

Kamma, Specific Conditionality, the Five Laws, Ethical Behaviour, Social Kamma & Neoliberalism

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Retreat Talks · 27 min read

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Awakened One.

We're going to approach the problem of *kamma*. 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." The specific law of conditionality is also called that. 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. Got it?

When I first read it I thought, "What?" If we now put two statements together it becomes a little more obvious. The first one 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. 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 one 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 talks. If you didn't arrive, it wouldn't happen, right? 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. If it were just immediate then there would be no order, so it would be chaotic. Things would arise, collapse, and then for no other reason things would arise and collapse.

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. It's much clearer to talk about how things happen as a process of contingency. Every moment, lines of decisions, not only that, nature,

whatever's happening in the outside world, the birds, constantly coming to meet into this present moment. When we think about *kamma* in that sense, you can see it's very difficult to sort out what's my personal *kamma*, what's the *kamma* from somebody else, what's the *kamma* of the situation, but we'll come to that in a minute.

If we have that idea of contingency rather than some linear process, we're getting close to what the Buddha talked about. This is suggestive of chaos theory, 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, if there's a butterfly wing in the south of America, with supporting conditions it 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.

So that specific conditionality is underlying 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. It's a constant moment after moment creativity. Nothing can repeat itself.

When we come to the actual *kamma* that's important, which is our moral actions, our ethical actions, again, it's very difficult to know when we're receiving something, when something is happening, to know whether it's personal *kamma* 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. 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 *kamma* in the past. Somewhere in the past they'd harmed a few dogs or something. They'd have to find some excuse for that tsunami creating such suffering. Others would have been a bit more philosophical in the sense of, well, everything's impermanent. It was these sorts of arguments that undermined 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. That's one law, which is to do with just nature.

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 *kamma*. We know it's part of the family, it's coming from your family's genetic history. If for instance somebody is born with a genetic disease, that is not personal *kamma*. That is something that has happened through that birth process. If somebody has a bad birth process and ends up with trauma, that isn't their personal *kamma*. 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 of that because sometimes people get confused that what happens to them physically through their genetics is somehow

caused because of some bad action in a past life.

The third one is the *citta*, the mind. This is our psychology. Here we're talking about just the basic ability of the mind - its ability to think, to speak, to solve problems. It's just what we would normally think of as our psychology. Again, we're born with this body, perhaps the brain is not quite so quick as somebody else's brain, but if you were to say that this is my personal *kamma*, in other words, I'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 *kamma*, but I'll just go on to the next one, which is *dhamma*. That's all the teachings of the Buddha. The Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path, Dependent Origination, that you heard. All these are *dhamma*, the teachings which allow us to escape from suffering. So that's the fifth category.

If we go back to *kamma*: an intention comes, we've seen that clearly, we empower it, and it produces an action. When you repeat similar actions, then you get a habit. When you put all your habits together, that's your personality. Once you've got a personality and character, then 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 are going to have the effect as to 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, ethical actions, and he knew that he himself had no more defilements. He was purified of his defilements. What was a personal law 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 that we don't consciously decide but have a moral or ethical quality to them, are going to produce certain results. The general law is, if you do something good, well, good comes of it. If you do something harmful, some 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. 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 I upset them, I very easily stop the possibility of their hating me and doing horrible things to me by simply apologizing. It's not as though there's some rigid process that once we do something harmful that will happen, because it goes into a matrix out there in the world and a matrix in us. The effect we can never be absolutely sure of.

For instance, there was a charity which sent clothes, second-hand clothes, to an African country. What happened was it undermined the local tailor trade. In doing so, it undermined the local economy. So 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 which they thought was good, and it

was, there's no problem with it, but within the situation it created an unfortunate situation and they had to withdraw.

You can see that the whole process of *kamma* is very difficult to work with if you're going to be logical, if you're going to try and think about consequences. Because you can do something, a person might do something terrible, but because of the surrounding situation, nothing happens. We know that so many burglaries are not being even approached by the police. There's a lot of burglars out there who are getting away with it. 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 given and enjoying it, and taking it for their own personal enjoyment. At some point, there has to be some reflection of that, either in themselves as something which is harmful and there's a sense of guilt and shame, or they get caught and they get stuck in prison.

In the process of rebirth, again, it's not as though it's a linear thing, that in the next lifetime they will be caught and hanged. It simply is that when they are reborn, they take with them that attitude. At some point, the universe, the cosmos, or the people around them, perhaps a bit more grounded, begin to mirror back to them exactly what they're doing. There's a moral justice that's written into this process, as far as the Buddha's concerned.

Some 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. "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?" 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 18th century mathematician. It was the growth of science and everything, and there were people who didn't believe in God anymore, positivists and things like that. What he said was, there may or may not be a God, but it might be wise to act as if there was one. There may or may not be rebirth, but it might be wise to act as if there is rebirth.

So that actually takes us to this law. We've understood this basic underlying conditionality, which is to do with contingency. It's not linear. You never know exactly what's going to happen. Within that we have all these laws to do with nature, to do with hereditary, to do with psychology, which of course is also to do with society, and I'll come back to that, which takes us into social *kamma*. Then finally there's the *kamma*, which is this specific area to do with suffering, and finally this *dhamma*.

So be clear about the ethical part. 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. That's what we've been really investigating with this whole business of eating. 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. The suffering lies in trying to seek happiness in the wrong place. This seeking of happiness in the sensual world is the cause of all our mental diseases.

If we go back to a child being abused - 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's 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 as 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.

That doesn't excuse the abuser when we think about that. 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. The triggers are just opening up that trauma. So it's an occasion for the person to work with it.

In my own experience, I've had childhood traumas come up. When we talk about traumas, there's undoubtedly harm done by parents, family members, and others to children. But remember also that the child comes in with their own mentality.

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, four months. 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 a sign of a trauma that you relive that moment totally. 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 the past life.

My body was suffused with fear, right? It was total. Fortunately, my father was still alive, so I said to my dad, "It was me that found grandfather dead in a chair in the front room." He said, "No, I was living. He was in bed when he died." 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. This is really just an attempt to discuss collective or social *kamma*. The last century saw three secular ideologies. The first was communism, the second was nationalism, 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 being tremendously rich, or tremendously happy. In which case, it always loses its grounding in what's happening in the present moment. 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 a lot of effects of socialism, a 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 and all that. 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 having discussions or 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, then of course your job was secure. If you became a teacher, your job was secure. That was the little bargain that you had between the two. They ran fairly parallel.

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

What Mrs Thatcher did was to begin to change the system to neoliberalism. This neoliberalism is another ideology. It's a corruption of capitalism in a way, because even - I'm not an economist by the way, this is just general knowledge, you'll have to check it all out for yourselves afterwards - when Smith wrote the basic book on capitalism, he always had a sense of social justice in there. When he talked about the hidden hand, what he was being, according to one writer, was sardonic. Because all these selfish, self-serving businessmen unwittingly were creating jobs that were helping people who would have been poor. It was a side effect. That's what he meant by the hidden hand.

What neoliberalism did is it made 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 that. There's an immediate lowering of wages because you have to bid for a lift to take the person. Three or four bids come up, and of course it's the lowest that gets the lift. So there's a constant pushing down of wages. It just happens naturally. Luckily, they were taken to law, and now they have to employ people. But we saw a worse case just recently with the P&O ferries, where they simply fired 800 people because they were losing 100 million a year, but they just paid out 270 million to their shareholders. The idea that the money will trickle down is actually a tsunami going up, as we know.

The fundamental attitude is acquisitiveness, it's to get money because when you get money you can do what you want. Greed is actually driving the system and what it does is it puts us into an aggressive competitiveness. This has come into - it was never defined. It was just slipped in as an economic program. It was never quite defined as to what was the underlying understanding. It's coming to, Carl mentioned it, that on these programs, from America especially, when everybody says "I'll do something," they're always

asking how much they get, how much do you want? Everything has to be some transaction. The idea of giving something or doing something for nothing goes out of the window.

This has become a general feeling in our societies so that when Covid hit everybody suddenly realised they were neighbours and they were helping each other and they said, "Oh look, we're neighbours, we can help each other" and it was just like a revelation because before you just worked out your own life and they lived over there.

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. That's not what Darwin said. He says that it wasn't the strongest or the most intelligent, but the most adaptable. But it's been translated through neoliberalism as greed is good and competition is what we really want, an aggressive competition.

In a pure neoliberalist situation, the worker has no rights. They have to negotiate with the employer. The government must keep away from restricting the market. If you remember Gordon Brown and the light touch, 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 just undermine this bargaining, this entrepreneurial spirit. Just recently, Amazon went and fired all the managers in New York because the workers were beginning to form a union.

Charities are a real bind because they're doing something which you could make money out of. So these things are not particularly welcomed and it undermines the entrepreneurial spirit. What about the unemployed? What about the sick and the aged and the mentally ill? Well, they become drags on the whole system. They're just drawing money out of the system. You shouldn't tax people who've made all this money. That's simply not fair. Because they've actually won in the system.

The only way to make it work within a neoliberal system 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 it to a company called Centene, which even the Daily Mail calls rapacious. It's just going on all the time.

In the system, there's no particular social responsibility. By the way, everything is privatized. The water, the electricity, the transport, everything becomes owned by somebody else who takes their little percentage. All these, the electricity for instance, I know because we had to have three-phase electricity put into our centre. I was talking to the man who organised it and they take 10%. I don't know whether that's 10% after they've paid their shareholders or before, but they take 10%. They're all 10%ers. All these people, these companies, have all taken their little 10%.

This really comes down to this wonderful phrase which most of you will remember from Maggie Thatcher, that there is no such thing as society, there's only individuals. In doing that, you isolate people. One person is up against the other. What's missing there is that the whole is always greater than the sum

of the parts. When you have people together, you create community. 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, 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 off.

I was at the process of that, I was teaching at the time at an FE college, Further Education college, and when she took away all the support for industry, the Chamber of Commerce were going berserk. There were so many collapses of businesses. The unemployment rose from 6% to 16% in six months. That's what happened. If you look at the process, 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. It's something that sticks in the craw of somebody like Putin, that they were so humiliated.

Sorry about that. I'm on my hobby horse, as you can see. When it comes to suppression, 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. You can now be arrested for being a single protester. If you go out with a placard and protest, you can be arrested. 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 - I'm really getting to it - that it would seem the report from Davos, which is where all the rich and mighty meet, was they were absolutely overjoyed at hearing about mindfulness and stress reduction. Because now, when their workers said, "Look, I'm absolutely stressed out," they said, "Look, take this course, go sit in the corner for a while." It's been called the religion of neoliberalism. 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.

Finally, what can we do in this situation? Well, it's the usual thing about consumerism because that's what's powering it. 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. It's a case of recognizing that what we buy is a 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.

The other thing is that from a personal point of view, 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 think, "My God, why haven't I discovered this before?" And you feel very good about yourself, you've been so careful, kind to yourself. Now, if I had bought thermal underwear for somebody else, and they had said, "I'm so 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. 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.

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."

I'm done with neoliberalism. The next thing 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 one was up in his own clan, the Sakyans and the Koliyas. They shared this river and they got into a real argy-bargy about it and they were going to have a fisticuffs. He was up there, he seemed to be up there, and he must have talked to them about the unwholesomeness, the unskillfulness of war. What he asked them was, "What is more precious, the water in the river or the blood in your veins?" This seemed to have brought them to their senses around the old conference table, and they came to an agreement over things.

There's another case where King Virudhaka, who was the king of Kosala. His father, Pasenadi, was a great supporter of the Buddha. This young fellow, he was now the king there. He had asked for a bride from the Sakyans. So it was aristocracy marrying into another. The Sakyans were vassals of Kosala. They were under the Kosalan king, Virudhaka. Well, it came about that he came to know that this woman he'd married was actually low caste. So he was very angry. He vowed to wipe out the Sakyans. He got on his four-fold army: his elephants, his chariots, his cavalry, and his infantry. The Buddha must have heard about this because he went to speak to him. Who knows what he said, but probably on an ethical basis, the idea of rebirth, with hatred, revenge in your heart, is going to have this ongoing problem. So he turned back. He no sooner got back than he got back on his elephant. The Buddha's out there again and this time he was able again to turn him around. He no sooner got back than he got back on his elephant and the Buddha's out there again and he convinces him to turn back. He gets on his elephant again and the Buddha said, "I can't do any more." So he went and he razed the village, the town of Kapilavastu, which was the capital of the Sakyans. I don't know whether he killed anybody. Presumably they just ran off. He damaged the city and then went back home. They built another capital, it seems. Interestingly enough, one is in India and one is in Nepal. There's only a brick wall there. But at least it gives some credence to that story. Again, he's trying to stop war, and I presume his arguments are to do with morality.

The final one is a rather interesting one, where Ajatasattu, who was the son of Bimbisara, who was also a great supporter of the Buddha, and the king of Magadha. He sent his counselor to talk to the Buddha and ask him - it's crazy when you think about it - he asked the Buddha, was it a good time to attack the Vajjian Confederacy? The Buddha did not reply, "It might be good, it might not." He gave principles for the

monastic order as to what makes a society strong. I haven't written them down here because we don't need to go into that detail. This particular counselor went back to Ajatasattu and he said, "Well, he gave these principles for a strong *sangha*, a monastic *sangha*, so he must be telling us that the Vajjians are strong." So that's how they interpreted it. But what they did was they sent in the CIA and by bribery and setting people up against one another, they finally undermined the Confederacy and he walked in and took it.

In all these cases, the Buddha is definitely working against conflict, against any form of conflict. Some writers will argue, well, no way would he have supported an offensive war, but he would have supported a defensive war. But frankly, I don't really get that.

These two kings I've mentioned, Pasenadi of Kosala which was up towards Delhi and Bimbisara down here in the Ganges. Bimbisara attacked Kosala and he defeated them. But Pasenadi got his army together and came back and smacked old Bimbisara. In those days, believe it or not, armies just fought against each other. There's a Greek ambassador who says that he watched a battle between two armies and while that was happening the farmers were still working around them. Those were the days of chivalry.

Now, if the Buddha - see, by this time, especially as his order grew, his order is everywhere. There are Buddhist monks everywhere, there are disciples, there are lay disciples, just stretching right across the north of that Gangetic plain. It doesn't go as far as Calcutta, but definitely from about a bit to the east of present-day Benares, all the way up to Delhi, because he gives talks to people called Kurus who live close to present-day Delhi. He's walking around this whole area all his life. He's always on the move.

If he were to say, if he were to side with anybody - this is the Buddha being pragmatic - obviously, the king who he was arguing against would have kicked all his monks and all his members out of his kingdom. That's to make the Buddha sound as though he's a schemer, but on the other hand, he is pragmatic. He's right there grounded in what would happen if he were to support one king against another.

But there's a deeper reason why he doesn't talk about defensive or offensive war. That's because his teaching is always concerned with the individual. It's always about you. 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?" 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. There's no end to that violence if you're going to hit 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. That's why the monks disappeared into the jungles and whatnot 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 he's raised his sword to cleave him in two, and he walks away. When they ask him why did he do that, he said, "I felt angry."

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

I read an article actually about that. 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. I can't remember the percentage, but it was shockingly high. It was around about 45-50% did not shoot to kill. They either shot over the enemy or around the enemy. They couldn't actually shoot to kill. They couldn't bring themselves around to doing that. That tells you that it's something very difficult for a human being to do. The way that they can do it is by giving them an object of hate. If you want to get a Russian soldier in a really hateful mood, what you say is your enemy are Nazis, because if you remember they lost 20 million in the war against the German invasion. That's what happened.

I think that brings me to the end of my little effort here. We've been through this whole business of *kamma* and the real message, the real message in terms of ourselves, personal self, is to purify the heart of what is unwholesome and to build up wholesomeness. Then to try to enact that wholesomeness in society in one way or the other. Then the society begins to mirror back to us the wholesomeness that we have put into it. We are 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 you hear the birds, you're in relationship.

Our job is to get that relationship into a place which has got rid of this wrong attitude of seeking happiness in the sensual world. But that doesn't mean to say that we cannot enjoy life, or that we can't enjoy pleasures. It's just recognizing that this is not the be-all and end-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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