equals mass times the speed of light squared. In the description and explanation of it, of course, because the speed of light is so large—

and then you square that number, it's a huge, unbelievably huge number. So then you could have a very small amount of mass, which equals a huge amount of energy. And the example given in the book was that the energy contained in the mass of a single raisin would be enough to fulfill all the energy needs of

New York City for a day. One raisin. So watch how many raisins you eat.

But the bigger lesson is simply this: it's an example that there's often a hidden power in very small things. And it takes an Einstein to discover what's contained in a raisin. It took the Buddha to discover the power that's contained in an intention. So don't overlook it.

We can explore this and understand it more fully. The intention itself is a neutral factor. The function of it is simply to organize or gather together or to direct all the associated other factors to accomplish a certain goal. So the intention, the volition itself, is neutral—it's just that organizing, directing, initiating, commanding force in the mind.

What determines the particular karmic result, the karmic fruit of our actions—that is, whether it brings us suffering or brings us happiness—are the motivations associated with that intention. The intention is neutral; it's just the force which gathers everything together and impels an action. What determines the karmic fruit is the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness of the motivation associated with it.

As you know, the Buddha talked of three wholesome and unwholesome roots. Greed, hatred, and delusion are the unwholesome roots. If that's what's associated with the intention, if that's our motive, the karmic fruit is going to be some kind of suffering. If the motivation is non-greed, or generosity, or love, or wisdom—and all those associated beautiful factors—the karmic fruit is happiness.

This is why it's been said, and we've mentioned it a few times here, that very pithy instruction or understanding: everything rests on the tip of motivation. Motivation is what's so important. We need to really be checking out what's the motive behind our actions. What's the motivation associated with the intentions that drive our lives? Because each one of those intentions has that enormous power to bear many, many fruits—in this life and, according to the teachings, in future lives. So it's worth paying attention to.

Going back to the original question: how do we integrate this understanding of karma with our realization of emptiness, that everything is empty of self and insubstantial? When I was in New York the other weekend for part of the teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, one of the lines in his teachings was: "A Buddha perceives the ultimate truth while leaving conventional truth untouched." So even as he sees the ultimate truth, the relative truth remains.

Padmasambhava, the great adept who brought Buddhism to Tibet, expressed it another way. He said, "Even though my view of emptiness is as vast as the sky, my attention to the law of cause and effect of karma is as fine as a grain of barley flour." So these are not two disparate things. Even as we may have a vast understanding of emptiness, emptiness of self, along with that we need our attention to the law of cause and effect to be as fine as a grain of barley flour.

To put it yet another way, this union of the relative and absolute levels—of karma and emptiness—we need to hold them together. The Korean Zen master Seung Sahn, who died a couple of years ago, was a

really great Zen master and expressed things very well. In terms of talking about emptiness, he said: "There's no right and no wrong. But right is right and wrong is wrong." Now this is teaching. There's no right and no wrong, but right is right and wrong is wrong. We need to integrate these two levels and not hold them separately.

So how can we understand the play of karma in our lives and our experience so we begin to understand it and live it experientially, so it doesn't just become an interesting Buddhist philosophic theory? Because we could talk about the theory of karma and rebirth and all of that, but it could remain very theoretical. How do we actually experience it playing out in our lives?

We can look at the different ways that our actions of body, speech, and mind bring about different results. One way is by understanding what is called present karma—that is, we see it operating right now in the moment. How can we do this? Notice the immediate effect of different mind states. Notice the different qualities of fear or love or greed or stinginess or compassion. Which ones bring happiness? Which ones bring suffering? It's not hard to tell if we're paying attention to our experience. How do we feel when the mind is truthful? How do we feel when it's dishonest?

There's a present karma—there's an immediate karma happening right now. We can also notice present karma in how people are relating to us as we're expressing these different mind states. What kind of responses do we get if we're greedy? If we're generous? If we're angry? If we're compassionate? There's an immediate result that we can see in how people respond.

We can also understand present karma playing out in the various things we undertake to do—the degree to which present qualities in the mind affect our ability to accomplish our aims. If we have something we want to do, what is the effect of energy? What's the effect of sloth? What's the effect of discernment and wisdom? What's the effect of confusion and delusion in terms of the efficacy of our actions? This is another aspect of present karma: how we are in the moment, the qualities of mind in the moment, affect the very present result of our actions. And this is all obvious.

So there's another way we experience karmic results. The first is in present karma. The second is very interesting, and you have been experiencing this a lot over these past weeks. This is an important realization which all of you have had, and that is really seeing and understanding how the mind retains impressions of past actions. Have any of you had memories come up of past things? The impressions of our past actions become the source of either happiness or suffering. When we think of past wholesome actions, happiness, joy, delight arises in the mind. When we think of past unwholesome actions, there's suffering involved.

I had a very vivid example of this, which I've mentioned over the years, but it's such a strong experience for me. When I finished college, I went into the Peace Corps. I was being trained to teach English, but for some reason in our training we spent a couple of weeks at the end in Hawaii, in a camping situation. Part of the training—for some reason I do not fathom now—they wanted us to know how to kill chickens. At

the time, I was in this very deluded mind state of thinking, "Yeah, I'm a man. I should be able to do this." Even though I really wasn't inclined to do it, there was part of me that felt this was important for me to do. And so I just took that big knife and chopped off its head. I had a picture of me holding this poor chicken, me with this big smile on my face.

Well, maybe it was five years later, I was in India. I had begun intensive practice, sitting quite deep, and all of this came back. It came back so vividly and with such a quality of horror in my mind. Basically, it was just murder. I murdered this being. And there was so much remorse and so much regret, really feeling it so deeply because I finally was present for what I had done. It was just so clear the mind retained the impression of that very deeply.

Just as another very interesting karmic twist—at tea time, I was staying at the Burmese Vihara in Bodh Gaya, and the food was very basic. But at tea time, sometimes they would serve us boiled eggs. And on the night where this was coming full force, when I was spending the whole day reliving this and feeling awful, I cracked open the egg and there was the embryo of a chicken in it. That is the one and only time in my life that has ever happened. It was incredible.

So the impressions are there. The impressions might also take the form not only of actions that we've done, but maybe just internalized feelings that were part of some experience we had that are embedded in our memories—feelings of anger or rage or unworthiness or fear or grief. We're in a certain situation and there's heavy emotions going on and we're not mindful, we're not aware, we're not conscious, and they become embedded in our mind stream.

There was one yogi years ago, when we first started teaching, a friend of ours who had been a medic in Vietnam during the war. When he came back and was just living a civilian life, he was having these endless nightmares of what he experienced. Then he came to his first retreat—it was a two-week retreat. And for almost the whole retreat, these were the images and memories and emotions that were coming up. It was this huge opening to what he had been carrying. It was amazing.

At the end of the two weeks, he went back home. I spoke to him afterwards, and all of the nightmares had stopped. It really points to the purifying aspect of this process of bringing awareness to all these impressions which are held in the mind.

This is part of the karmic unburdening. We all carry impressions—both the wholesome, beautiful ones and the ones that are unwholesome, ones of suffering. But as we can sit, as we do sit, in just an open, soft, receptive way, all of these impressions start coming up, releasing. If we can be with them mindfully, just being present, we allow them to come up and wash through. It's really part of a great karmic unburdening, a purifying process.

Even the way our practice unfolds is a karmic fruit. The Buddha talked of four kinds of practitioners. There are practitioners who develop slowly with a lot of pain. There are practitioners who develop slowly

but with a lot of pleasantness. Practitioners who deepen their insight quickly with a lot of pain. And practitioners who deepen their insight quickly and with a lot of ease. I think most of us are in the first two categories.

But what I like about that is that it's very impersonal. It's not that we're doing something right or wrong. There are karmic conditions at work. We've all been conditioned by our past actions, and so our practice will unfold however it does. It's all impersonal, and it doesn't matter.

I want to read this story from the Enlightenment Songs of the Nuns from the time of the Buddha. It's collected in a volume called the *Therīgāthā*. This offers great hope to all of us.

"So it's twenty-five years since I went forth. Not even for the duration of a snap of the fingers have I obtained stilling of mind. Not having obtained peace of mind, drenched with desires for sense pleasures, holding out my arms, crying out, I entered the vihara, the monastery."

This is after twenty-five years. Not even for a snap of the fingers, a stilling of mind.

But then—and you have to remember the twenty-five years that went into this—she went into the vihara, sat down, remembered the teachings.

"Having heard the teachings, I sat down on one side. And suddenly, I knew that I had lived before. The deva eye had been purified. Supernormal power has been realized by me. I have attained annihilation of the defilements. The Buddha's teaching has been done."

So you never know. I just think of this nun who for twenty-five years persevered through all of those difficulties, never really having felt peace of mind, and yet the ripening was happening. The karma was ripening. Twenty-five years, and then, in a moment, everything opened up.

So we experience present karma as the immediate effect of our mind states and how people relate to us. We experience karma as the reliving of all these impressions that are in our mind stream and that come to the surface—the happiness of remembering skillful things, the suffering of remembering unskillful things.

Another way that we can understand the actual playing out of karma in our lives is seeing how the mind develops habits and patterns through habitual actions. We can really see it as the development of personality. We can understand certain personalities as being very fearful, very loving, very truthful, or angry personalities, very compassionate ones. The Buddha, of course, talked about the three basic personality types: the desirous type, the aversive type, and the deluded type, plus their positive counterparts.

The important thing to see here is that personality is not a fixed thing. It's something that has been built up and developed through repeated actions. Every time we act in a certain way, we are practicing that quality. Every time we get angry, we are practicing anger. Every time we're loving, we are practicing love. Every time we're greedy, we are practicing greed.

So it's really helpful to see that this is a very dynamic, ongoing process. We're right in the middle of the process now. What are we developing? What are we strengthening? Don't underestimate the power of small actions—small actions of renunciation or small actions of generosity. We need to look, we need to make a practice of looking at what the motives are in our minds.

What are the motives associated with these volitions, with these intentions? What's the motive behind our actions? What are we practicing? What are we strengthening? These become very useful questions.

When we become more sensitized to the motive behind our actions, we can see clearly: Is this skillful? Is it leading to happiness? Is it unskillful? Is it leading to suffering? We take a look, we become more aware of our motivations, and we ask ourselves: Where is this action leading? Do I want to go there?

You wouldn't hop on a plane without knowing its destination, probably. Well, we can know the destination of our actions. We can know the fruit of our actions as we become aware of the motivations behind them. This becomes a powerful practice.

And many times, of course, we're unaware. Many times we're in delusion, forgetful. That's fine. If we were all able to do this perfectly, we certainly wouldn't have to be here—this is a practice. Even if we just begin to be aware of some of our motivations in the course of a day, we begin to get more of a feel for what it means to understand the power of volition and to recognize the different motivations. This is a tremendous thing. It will have transforming power in our lives.

Great care is needed not to misinterpret the law of karma, because it can be misinterpreted in some pretty harmful ways. I want to point out a few flags to watch out for. Sometimes we can mix up this understanding of the law of cause and effect with attitudes of blame, judgment, resignation, or indifference. We get caught up in judging ourselves for the unwholesome motives or unwholesome actions that may arise. Or—and we can see this in the world a lot—there is the very unfortunate tendency of blaming the victim. Somebody who's in a situation of suffering, and we think, "Oh, well, that's just their karma." This is a perversion of the understanding. Instead of being a vehicle of compassion, this understanding becomes a vehicle of blame.

The subtlety here is that we can have the wisdom and the understanding that all situations have causes and conditions behind them. Situations are not happening accidentally. There are causes and conditions, including one's own past actions and the past actions of others. So we can understand this law of cause and effect and still respond to present suffering, either our own or others', with metta and compassion. We understand that it's caused, and it may have been caused by that person's very actions. But that's not a cause for blame. It's not a cause for judgment. The appropriate response is compassion, arising from the understanding that we are all in this great human predicament, this samsaric predicament. We are all subject to this law of cause and effect. We've all done an endless number of past unwholesome things, things that have harmed others and harmed ourselves. And we've all been great benefactors to ourselves and others.

When we understand this, when we understand the magnitude of it, when we understand the law of karma and how it's all unfolding, it really gives rise to great compassion.

There's a professor of Buddhism at Columbia University, both a great scholar and practitioner. His name is Robert Thurman. He gave a wonderful example of just this point. He said: Imagine yourself on a subway. The subway car is filled with all different kinds of people—some who are very happy, some who are really in a miserable state, some who are very angry, all kinds, just all kinds of people. Now imagine you're on this subway car with all these people for eternity. What would be the best thing to do? How would you relate?

The people who are really suffering or miserable or causing harm—clearly your own happiness would be enhanced if in some way you could relieve their suffering. If in some way we could relieve their suffering, bring them to a place of greater understanding, greater happiness, everybody in the car is going to benefit, oneself included. I just like this image because it so highlights how if we're just adding to the misery by a lot of judgment, a lot of blame, a lot of anger at what we see, we're just contributing to the general misery of everyone on the car.

We are on that subway car. It's just big. And we share this journey with all other beings.

So even as we understand that suffering is often, though not always, the result of karmic causes, still we respond with compassion, with metta. When we begin to reflect on this and understand it more deeply—experientially, not just conceptually—this understanding that actions have the power to bring about results becomes the important point. Small things, like that raisin, can contain a huge power. Intention, volition is like that. It contains the power to bring about results, many results, countless results from each intention.

When we understand this, when we fully grasp this, it changes our relationship to experience in a couple of ways. First, there's greater acceptance of what's arising, rather than resentment or pride. Instead of resenting the difficult things, we understand: yes, this is arising out of causes, out of past action. Or if good things are arising, instead of pride or thoughts of how great I am, there's also understanding: yes, this came out of past wholesome actions. There's a greater level of acceptance.

Acceptance of these changing conditions does not mean passivity; it doesn't mean resignation. It actually opens us to respond appropriately to what's arising. But the responses can come from wisdom rather than reactivity. So when we see the law of karma playing itself out, this law of cause and effect, and understand the power of volition, it leads to a greater acceptance and responsiveness.

It also leads to a much more mature level of responsibility that we take for the actions in our lives. We begin to take a longer range view of things, instead of this very Western sense that our happiness depends on immediate gratification. When we understand the law of karma, we take a very broad, long range vision of how our lives are unfolding, which then leads us to take a strong interest in what we're doing

and in the motivations behind it.

In Buddhism, there's a concept which is very deeply embedded in the teachings and which is very hard for Westerners to understand. The Pali word for it is puñña, often translated as "merit." In popular Buddhism, there's this sense of "it's good to make merit." But I think for many Westerners, that's hard—I don't think we quite get it. For a lot of us, it reminds us of getting gold stars in first and second grade.

But the Buddha talked a lot about merit. He spoke of how merit is the source of happiness, how merit is the condition for awakening to happen. What is merit? It's the accumulation of wholesome actions. And one of the expressions of merit, which I think is such a beautiful, vivid, clear expression of its value, is this: it was described as provisions for the journey.

If we're on a journey, who wouldn't want to be well-provisioned? This is a journey that's going to take us across a lot of terrains. Sometimes it will be great fertile plains, sometimes deserts, sometimes mountains. It's good to be well-provisioned. Merit is the provisions. Merit is that force of wholesome actions. That's what's carried along with us.

So when we see this, when we understand the power of karma, the fact that our actions actually do bring results, then we start taking care with what we do. And this understanding can lead to a very joyous quality of mind, because it's coming out of a place of understanding: this is a good thing to do, this is going to be the cause and condition for my happiness, for my well-being. And out of our own well-being, we can be the cause for the well-being and happiness of others.

Don't underestimate the power of small actions. Our mind is like a bucket being filled drop by drop with water—just drop, drop, drop. Each drop seems so small, but the bucket stays there and the bucket gets filled. Each action we do is like another drop in our mind. What are we filling our minds with? Are they the wholesome qualities? Are they the unwholesome?

I came across a blurb on the back of a book—I was probably in some airport or something. I loved it.

A novel of love, lust, passion, and greed—something for everyone. A real delight.

There's another verse in the Dhammapada which again sums up in a very pragmatic, practical way how we start living this understanding. I can't emphasize it enough: this is not about Buddhist philosophy. It's about our lives and understanding what brings happiness and what brings suffering. It has this tremendous immediacy for us. And this is the great gift of the Buddha's teaching—he was just so clear about all this.

Again, from the Dhammapada: "No deed is good that one regrets having done. A deed is good that one doesn't regret having done, that results in joy and delight."

When I read that, I thought, that would be a good thing to remember. Because I see in myself very often, in a moment of intention, in a moment of volition, I'll often know this is something that I'm not going to feel

great about. It doesn't have to be a huge bad thing—it can be on very subtle levels. But just something that, in looking back, I might regret having done. And on the other hand, there are those actions where we just know that this action will bring no regret, that this action will bring joy and delight in looking back at it.

So it becomes like a mirror for us—a mirror for our own actions, if we're mindful enough, aware enough, in the moment of intention, in the moment of volition. And again, we'll miss many. Our habits are strong. We'll get caught up in the delights of that novel many, many times. But we practice. This is our practice.

Just a couple more things to say about karma, of interest in understanding how it unfolds. It's not a closed, mechanistic system, because every action we do in the present feeds into the stream and influences and conditions the unfolding. The Buddha talked about surrounding unwholesome actions with many wholesome ones. Because as we surround an unwholesome action with many wholesome ones, it mitigates the karmic results. It's a very fluid system.

The example that was given: if you take a glass of water and put some salt in it, the whole glass of water becomes very salty. You put the same amount of salt in a pond, you can hardly taste the salt at all. The Buddha was saying that the karmic fruit of an unwholesome action, for a person whose mind is filled with unwholesome action, is very strong. The karmic fruit of an unwholesome action in a mind that is filled with wholesome action is much mitigated—it's hardly felt.

So we are influencing, even now as our lives are unfolding, how we will be experiencing the fruit of our past karma. It's very fluid. And that again gives energy to taking care and to being aware.

The Buddha called the understanding of karma "the light of the world." This understanding is the light of the world because it shows us what leads to suffering and what leads to happiness. We don't have to muddle around in confusion. It illuminates the world; it illuminates our lives.

When we have this understanding of the law of karma, of cause and effect, the importance of intention and the motivations around that intention—whether they're wholesome or unwholesome—it gives us the power to create and shape our lives. It's like our life becomes an art form. Our life is the medium, and we are creating it through our actions. This is a great empowerment of our beings, the more fully we understand it, reflect on it, and experience it for ourselves.

I'll close with this wonderful haiku by the Zen poet Bashō. I think it somehow captures this whole understanding of karmic unfolding—of fruits coming out of action, out of volition. He wrote:

The temple bell stops,
but the sound keeps coming
out of the flowers.

May the merit of all our practice be dedicated to the welfare and the happiness and the awakening of all beings everywhere.

Karma

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