

## V

### THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING: KARMA

Karma is nothing but performing actions, positive or negative. Because we've got addictions, we perform actions that we know are wrong, even though we know we shouldn't do them and that there will be consequences. We ignore that knowledge completely until the consequences are so heavy that we are in danger of losing our lives! If we could switch the habit of dragging our feet about positive deeds to our negative deeds, things would be very different.

Buddha said:

*All the pains that I experienced are coming from my karma; karma is nothing other than my addictions.*

Negative emotions make me do things I should not be doing. Those actions become my negative karma and bring me suffering. That is how the Noble Truth of the cause of suffering brings the Noble Truth of suffering itself. If you want to reverse that, you don't need to be a rocket engineer to figure it out. When you cut the cause, you cut the result.

It is similar to a river valley project. In third world nations, in the old days, you had to bring all the rivers from different hills and mountains together and build a dam to hold all the water and supply water wherever you wanted it. If you divert all the water coming from the hills, the water held by the dam is going to be empty without much effort at all. There will be no more water coming from anywhere. No matter how big the dam is—maybe between two big hills there are a zillion gallons of water—once no more is added, the water can dry up, go away, and be finished.

Exactly the same way, if you don't add up your addictions, the negative results will go away. It is in your hands, and you're capable of doing it. Nobody else can do it for you. The truth of suffering and the truth of the cause of suffering are in your hands, and you can easily handle them. That doesn't mean you won't have difficulties. You will. But you can handle them.

Some people think karma is something uncontrollable, something huge. When it does become huge, we ourselves created that. We created each and every karma we have, so we can cancel it. Before it begins to give us the result, we can divert it.

For me, becoming diabetic is an example. It is entirely in my hands. I could have controlled my diet, exercised, and gotten over the diabetes. It was entirely in my hands, and I didn't do it. I blew it. So then, the easy way is to take a pill. Eventually

the pill doesn't work, so you take an injection. When one doesn't work, take two. If two doesn't work, take three. If three doesn't work, take four. Like that. Once the karma starts reacting, you cannot control it any more. But the original karma was made by us, so before it starts reacting, we can do everything: cancel it, divert it. Of course, if you killed somebody, you cannot bring that person back to life. However, that karma can be purified.

Life is in our own hands, under our own control. Nobody else controls it. If there is something to be praised, it is your deeds, and you deserve it. If there is something to be blamed, it is your doing, and you deserve to be blamed. If it's something good, I deserve it. If it's something bad, I deserve it, too, because I did it.

My karma is my karma. I create my own karma; you don't create my karma. Likewise, you create your karma, and I cannot create your karma. I can contribute conditions or I can be instrumental in interrupting conditions from coming together, but it is me and me alone who creates my karma, and only you create your karma. So that is how the first and second noble truths, the truth of suffering and the truth of cause of suffering, work. It's simple, straightforward, and completely grounded.

Whatever we experience is karma—karmic consequences or karmic results. Good or bad, everything is karma. There is no doubt about it. Unless we, as individuals or collectively, engage in certain actions, we will never experience the result. Each and every one of our sufferings comes from causes. Every minute, every shade, intensity, and form of suffering is created by our karmas. Not one single karma, but hundreds, thousands, actually millions of different karmas combined together created it. Every minute of our life, whatever we experience, joy or pain, together or separately, mental, physical, or emotional, comes about that way.

I think I am not exaggerating if I say that each and every suffering has multi-zillions of causes. They cross-connect, and all kinds of things happen. Sometimes we call it bad luck or good luck, but actually there are causes closely knitted together. Each of the causes we are carrying can be called karma. But karma does not mean the cause alone, but covers the result too.

We have very limited knowledge of how this all works. But as an example, it is unthinkable that our sophisticated physical structure, our brain and body, could come together without causes.

How sophisticated and complex and complicated our body is! There are the tiniest nerves and veins pervading our body. There is air and different liquids and enzymes and chemicals. It doesn't just come out of nowhere. Nor is it just produced by our parents. They couldn't have figured all that out in the short time they got together! It doesn't happen that way.

We do know something about how the body functions, particularly if you have seen the recent Bodies Exhibition in New York. I haven't seen it, but when you think about it, how does each and every one of our tiny little veins function? The heart and

lungs and so on are very, very sophisticated, mechanical systems. Do you think all this just came out of nothing? Even fools will not think that.

Then think about our brain function. Today, even the greatest neurologists probably know twenty-five to thirty per cent of how the brain functions. All that is not created by one karma. Millions of different karmas made the human brain and made it possible for us to function and do whatever we need to do, plus much more. Our capacity is almost unlimited. If we can utilize our body, even just our brain, completely, we will be almost enlightened.

It takes all kinds of conditions and causes for the human beings to function. Some people are physically challenged due to some karmic shortage or disconnect. Some physical part is not working. It takes so many karmas and causes to make it all work. Imagine just the functioning of our brain alone! Even the best scientists put together with all the resources available in the world today could not re-create a single human brain. Maybe some time later they will be able to, but not today. That shows how many multiple causes it takes just to have the human life.

Then sustaining this life and making it function continuously requires many more causes. That is why Buddha talks about the many different types of karma, such as throwing karma, running karma, karma of continuation, karma of closing down. We can see how many are needed quite clearly just by looking at the human body.

Equally complex are the mental aspects of our existence. There is not just one mind but multiple mental aspects. We talk about the six consciousnesses, but these can be further divided into twenty-one, then a hundred and eight, and many more consciousnesses. So it is not just a single cause that makes a human life pop up. Then, all these causes interacting still need the right conditions. When you ask: who has created all the causes and conditions? Nobody else except our selves. I don't create your causes and conditions, and you don't create mine. Each and every one of us creates his or her own.

On top of that, each individual also has common karmas, like family connections, connections with fellow countrymen and with members of the same race. It is very, very sophisticated, and we have produced each of these karmas by our selves. If you want to change anything, you have to do it within yourself. That is why so many spiritual teachers say, "Don't look out there. It is within you." Since the cause is within me and produced by me, it is also me who can do or undo whatever I want. I can do it. The key is here.

I am not saying I found all this out because I am a clever person. I am talking about what Buddha discovered. This is Buddha's experience, not as a religion as such, but as life and how to conduct it. Buddha's teaching on the Four Noble Truths is found in Theravadan teachings, Zen teachings, Mahayana teachings, and Vajrayana teachings. All

these traditions may look totally different, particularly how the people that practice them wear their robes, the color, style and all this. But the bottom line, the basic fundamental principle of them all, is the Four Noble Truths.

#### Karma: The Individual Matters

Since I'm responsible for me, what should I do? Every step that I take, every thought that I generate, every action that I do, affects me—not only me but also my associates and companions. There is a saying in Tibetan, "If you are near a golden mountain, everything nearby becomes gold. If you are near a poisonous mountain, everything nearby becomes poisonous." That is how each and every one of us affects our companions, our family, and everybody around. One individual affects all of them—family, children, parents, spouse. We especially affect our spouses. If you like being a nice, jolly fellow, that affects your spouse. If you like being an angry, lazy person, that affects your spouse. If you extend anger, anger will be met by anger. If you extend love, love will be met by love. No mystery about that.

Some time before we had this emergency of 9-11 and all this terrorist business, our aim was world peace. Remember? Since the war on terror came, we forgot about world peace. Nobody talks about it. But talking about world peace, I always think that no organization, no leader in the world, can bring world peace. Peace is going to be created by each and every one of us, within ourselves, within our families, within our country, and within the world. It's not going to be the other way around: that the world will have peace, then the country will have peace, then the then the family will have peace, then I will have peace. It is not going to work that way. It's the other way around. That's why the good old American saying is, "Charity begins at home."

It is the individual that matters. That means you and me. If I let my mind be influenced by negative emotions, such as hatred, anger, and obsession, I will influence my spouse, family, children, and so on. If I let my mind be influenced by peace, kindness, compassion, and love, that will also affect my spouse, my children, my everyone! Whenever we have difficulty getting along with another member of the family, do not think he is responsible or she is responsible. Please do think, "I am responsible." If you have not created anger, the other person will not create anger. Even if the other person is angry, if you maintain love and compassion, and if you are not passive-aggressive, the other person has to give up and back down. They have no other choice.

In China, during the students' struggle, in '87, when the soldiers came with tanks and guns, the students were carrying flowers and giving them to the soldiers, and no soldiers were shooting them. Remember? The soldiers from Beijing sent to overcome the students could not manage because the students came up with flowers and offered them to the soldiers. Even the Communist Chinese soldiers don't

shoot when someone's bringing flowers to them.

No within the family, if one person is angry, and the other one person gets angry, the consequence is a broken family. Please make sure your reaction is not passive-aggressive. Passive-aggressive behavior is the same as fighting.

No one but me is responsible for my happiness. No one is responsible for me getting old, except me. No one else is responsible for me getting sick. No one else is responsible for me getting fat. No one else is responsible for how I die. Likewise, every good experience that I enjoy in my life is due to my deeds. And I deserve it. That basically is the karmic rule; it is how karma functions. Nobody made the rule, but that's what happens. Nobody made a rule saying that the sky has to be up there, and the ground has to be down here. Nobody made a rule that the grass has to grow from down here to up there. But the ground is here and the sky is up there, so that's what happens. And just like that, karma functions. Buddha discovered that. He discovered that the key to our happiness and our suffering is in our own hands. Nobody else has the key.

When your mind is right, when you're not influenced by negative emotions, when you're thinking straight, of course, you like to be good. No one would like to be bad. Everyone would like to be happy. No one would like to suffer. But, we do bad things. And we suffer, too. Sorry.

Karma is not mysterious. In one way, it is extremely difficult to understand, but on the other hand, it is nothing but cause and result. When we create a cause, we will have a result. When we do not create a cause, we will never have the result, no matter what we do. That is what cause and effect is all about: every action that we take, every daily chore, whatever we do, including walking, sitting, sleeping—all of those things are creating karma, according to Buddha. I have no proof of that, honestly, but it is true. Not because Buddha said so, but because when you look at the causes and the consequences, you will begin to see the reality of it.

### Karma: Causes and Conditions

It looks like our suffering comes out of nowhere, but that is certainly not the case. It comes from a cause--both a temporary cause and a deeper cause. The temporary cause, although I use the word *cause*, is actually a temporary *condition*. When temporary conditions come together, things materialize, either good or bad. Whatever it is, it is.

Suddenly people die, but there has to be a condition. The death can be from a heart attack or a stroke or from falling down or whatever it may be, but it happens because of some kind of condition. When the conditions are right, people get sick and people die. Everyone has the karma of dying and the karma of living. Each and every one of us carries a tremendous amount of karma of living, karma of being healthy, karma of being sick, and karma of dying. We have all of them. There is no shortage. When the conditions for a particular death meet up, zoom! The karma

connects, and it happens. For instance, the condition might be that a person happens to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. The conditions meet, and karma takes over. That's not the fault of the person. Karma is everywhere. Everybody carries a tremendous amount of karma, as individuals and collectively.

Yes, we blame George Bush for the Iraq war. In a way it's true, but on the other hand, each and every one of the people who are involved in the war has his or her own karma, too. Those who lost their lives, whether they're American or among the huge number of Iraqi people who have died in the war, everybody also has collective karma involved. Even the innocent child who got killed by the suicide bomber had the karma of dying. The conditions met; then karmic consequences took over. That is absolute reality.

If you don't have a karma of dying, no matter what happens, even if your legs and hands have been blown to pieces, you will survive. Again, that is karma. That's why Buddha says that karma is so difficult to understand. It is more difficult to understand than the wisdom of emptiness. Even if you're not a developed person, you can understand the wisdom of emptiness to a certain extent by thinking about it logically.

Moreover, karma is a dependent arising. It is not independent. Even though it is so powerful, it is a dependent arising: it depends on the conditions. Who created karma? Me. Who provided the conditions? Me. Do I have control over it? Probably not, but I can try not to meet the conditions. We always have room to play.

The area of not meeting the conditions is the space in which miracles work. Why do miracles happen? Because of conditions. When a plane filled with people crashes and all die, except one person, we call that a miracle. Yes, it's a miracle, but at the same time that individual person just didn't connect with the karma of dying at that moment. That doesn't mean that person will live forever. No, at that moment, at that time, the karma to die was not there.

In the area of conditions, we can do and undo. There we have freedom; there we have choice. Conditions give us independence. Because we are the ones providing the conditions, we have the power to help ourselves. If we think nothing, do nothing, and just sit there, negative karmas will hit us like arrows. The conditions will come together, and we will suffer. As human beings, we are expected to do something so that the conditions don't meet up. Karma is all about that. I think we have to realize there is no shortage of karma in all of us, good and bad. The difference is only the conditions. Each and every one of us has the karma to be able to be, let's say, a great educated person, but if you don't provide the condition of learning, then no matter how much positive karma for that you have, you're not going to be educated. You're going to be stupid.

When I was a young kid in Tibet, say 13, 14, or 15, there was a new cinema house in

Lhasa that was built by one of my cousins. I got in free whenever I wanted to go. I had one of those balcony rooms for free. I went a number of times, but I always saw the same picture. It was an old Indian movie called *Anakari*, a love story. It was probably shown there continuously for three years.

The monks were not supposed to be watching the movie. That included me. But every time, whenever I went, when I got up in the balcony, I looked down and the hall was filled with monks. All the monks had their robes over their heads trying not to be recognized. The whole movie hall was completely filled up with maroon cloth!

In the movie, there is a couple, some kind of prince and princess. They are not married yet. They are lying down near a beautiful grape tree, hoping that a grape will drop into their mouths. But it never does. All the grapes are up there, but since they don't put any effort into picking one, the grape never goes into their mouths!

Similarly, the karma is always there, but when the conditions are not right, you don't get the grape. Even if it's dangling right in front of your mouth, you can't eat it, because you didn't provide the conditions of biting it or picking it. When I think about how karma works, I remember that movie all the time. As a kid, when I saw that movie, I used to think that way, too. Even in those days, I used to think about the karmic system. That movie was my example of what happens when the conditions are not right. Even though the grapes are there, they are not going to go into your mouth!

So, working with the conditions gives us freedom, choice, everything. That tells us, if you don't want to suffer, you can stop it by yourself by not providing or avoiding the conditions. We may think, "She created my pain. He created my pain." But that is not true. He became the condition. She became the condition. Apart from that, the cause is already within us. We have been carrying it for three countless eons within ourselves. It is so sophisticated, so complex, yet, it has to go through our physical and mental structure. The grape has to get through the bottleneck of the throat, and that throat is our self.

She is not your enemy, and he is not your enemy. There is no point blaming some other person. "It is she who did it; otherwise, I am doing fine." "It is he who did it; otherwise, I am doing okay. But he did this, he did that." It is like the usual American exchange of "he said/she said." Now it becomes "he did/she did." But that is not true. He or she didn't do it. They might have contributed to creating the conditions, but the cause is something we ourselves have carried with us from the limitless beginning, and we are constantly and continuously adding to it. It is like carrying money and at the same time, adding money to our bank account.

Our hatreds, our obsessions, are baseless. They are confusions within us. We don't know that we created the cause ourselves. We do not know that the person harming us has just triggered an already existing cause. We think, "That person did

it to me, so I will not forget until I get my revenge.” On whom are you going to take revenge? On your own mother, no one else! If there is no cause that we created ourselves, we will not suffer.

Karma is very hard to change at the result level, because karma is definite. But it is always possible to change at the causal level. Sometimes you can even change karma at the result level, because it is impermanent. However, at the causal level we can cancel it, we can defuse, we can neutralize it. Everything is possible at the causal level.

### Karma: Thoughts Before Actions

What we do and what we don't do both make an impact. We do a lot of things with awareness. We do things without any awareness. Awareness or no awareness, we do nothing without thought. For every action we take, a thought has come before. If you want to get up, a thought comes, “I should get up.” If you want to go to the bathroom, first the thought comes, “Oh, I have to go to the bathroom.” If I hit somebody, the thought has come up, “I have to hit, I have to hit, and I'm going to hit.” And if you are going to be nice to somebody, the thought comes up, “I have to be nice, I have to be nice.” If you have to eat something, the thought comes up, “I have to eat” and then you eat. If you drink, you have a thought come up, “I have to drink.” Sleep, the thought comes up. Walk, the thought comes up.

So every action, physical, mental, emotional, all of them follow from thought. The same thought that makes the individual act also defines whether the action is going to be positive, negative, or neutral. So the action we take, positive or negative, comes because of an action-provoking thought. If that thought is one of kindness or compassion, then unless the act is negative by nature, more or less, the action becomes positive. If the thought is hatred, anger, obsession, or jealousy, then more or less, the action that follows will be negative. The nature of the action does make a difference, but the thought that brings on the action also makes a difference. We call that thought “motivation.”

Motivation shapes events tremendously. It has a very strong influence on whether the action creates positive karma, negative karma, or neutral karma. Some great teachers have said repeatedly, “It is nothing but the mind. Every action follows mind. Every phenomenon follows from mind. Therefore mind is most important.” These statements all arise from that reason. It is up to us to decide whether our actions are going to be positive or negative and that decision begins with motivation.

### The Worst Karmic Result: Doing It Again

We are heavily addicted to negative actions. That is an important aspect of karma. If you kill someone, for example, you will get a couple of results: First there is the

direct karmic result. You create killing karma, and as a direct result of that, you lose your life. Somehow or another, one life or another, this is what happens. That is the direct consequence. Then there is the indirect consequence. Killing creates a lot of negative experiences within that lifetime. Even though you may have a respectable life, it is shortened or interrupted, or it has more illnesses and more problems.

You may think that these results are bad, but they are not the worst. I kill, so I pay for it by losing my life. That is a direct, straightforward deal. But then there is a result that is not straightforward, what is called in Tibetan *jyap ah gyu du*. This means that you *like* repeating the action you have carried out. That is addiction, and it is always there.

What does this addiction do? I am giving you the example of killing karma. Addiction to that action makes the individual like killing again. We see innocent little kids, doing nothing but playing around. Some of them like to help insects or animals or little cats and dogs. And some of them like to hit them, or in the case of little insects, step on them and kill them, or chase them with sticks or even with a little fire. Where does that come from? It is the particular karmic result of picking up the addiction again, so that one likes to kill. It works very similarly with attachment and jealousy. Buddha said that this is the worst result of karma. The addiction of liking to do the same negative thing again is what creates constant, continual negative karma.

When you look at two brothers, two sisters, or even twins you will see the different characters they have. This difference is not coming from the father. It is not the fault of the mother. It is not the fault of the nanny, if there is one. Nor is it the fault of schoolteachers. It is simply an addiction that the individual has. And that is exactly what he or she is showing.

### Complete Karma: Motivation, Action, Conclusion

Whether an action creates a complete karma or an incomplete karma is a different story. I should give you an example. All killing karmas are bad, but in order to qualify as a “perfect” killing karma, you need a number of things.

First, you need the motivation, such as hatred, anger, hatred mixed with jealousy, or jealousy mixed with obsession. Or the motivation could be a self-serving ego control issue. The motivation will be one of those negative emotions. If there is no motivation whatsoever and somebody just hits somebody, and that person falls and dies, we call that an accident. We don’t call it murder. Even in normal society, under normal rules, it will be called an accident. Yes, you killed. You do have the karma of killing. However, it is not a complete killing karma because you don’t have a motive.

Then comes the action, in this case, killing. That also depends. Some actions are more terrible, like killing by torturing a person, giving them tremendous pain just to

pursue some personal interest. I can't help thinking about the actions we have taken in Iraq and in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba—all that torture. That is the worst action, one that creates terrible, strong killing karma. It is not just killing, but making sure the individual suffers as much as possible, doing whatever hurts them the most. That's the worst action. It makes the killing karma much stronger than simply shooting somebody.

In war you just shoot and somebody gets killed. It is much worse to capture the person and torture them as much as you can in order to extract information. Whatever the purpose may be, the end can never justify the means. That's where people go wrong. We think the end makes the action justifiable. We think we need to get the information [from suspected terrorists] because we don't want them to attack us, and that unless we torture them, they won't tell us. It's justifiable in one way, but from the karmic point of view, it's not. It just makes much stronger and more powerful killing karma.

I must also give you an example on this. This is a funny example. Maybe the Tibetans torture, too. It's not that every Tibetan is innocent and great. People like to romanticize the Tibetans. Not true! Though everyday teachings may use torturing a person as an example, the example given in the traditional teachings is not about torturing a person, because that's very rare [in Tibet].

Say, you are falling asleep nicely and this little red bug comes into your bed and bites you. You get irritated and scratch a little bit and then go back to sleep. The moment you begin to fall asleep, it bites you again, and you get more irritated. That is repeated a couple of times, and at the end you say, "I'm going to get you!!" You get up and find a flashlight and go and search for that bedbug. You find it because it's a little red bug on a white bed sheet. It's very easy to find it, right?

So you catch the bug. In a way, the bug is a person, you know? Not a human being, but a living being. Then you say, "Now, look at you, you have become big and fat by drinking my blood. Now here you are." And you decide to hold the bug between your fingers and rub it. You are not going to kill it; you're just going to keep on rubbing it as much as you want until you're satisfied. So, you rub it and torture it, let it go a little bit, and catch it again. Finally, you put that little bug between your two thumbnails and squeeze it. When you squeeze it, a little drop of blood comes from its body. Then you say, "Ah, now I am fully satisfied."

That's the example given for a full negative karma. Why? Because you have the motivation of first being irritated, then becoming angry, then torturing the bug and killing it, and finally feeling satisfied. That is considered a perfect karma consisting of motivation, action, and satisfaction. When you look back, you think, "I did it!" That makes the karma strong.

## Positive Karma

Now let's say we want to create a positive karma. If your motivation is, "I'm going to help him so that he may help me later," that is absolutely the wrong motivation. "I'm going to help him because he needs help," period. That is a good motivation. Do you know why? Because "I'm going to help him so that he may help me later" becomes a "me, me, me" issue again. So it's self-cherishing motivation, ego-boosting motivation. Even though you're helping, the karma created is questionable. The action may be helpful, but it may or may not become good karma because of the motivation. Motivation is very important, number one.

With the mind of, "I wanted to help because it is needed. I have the opportunity to help," any action you take will be good. Sometimes it is very difficult to help certain people. You may be trying your best, but they give you the worst attitude ever possible, show their temper and criticize you. They may get angry with you or accuse you—all those things happen. If you don't lose your motivation and continuously keep trying to help, then the more difficult the situation is, the stronger and better positive karma it becomes. But if you lose your temper in between, you lose the opportunity to create perfect positive karma. Although the result may not be bad, the efforts you put in have been distorted a little bit, and the positive karma will not be that strong.

Finally it is also important to look back, not with the concluding mind of "I did it," but with rejoicing that you've been able to help and recognizing how wonderful that is. Rejoicing makes very strong karma of helping, especially if there is strong motivation and strong action and when the action has been taken in spite of great difficulties. These difficulties are actually a challenge. The challenge is whether you are going to utilize this opportunity as good karma or whether you are going to lose it in between, making it weak.

Rejoicing is important, appreciating being able to help. This applies to everything, everybody, everywhere! It doesn't matter whether it's someone who would like to give a dollar to a beggar in the street, or a philanthropist who would like to make use of their good karmic result, or a caregiver who would like to give care to a weak and sick person, the rejoicing is the same. With rejoicing, you have perfect motivation, action, and conclusion.

Dharma practitioners sometimes go through difficulties to develop their practice. We always experience difficulty getting to Ann Arbor for winter retreats because of the snow. If you look back, the snow was an opportunity, but whether we take advantage of the opportunity or not absolutely depends on us. If you have a nervous mind, get hesitant and angry, it causes a problem for your own positive process. That's why the Bodhisattvas sometimes ask for more difficulties. Milarepa repeatedly said, "When there is more difficulty, I appreciate it, because my

opportunity is stronger.”

Coming to New York is easy for me. I just get on the plane and fall asleep. When I wake up, it is almost landing time. Because it's easy, I don't build much positive karma in coming here, honestly. I mean, there is not so much struggle.

### Karma and Compassion: Parents and Children

In short, if you have positive motivation such as good compassion, then the action that follows will be influenced by that compassion. You are willing to take on hardship and difficulties. You want to help that person, even if the person gives you a twisted answer or doesn't listen to you.

For instance, say that you are trying to tell a young teenager, “Don't do this,” and they won't listen. The more you tell them not to do it, the more they want to do it. So you begin to get irritated and nervous and afraid. You begin to think, “Oh, this little kid is going to have a terrible life. He's going to be a bad person.” Then your fear is exaggerated more. You think this little guy is going to land in jail. At the same time, while taking on this hardship, you never lose your compassion and love.

That really happens to so many parents. They never lose their love for the children, even though the children never listen. Children always think, “I know better than that.” Think about yourself at age seventeen or eighteen. Remember how you used to think, what your parents used to tell you, and how you liked to find ways your parents could not discover what you were doing.

I saw an ad on television two days ago, in which a young little boy is stealing the drug that his grandmother is using. The boy is very sweet to the grandmother and gives her the medicine. While she is taking it, he pulls out a little amount and puts the pills into his pocket. So the bottle is not completely empty when he puts it back.

We all did something similar to that. We looked at our parents and thought, “They're just making trouble for me, telling me to do this and not to do that.”

Then, when we become parents, the same thing happens, right? It's nothing new. Your kids are not doing anything that we did not do. Honestly. The main thing is not to lose your love, affection, and care, even when you are taking on the hardship of helping that crazy sixteen or eighteen or nineteen or twenty year old—that wild crazy horse who would like to go to bed at five in the morning and get up three in the afternoon or something like that. And if you take on that hardship and try continuously to help that person, the action is very difficult, but it creates very strong, good karma. Finally, if you are able to help that kid, you feel happy that you could get through. He or she turns out to be good person, so you are fully satisfied and joyful. That is a very good conclusion, and it becomes perfect, good karma.

It's not easy to create perfect, good karma because we break our compassion in between [the motivation and the conclusion]. We may have good motivation; we

may take action. But then the action becomes difficult. We say, "Yeah, I'm trying my best, but they won't help me with it. All right!" So then you use the "F" word and say, "What's the use? What do I care? Do whatever you want to. You're grown up. If you're going to land in jail, you are the one landing in there, not me. So get out of here," and you kick them out and all that. These are the breaking points in your compassion.

In order to help a kid, sometimes you decide to ground them, to give them some consequences, or take away some privileges. Actions like that are justifiable because of your motivation. But if you hit your kids, I'm not sure if that's justifiable or not—probably not, because it causes pain.

I'm told that a number of times I was hit terribly as a kid. I used to get lashes all the time. I must have been a very naughty boy, you know? So that's what happens when the action is crossing over from just giving consequences to a step beyond—hitting. Yes, even the action of grounding will create pain. But it is a different pain than when you are lashing the kid with your belt. That is where you are crossing the boundary. Then you are creating terrible pain. But the Tibetans used to beat the kids all the time. They tried to justify it because apparently there was no anger or hatred involved whatsoever. But that is questionable. So you really have to recognize a line that you can go up to. And when you cross it, anything you do that hurts the person, by virtue of the act, becomes negative.

Anything you do to help, by virtue of the action, becomes positive. Even here, though, there are a lot of gray areas. If you give an addicted person alcohol, is it helping or hurting? Giving an addicted person an addictive substance is hurting the person, although the person may feel it's great. But in reality, it contributes to hurting the person, so it's not right. On the other hand, if the person has terrible withdrawal symptoms and you still insist on not giving them anything, they may die. In that case, giving them the drug again becomes a positive action.

### Karma: Strong or Weak

So that is how it works. You know now what makes a powerful karma and what makes a weak karma. If you have motivation, action, and conclusion, and all three are strong, it makes a strong karma. If one is missing, the karma becomes weaker. If two are missing, it becomes even weaker. Let's say you hit somebody accidentally and that person dies. You had no motivation. The moment you see that person falling down dead, you regret it tremendously, rather than rejoicing, "Hey, I did it." If you regret, your action doesn't become strong karma. It has the action of killing, but not the factors of motivation and satisfaction. So it becomes weaker.

That's how you can judge whether a particular deed is good for you or bad for you. That is how you have to form your opinion. You all are grown up, educated, intelligent, wonderful people. You're not twelve years old. You are not a two-year-

old who has to be told, "Now sit down. Now stand up. Now sit down," although a lot of American Buddhist centers do that! They treat you like little babies. That's not right.

Everything is the result of karma. Every action that we take creates karma. There is no big karma-making factory. You don't have to go there. Everywhere, when you sit, think, sleep, or sit on the throne, whatever you're doing, every time you're creating karma. Even if you're sitting the wrong way on the throne, you're creating karma, too. Honestly, that is how it works.

The higher up you are, the more people you control, the more karma you produce. Let me give you an example. This is according to the Buddha, not me.

What happens in the Iraq war when we kill people? The soldiers who are on the spot shoot people and kill them, but probably, they have to do it; otherwise they are going to lose their own lives. They have no choice. The individual soldier is going to have the karma of shooting one person or two, or however many they kill. They do have that karma, but that's the limit.

But the commander in the field will have the karmas of all the different soldiers who have killed a number of people, because he is the one who issued the order. The commander-in chief is going to have all the karmas of everyone who has been killed over there. From the karmic point of view, that karma is very, very heavy.

There's no comparison with the colonel of Kentucky Fried Chicken! Colonel Sanders will probably have the karma of all the chickens that have been killed, as well as those that will be killed in the future in the name of Kentucky Fried Chicken. But in the war you have not chickens, but human beings. See the difference?

The karmic system is very sophisticated, very profound. Buddha himself said that even if you develop perfect wisdom, it is hard to figure out. But that's how we get our own karma. Some people may think that when we pay our taxes, we may also get the karma of killing because we are contributing to the war. I thought about that a lot. My conclusion is no. We pay taxes for the betterment of humankind and the American people. We pay taxes for our development. We pay taxes for better roads. We pay taxes for better protection against what happened to New Orleans. We pay taxes for all this. We also pay taxes to help people outside this country. We don't pay taxes to kill people. We don't. If people use the money for that purpose, that's their karma, not our karma.

While I'm mentioning paying taxes, I can see one great opportunity. You have to pay your taxes, otherwise the IRS will get you. So you might as well pay it as generosity. Have the mind of generosity, thinking, "I am doing this to help humankind." Your taxes have the opportunity to help all people. We are a superpower, no doubt about it. If we use our superpower in a better way, we can be outstanding. If we use our superpower in the wrong way, we can be horrible. The

choice is ours as people of the United States. We are part of it, because we are members of American society. Society is nothing but a collection of human beings, and American society is nothing but the collection of American citizens, such as you and me.

So we do have an opportunity. We have a great opportunity to be good. And we have the great danger to be horrible. We have a huge responsibility. If we pay taxes with the mind that we are contributing and giving generously towards the betterment of humankind, it's going to be generosity activity. Don't think, "Whether I like it or not, I have to pay it." By thinking like that, we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to be generous. So contribute towards betterment, and if someone misuses that, it is that person's responsibility, not ours.

#### Justice: Karma is Doing the Punishing

Some people may think, "We have to punish criminals on God's behalf." We don't have to punish on behalf of God. If God cannot look after him or herself, then I'm sorry. He or she knows what to do. From the Buddhist point of view, there's karma standing there, and it is functioning by itself.

When karma does get the criminals, remember, we should not rejoice. We should develop compassion. Believe me, here we can go wrong. Never do it. When you see karma getting somebody, remember compassion, compassion, compassion. Not revenge. Not satisfaction. Nothing. Otherwise we are no better than they are. By developing compassion towards them, we create better karma, which will give us better results. But if we develop feelings of satisfaction at someone's suffering out of anger or hatred, it is called revenge.

Personally, I do have a problem when people say, "justice is being done." Whether they bring justice to the criminals or bring the criminals to justice, I do have a problem with that. This is a very interesting view. A number of people think we have to punish the guilty and reward the great ones. But my opinion is: there is somebody called karma standing there, ready to do just that. We don't have to do karma's job. Why should we subject ourselves to creating suffering for ourselves by doing that?

We may think that by bringing justice, we become God's instrument, but that is just our own thought. No God comes out and says, "Hey, you're my instrument!" God doesn't need poor human beings like us to help do his work. Neither does karma. Each and every karma will be standing there, and it will never let anyone skip. That is the Second Noble Truth.

#### Types of Karma and Its Four Characteristics

Among the types of karma there are *positive karma*, *negative karma*, and something called *immovable karma*. Immovable karmas are normally thought of as part of

positive karma. However, they do not help people to get out of cyclic existence. They are simply positive karma to take a good rebirth within *samsara*, the cycle of lives managed by the First and Second Noble Truths. Though you may have a good rebirth, immovable karma does not give you the karma to free yourself from suffering completely. It does not bring *nirvana* to you. It does not bring total enlightenment. So immovable karma is part of positive karma, but it doesn't go towards the purpose of enlightenment or freedom from *samsara*.

That's why, whenever we begin to do something positive, we do the meditation to generate *bodhimind* or compassion. Compassion makes sure that every good work we do becomes a cause for enlightenment, or at least for *nirvana*. The influence of compassion blocks the karma from becoming immovable and makes it truly positive.

You now know basically what karma is. I don't want you to be expert, but you have to know a little bit. What is karma all about? What are the characteristics of karma? What makes something qualified to be karma? You have to know a little bit about all these things because that is how you conduct your life. Karma is not just about how to meditate, but how you think in everyday life, within your own home or out in the market or at work, how you function, how you do everything. If you know the karmic principles, you know exactly what to do and what not to do. The more details you know the better it is for you. You have to know how karma works.

There are four characteristics of karma:

1. Karma is definite.
2. Karma is fast growing.
3. One never meets the result if one does not create the cause.
4. If one creates the cause, no matter how much time passes, the result will happen when the conditions are right.

Karma is so important. It is controlling our life. We create it. Nobody else created it. I created all my karma. My karma controls me now. Since it's my creation, I can change it, but not immediately.

### Purifying Your Karma

Karma is not something that popped out of ground or fell from the sky. My karma is my own creation, good or bad; in both cases, I did it. It is not like politicians who sometimes say, "I'm responsible," and then forget about it. It doesn't work that way. When I'm responsible, when each and every one of us is responsible, our karma will follow us.

Unfortunately, it follows us just like the body and its shadow, or the body and the body's odor. You can also say that it follows like our toes and toe jam, if you like that example better. But you can wash your toes and have no toe jams. Just like that, you can purify your karma and get rid of the smell. Just like you are washing your foot

and putting talcum powder on it, you can purify your negative karma.

Negative karma is negative karma. When you kill someone, even if you purify the negative karma, you can't undo the action itself. Once you've killed someone, you cannot bring that person back; that's the reality. But still, you can purify everything.

Although karma is definite, you can intervene in both positive and negative karma. For positive karma, the intervention is hatred. According to the Buddha and his disciples, hatred burns positive karma. Chandrakirti says in the *Madhyamakavatara* (Entering the Middle Way):

*If you are angry towards a bodhisattva, the generosity, morality, etc. that you have accumulated for a hundred eons can be burned up within a matter of seconds.*

*Therefore, Buddha says there is no heavier negativity than hatred.*

It is easy to say, "I hate you," but hatred is very, very expensive. There is no worse negativity. You may think, "What about killing a human being?" But hatred is involved in that. If you don't hate, then how can you kill somebody? Unless you are a mercenary, hatred has to be involved.

For negative karma, the intervention is purification. Even such a heavy negativity as hatred can be purified. When Buddha talks about purifying, he says the higher ground can go under the water and the lower ground can rise up as high as possible. In other words, it can all turn around. Buddha will never tell a lie. He made that statement because we don't know what karma is all about.

When Buddha first presented karma to people in a village, he said, "I know this karma business." Somebody asked, "How can you prove that you know?" Buddha replied, "All right, each one of you go back to your own homes and get a kernel of grain. Put it in your own cloth or paper, bring it back, and put it over here." Five hundred of them did so, and for each one, the Buddha picked up the correct piece of paper or cloth and said, "This belongs to you, this belongs to you, that belongs to you." That is how Buddha demonstrated his direct knowledge of karma. Otherwise, talking about karma is like talking in the air. Nothing is really proved. So Buddha demonstrated his understanding in that way.

Buddha even went beyond that. His total knowledge was such that if you brought all kinds of tree branches from 100,000 different trees together and burned them to ashes, Buddha could select which part of the ash belonged to which tree and which branch. His knowledge is way beyond our imagination, though we can work and get some understanding.

So it is Buddha who said negativities are heavy; they have consequences. And it is that same Buddha who said you can purify. It is logical: purification works. Why? Because everything is impermanent, and that means that it's changeable. Negatives are impermanent, and positives are impermanent. Negatives can change into

positives, and positives can go wrong and become negative. It's all possible.

### The Four Powers of Purification

Purification is basically the four powers. The first is **the power of the base**. You created negative actions. You take refuge in the enlightened beings and you generate compassion for non-enlightened beings. That provides what is called the power of the base.

The second is **the power of regret**. If we don't regret our negative actions we're not going to be able to purify them at all. Why should we? If I did nothing wrong, why should I have to engage in purification? Last night on TV I saw the arrest of an accused pedophile who kept on saying, "I did nothing wrong." If you don't believe you did anything wrong, you have no reason to purify.

If there is no regret, there is no repentance. When you have regret, then you have to take physical, mental, and emotional action. [These are **the power of antidote action**.] Mental action is actually more important than physical. Mental action is regret and **the power of non-repeating**, promising not to do it again. Generating bodhimind and meditating on emptiness are also mental actions. They are the most recommended mental actions.

### Antidote Actions

In the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* (Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life), Shantideva said:

*What kind of virtuous action can overcome such powerful negativities  
besides bodhimind?*

That is very important. *Bodhimind* is unlimited, unconditional love and compassion. It is pure love, not attachment. Pure love.

Emptiness also is definitely powerful. Nargajuna says:

*Even raising doubt alone on the nature of reality tears samsara into  
pieces.*

Meditating on wisdom and bodhimind are the most powerful positive mental actions.

Then you also have mantra recitations, such as the 100 syllable recitations of Vajrasattava, because Vajrasattava specializes in purification.

Physical antidote actions include prostrations, circumambulations, and mandala

offerings. All of those are physical actions to purify negativities. Most of you know about circumambulations and prostrations. Some might not be aware of it, but prostration is a very strong practice within Jewel Heart. There are people who have been doing 100,000 prostrations.

It began with a friend in Ann Arbor. A few years ago, he was supposed to fix something in Jewel Heart. I put an impossible deadline on the task. By the time the deadline had come, the job was not done yet, so I said, "I am going to punish you." The punishment was 100,000 prostrations, which he did very well, completely, with total dedication. He was joined by a number of people in Jewel Heart. So there are a lot of them doing 100,000 prostrations now. Now they're continuing; even the new ones continue.

I should tell you what the meaning of prostration is. In essence, it is always what we call *chak tsel* in Tibetan. *Chak* means that you admire the qualities of the person to whom you are prostrating. *Tsel* is saying: I want that same quality that you have. When you do 100,000 prostrations, the person to whom you are prostrating is Buddha. We admire the qualities of the Buddha, his mind qualities, physical qualities, and most importantly, his emotional qualities. And we say, please give these qualities to me.

Unlike Buddha, our emotions are normally colored by self-cherishing hatred and obsession. This is how our emotions are. Anything that can hit our sensitive spot makes us cry, laugh, experience hatred as well as obsession. We cry; we get angry. But one wonderful thing with the people in Jewel Heart is that even if they get angry for a short time, for some people it's immediately, for some people quite soon, for some people after a little while, they begin to realize, "Hey, I've been submitting myself to a negative emotion." There may be different reasons why, but then they realize, "Let us not hold that as a grudge."

That is a great quality I see with a lot of people. I admire and appreciate that a lot. In the long run that will give you happiness, that will give you joy. You will not have so much pain that you keep holding tight, and not only your mind holds tight, even your physical body gets twisted. People do that. You're not going to have that at all because of the information that you have, the dedications that you have made, and your love and affection for yourself and for others. Those will protect you.

Knowing how to take care of karma and then conducting your life according to these principles is the best way to help yourself. That's what Buddha said, that's what all Buddhist people do. Not only Buddhist people, all good people do that. Whether you are Buddhist or not Buddhist, it is almost the same for everyone. Whether you give this understanding a name or not does not make the difference.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Audience: Would you say that there's always an emotional component to an illness?

Rimpoche: Sure. Positively. But the problem is, we don't recognize it. Healing is so difficult. But no matter what it is, every illness is subject to some kind of healing. Some is done through chemicals. Mostly what doctors know is the balancing of chemicals. But some illnesses may have nothing to do with the balancing of chemicals. But each and every illness has a form of healing. The difficulty is what. That is our problem. And the cause of each and every illness and each and every healing is due to karma. And that karma is due to negative emotions and positive ones, too. Positive karmic results are caused by positive emotions, and negative karmic consequences are caused by negative emotions. I believe that's a fact.

Audience: With your diabetes there seems to be, from what you've shared with us, a direct link between your sugar consumption and the diabetes. But there isn't always such a clear link. Could it be that an illness could come from karma developed in a past life?

Rimpoche: Yes. Karma is one's own creation. There is always a karmic link, always an emotional link there. Take cholesterol as an example. You can get cholesterol problems from two sources: food intake as well as hereditary predisposition. But both sources have a karmic link, and all these karmic links have an emotional link.

Audience: Rimpoche, you mentioned that in praying for someone who has passed away, we pray that their karmic links are somehow connected to the positive, that they are linked to their positive deeds for their future life.

The word "somehow" catches me every time. On the other hand, we learn that it is our personal responsibility in our own lives for our own karma. So how does that connection work, if we pray for someone else's karma to connect?

Rimpoche: You know, miracles work! Personal responsibility is there, and miracles work, too. I think you have to give room for both. I think it is called an open mind, and if you go to one side only, then you have to say, "It's only personal responsibility, nothing else." Then nobody can pray, nobody can do anything, and there's no such thing as a miracle! There definitely is room for prayer and miracles and both are linked, for sure.

Audience: Can you say a little more about group karma?

Rimpoche: There's definitely something called group karma that is created by a group of people who work together and do something influenced by negative emotions or positive emotions. You do something together and that creates group karma.

The question arises, "Is group karma more powerful than individual karma?" In our normal sense, group karma should be more powerful than individual karma, but

I don't think that's true. I think group and individual karmas are equally powerful because the negative consequences or good results will be suffered or enjoyed equally by a group or by an individual. Therefore group karma is not necessarily more powerful than individual karma.

Audience: Sometimes I wonder if you help because you want to enhance your spiritual practice. Is there a danger of ego getting in the way?

Rimpoche: The motivation to help because helping helps me is the wrong motivation, isn't it? Because it's twisted. You know when we were kids, we were taught a twist of logic. When you say something positive, the opposite of it becomes negative, and the opposite of that opposite becomes positive, and the opposite of that opposite of that opposite becomes negative. This was some funny little tricky thing they teach you in the monastery. I don't know what for, but that is what they teach you there.

So that tells you that when you have the motivation of helping "because that is my accumulation of merit," it goes from being one thing to another thing to another thing. You think "helping me" brings me "my merit," so the motivation becomes weak. It doesn't become negative motivation, however "me" comes in. "Why am I helping that person? Because helping that person is accumulation of merit for me." So, if you do that, the purpose jumps from one thing to the other.

But simply, as I said earlier, the best thought is, "This person needs help, and I can give it." Period. That is pure motivation. Thinking, "If I'm doing this, it will help me to build merit" is the beginning of self-interest coming in. It is very tricky.

Audience: Once I was helping out in a dharma organization and one of the people answering the phone was saying, "Now you can accumulate all this merit. So please give us more money . . ."

Rimpoche: People use that for all kinds of reasons. You know fundraisers do that all the time. That is their tactic, and it doesn't matter to me. What I want from my side is a personal practical point of view: clear-cut motivation, clear-cut action. Then you know it's not bouncing around. We always love to do that, because we like to kill two birds with one stone. That may or may not work, I don't know.

You can have good karma, good deeds, wonderful deeds, but if they don't lead you to liberation from samsara or reaching nirvana or enlightenment then it is called **lucky karma**. Why is it called lucky karma? Because it is good karma, it will give you a good result, but the result is only going to be within samsara. It is not the best. You did indeed do a good job, no doubt about it, very good work, but the result is not going to be great because it becomes just lucky karma.

Then there is **immovable karma** as well, which gives you rebirth in the formless realms, and that is better than the karma of samsaric gods. That's not very relevant for us. It comes as a result of very strong concentration, beyond the level of shamata.

Relevant to us is really true positive karma and lucky karma. If you are deeply involved in helping yourself, then you have to understand the karmic result, also the result of positive karma

Audience: How does the imprint of the karma that goes with you from life to life and goes into your rebirth in connection with the type of person you are going to be affect your next life? And if a lot of people are trying to do that, how does that affect all of society? If you can't get out of samsara and you're going through the cycles of life . . .

Rimpoche: That's lucky karma.

Audience: Right, right. But let's say you come back, you become a bodhisattva and then you come back to the next life.

Rimpoche: That's a different story. Bodhisattvas do not come back because of karma; they come back because of compassion and prayer.

I was saying earlier that we have millions of karmas of dying and living; this is what I was talking about, those imprints. Each one of them is be able to materialize if we provide the conditions. That's why it is said so often that at the time of death, make sure that you don't die with anger. The teachings say that so much. This is considered very, very important. Because even though you may be doing wonderful things throughout your life, a minute of anger just before you die can create a negative karmic condition which will result in wasting your life. I mean, the life's efforts are not wasted, but you are canceling the positive results and building the negative ones first instead.

Every action we carry out makes an imprint, and that imprint waits to meet with the conditions. When we talk about dharma practice, what do dharma practitioners do? They both create the cause and provide the conditions. I think that is really what dharma practice is all about. You are always creating the right conditions and the right causes—both together.

Audience: I would like some suggestions on getting through with a day, a day maybe like today or tomorrow, with less anger about things that are irritating—just getting through a day with less anger and in a more peaceful way. Any suggestions?

Rimpoche: You know, compassion and love brings you that. That's why we always pray, "May all beings have happiness, and may they all be free of suffering." One of the best motivations is compassion and love. That will really get you through the day. Even if it brings you halfway through the day, in the afternoon you can generate compassion once more. So then late afternoon goes along with compassion and so does the next morning. That's what it is.

I must tell you that when I was a kid in the monastery they would teach you that the moment you get up you have to think two things: "I will not waste my time" is

one, and the second is “I will make this day useful and good for all.” That is the compassion you bring in. Those two thoughts bring compassion to you day-by-day.

Audience: This morning on *The Today Show* a new self-help guru was saying that we are responsible for our actions and the show’s staff psychologist answered that you’re creating blame for victims who are ill or whatever [when you say that]. I would just like to hear your answer.

Rimpoche: I’ve been through that because when my book *Good Life, Good Death* came out, I was sent by the publisher for promotion and it was a little after 9/11, so every question everywhere was on that issue. It’s not blaming the victim, definitely not. But we also can’t experience anything if we did not create the cause.

When you experience something like 9/11, it happens to be a case of the person at the wrong time at the wrong place, no question. Each and every one of us have a tremendous amount of karma, both positive and negative. When you happen to be at the wrong place at the wrong time, your negative karma links up. The karma functions because the conditions are right.

It is the interdependent nature of existence. Things are really dependent arisings. When the conditions are right, the result is bound to come. When you get into the wrong place at the wrong time, the wrong conditions become right. That’s why you have those consequences, no doubt about it. Each and every one of us carries karma that will cause us to die in fire, in water, in falling from the sky, or whatever. No one exists who doesn’t have such karma. When the conditions are right, the karma materializes because it is interdependent nature. That’s how it works.

Remember, we spent a lot of time talking about interdependence and how it works exactly. So the wrong time, wrong place, wrong thing, makes the wrong conditions meet together, and that’s what happens. Victims are not to be blamed, but no one can say it’s not karma. No one can say it’s not the collective karma for over 3,000 people who lost their lives there. No one can say that the individuals did not have the karma to lose their lives there. But they are not to be blamed for that, because the karma of losing their life in that situation, and the karma of making it through, and the karma of not even meeting that situation at all—all are available with us. The circumstances that linked up made the whole difference. That is what interdependence of karmic functioning is all about.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/MEDITATION

1. Do you agree that: “Life is in our own hands, under our own control. If there is something to be praised, it is your deeds, and you deserve it. If there is something to be blamed, it is your doing, and you deserve to be blamed.” Why or why not? What life experiences led you to form your beliefs on this point?
2. What is necessary for a “perfect” or complete negative karma and a perfect or

complete good karma? Can you think of examples of each in your life, today or this week or this year? Can you think of examples when your good karma was weakened in some way?

3. What does it mean that karma is “impermanent”? What does it mean that karma is “interdependent”? Why are these points important?