

February 2018

Greetings!

I want to wish all the best in this new year. For myself, and I think for others, it is a time of transition from the hustle and bustle of the holidays to a more regular routine. I find that the training and meditation really helps me with this.

At this time, I want to give my great appreciation to those who edit my articles and these emails. Without them, they would not be possible, as English composition is not my strongest suit (to say the least). So thank you Rev. Master Bennett, Geoff, and Allan, all my very close friends.

Lately, an awareness has come up for me about karma and its strong influence on some of my friends. Before I go into this (in future emails), I want to give some background on karma. Over the years I have talked about karma, trying to give everyone a feel of how it works. I have found the teaching of karma to be very true for myself, and have seen what an important part it plays in our existence. For those wishing a more in depth coverage of karma, please go to the Email List on the [Seattle Dharma Refuge](#) website, where there are five emails on karma dating from July 2012 to November 2013.

The words of Rev. Master Jiyu Kennett give a short concise explanation of karma: "... this is the spiritual force set in motion by all volitional actions, whether good or ill. When we speak of a person's karma, we refer to the sum total of all such forces currently remaining effective which he or she has produced in this lifetime or has acquired at the time of conception from other beings which have left it unfulfilled at the times of their deaths. Positive volitional acts produce positive karma sometimes called merit, which has positive effects on the lives of beings.... Negative karma, if not exhausted or purified in this lifetime continues on after death and conditions the conception of a new being who will have the opportunity to allow it to run its course or to purify it, thus setting it to rest..." (full quote in July 2012 email).

When we take refuge in our karma and let our egocentric self embrace it, suffering can be the only result. Our training and meditation allow us to bring the love and compassion of the Eternal to these karmic streams so that they can be washed by It, and reunited with It. Let me give an example to illustrate this, that I often use in my talks. Years ago, I was watching the news and I saw a very disturbing piece. There was this couple who had a very serious drinking problem. They had a young daughter, and when she would start to cry or scream, they would lock her in the closet. The neighbors called the police, who took the couple away and brought the young girl to family services. This is an example of the beginning of a stream of karma. As this girl grows up, the karma can go in different directions. She could hate and blame herself, sending her into a state of despair. She could blame those in authority, becoming hateful of them, leading her to become very rebellious. Or she could just go into a state of fog, feeling herself to be inadequate. There are other directions the karma could take, and they all lead to suffering. In this case the karma can be very painful, and it is something I can relate to.

For me, the meditation and training was a true blessing. The training can be very difficult and many things will come up, but it goes very deep and gets to the root of the problem. I have found for myself and have seen for others that living in an open-hearted way with compassion, works very well. It allows the flow of the Eternal to permeate through us.

To continue with this example, if she should die without converting all of the anger, despair, etc., then whatever is unconverted would be reborn in another being in order to be converted. And this is exactly how it is for each of us. At conception we inherit the unconverted karma from various beings who have died. However, I know that this is a part of the teaching that many people have trouble with, especially those in the scientific and medical fields. We don't really know how this karmic inheritance at conception happens. This leads to a lot of skepticism on people's part. One can accept it or not, it is a question of faith. I think it is helpful, if one is skeptical; to put this teaching on the back burner, to keep an open heart and an open mind, and just to continue with one's daily training. What I want to stress here is the importance of the meditation and the keeping of the Precepts, as these are the backbone of the training. It is through our training in meditation and the Precepts that we allow our unconverted karma to be met and washed by the unconditional Love of the Eternal. And it is through this meeting that the karma is converted, as the pain, anguish and dis-ease dissolve into the Eternal's flow.

Earlier in Rev. Jiyu's quote, she spoke of karma running its course and being set to rest. A monk that I have trained with expresses this in a very beautiful way: "...all streams of karma flow into the great ocean of the eternal with its unconditional love and compassion."

There is a teaching that goes hand in hand with this karmic conversion. In this Buddhist teaching one of the five laws of the universe states that "Without fail evil is vanquished and good prevails."

We will continue our discussion of karma in the next email.

Before I close, I am reprinting below my recent article on faith from the Serene Reflection Dharma Association newsletter, for all those who are not on their mailing list.

Faith

Rev. Master Basil Singer
Seattle Dharma Refuge

Some years ago I gave a Dharma talk in the southern part of the United States. The talk was on faith, and many of the trainees in the group had a big problem with faith. They said they were "force fed" faith when they were young and the word really pushed their

buttons. I have been reflecting on this for a while and recently I have again done a series of talks here in Seattle on faith.

One thing I have focused on is examining aspects of the idea of faith that so many people seem to have trouble with. To that end I find three dictionary definitions of faith to be helpful. The first two definitions describe the problematic aspects of faith: “The body of dogma for a religion,” and “Trusting acceptance of God’s will.” Rev. Master Jiyu also talks about faith in a talk she gave at a retreat at Shasta Abbey in 1980. First, Rev. Master talks about the problematic kind of faith. She calls this type of faith absolute faith. She said:

Absolute faith, which is a requirement of many religions...implies a hardness, with no means whatsoever of allowing for softness or change. It is absolute—there can be no differences or movement within it. Absolute faith is rigid and results in bigotry, fear and frequently in the giving up of the will.... In absolute faith the residual hardness is as some-thing rather than no-thing.¹

The third dictionary definition of faith describe its helpful aspects: “confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, idea or thing.” Rev. Master calls this perfect faith, and says of it:

Perfect faith is full of lightness and acceptance. It is softer than a cloud yet harder than a diamond. It is all of these things and changes constantly in a positive direction.... Perfect faith is always changing and always the same, always interesting and always joyful, never seeing an opposite because it has indeed gone beyond opposites. Opposites can only exist when we have not yet transcended them.... We need to have a faith that does not insist upon faith.

Rev. Master Koshin Schomberg also addresses faith in his book *Dependent Origination*.² First, he talks about “misplaced faith,” writing that “it is a conviction that some part of the world of impermanence can endure and this enduring part can be a refuge which can provide true spiritual satisfaction.” I see this a good deal in my hospice work, when the refuge that people are really holding onto is dissipating. They get full of fear and terror. This is quite normal. I try to guide them to the “Perfect Faith” of the Eternal that is always there with pure love now and after death.

I would like to end with what Rev. Master Koshin says about faith in his book:

It is this intuitive root—faith—that enables us to begin to turn from that which, at least in a deeply intuitive way, is at last being recognized as unreal. And this turning from illusion is a turning toward True Reality and True Life.

This True Reality is always there, always. It is the refuge that always helps us. This is beautifully expressed in the Avatamsaka Sutra:

Faith is the basis of the Path, the mother of virtues,
Nourishing and growing all good ways,

Cutting away the net of doubt, freeing from the torrent of passion,
Revealing the unsurpassed way of ultimate peace.

When faith is undefiled, the heart and mind are pure;
Converting pride, it is the root of reverence,
And the foremost wealth in the treasury of religion
Being a pure hand to receive the practices.³

1 The complete transcript of the talk can be found in the Introduction to Serene Reflection Meditation booklet at: <https://www.shastaabbey.org/pdf/IntroSRM13.pdf>

2 Dependent Origination

3 The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra, tr. Thomas Cleary. Shambhala: Boston, MA. (Slightly edited.)

Take care.

With all my heart,

Rev. Basil