

October 2018

Greetings!!

It feels like the summer has come and gone in the blink of an eye. Here in Seattle we have had a difficult summer due to the heavy smoke from the nearby forest fires. It is really nice to breathe some fresh air again. I had a really nice trip to Minnesota with Rev Master Bennet. It was quite relaxing and we had a great time together.

This will be the last of our current series on karma. At the end of this article, for those who are not on the Serene Reflection Dharma Association email list, I will also include another recent article of mine that appeared in the Association's newsletter – it is on living the spiritual life 24/7.

Before continuing, I would recommend that those who have not yet had the opportunity read some of the previous emails on karma. They are available on the [Email List](#) page of the [Seattle Dharma Refuge](#) website.

The most poignant motivation for me to write this series of emails was my observation of some close friends in recent years and the struggles they have had with their karma. I will relate their stories and try to protect their privacy by arbitrarily assigning a name and gender.

According to the teachings of karma, much of what happens in our lives is the result of karma, particularly inherited karma. Of course there are other things that affect us, such as genetics and environment, as well as karma from childhood. Simply put, inherited karma is karma that has remained unresolved from the past. I can often recognize when people are deeply affected by this and the difficulties that may arise. In recent times we have seen how many celebrities have succumbed to addictions or suicides. The media often states that they have been fighting their inner demons. To me this doesn't really explain the issue. I believe that what is actually being referred to by "demons" is inherited karma – unresolved pain from the past that is searching for the pure, unconditional, non-judgmental Love of the Eternal.

The first story I want to relay involves my friend Pat who suddenly began suffering from an unexplained illness. Besides being very ill and weak, they became very dark and negative. Their family had no idea what was happening and didn't know what to do. Pat went to various well respected medical experts around the country, but they couldn't determine the nature of the illness. After a couple of years looking into all types of treatments, Pat went back to a spiritual teaching and meditation group that had been helpful in the past. The illness suddenly disappeared and nobody knew exactly why. The last time we spoke, Pat was in great spirits. This may not be totally conclusive, but I believe that inherited karma can be manifested physically, and I have seen many examples of this, where there is no logical medical explanation. I have found that meditation and spiritual training can have a really positive effect with this type of karma, as it allows the unconditional love and compassion to flow through it. This was a really beautiful story for me.

My friend Alex, who I have known since he was a small child, had a more difficult time. Even though he had a pleasant appearance, was quite intelligent, and very artistic, the spiritual pain was evident. I could always feel Alex's karma, maybe because I could see a similarity in myself. I call it "a stranger in a strange land" karma. Nothing feels quite right and you can be very uncomfortable, feeling that you just don't fit in. He tried many things to alleviate this dis-ease, but nothing seemed to work. Eventually, Alex committed suicide. The suicide was very painful to many people, including me. I did extra meditation and reflection. It came up for me that Alex did the best that he could do, and I believe that this effort really helped the karma, so that when it is passed on, it will have less power.

Over the years, many people have come up to thank me for trying to explain karma. They have told me that now they have a better understanding of what is going on with themselves in terms of karma, and that they now have a better way to deal with it. My purpose in going over karma repeatedly is to point to the things that people can try to help with it, such as the meditation and training, and living within the Precepts.

Karmic consequence manifests in the thoughts and feelings we experience on a daily basis, so our daily meditation and training is crucially important if we are to come to accept and convert our karma. It is my great hope that people will benefit from these stories and gain insight into how the training and meditation can help us as we live our daily lives.

And now, here is the article from the September edition of the Serene Reflection Dharma Association newsletter:

Living the Spiritual Life 24/7
Rev. Master Basil Singer
[Seattle Dharma Refuge](#)

I often remind the trainees in the meditation groups that I lead that, in order to be successful with this training, we have to do it on a regular basis. It really is necessary to practice sitting meditation for some amount of time every day, although taking a day off occasionally is not a problem. Besides formal meditation, keeping our attitude of meditation going throughout the day is just as important. What follows is a brief explanation of what I am talking about.

In formal meditation we sit facing a wall with our eyes half open, being mindful of what comes up in our thoughts and emotions and letting it all dissipate. In our daily life we keep this mindfulness going throughout the day by just doing what needs to be done and being aware of what we are doing at the time. For example, when we eat we just eat; when we catch our mind drifting into other things, then we come back to just eating. The same thing goes with our work, watching TV, conversation, and all activities. The

purpose of this ongoing, gentle awareness is to help us maintain our focus without distracting ourselves with thoughts of the past or the future. I have heard from many trainees who do this seemingly simple practice that it has really “saved my life” and has helped in many ways. I say this myself about my life.

On the deepest level what is going on here is that we are opening ourselves up to what we all have: the “flow of the Eternal” with its pure, unconditional and nonjudgmental Love, compassion, and stillness. With our meditation and training we can live from this magnificent Place that we all have and let our lives be an expression of this Place. It seems simple in the telling, but it takes constant diligence. I can speak for myself and others: it is worth it.

I would like to go over some particular things that pull us out of this place of Immaculacy. The first is something I see happening a great deal in current events. That is anger. It seems that for many people—including myself—it is much easier to get angrier at this time when the opposites seem ascendant. The truth of the matter is that if we let the anger fester and grow, we go into suffering. However, if instead we call upon our meditation/training and let the anger arise and then dissipate, we live in a state of peace and stillness.

I am aware of how easy it is to get angry at so many things and I have to say my training and meditation has really helped me. Rev. Master Jiyu gives some great teaching on this in her commentary on the Kyojukaimon. Rev. Master says, “The depth of the ocean is still even when there is a great storm upon its surface; thus should we be when there is anger, knowing that nothing whatsoever can touch the Truth.”

The last area I want to go over is something that came up for me years ago, which inspired a series of talks. I call it “opening the JAR of suffering.” This “JAR” is Jealousy, Animosity, and Resentment. When we go with these attitudes we experience a life of suffering. If we let them arise and dissipate with our meditation and training we cannot be controlled by them. These attitudes come from what Rev. Master Jiyu calls “the housebuilder of the house of ego,” and Rev. Master goes on to say that we must “know all his tools, know all his building materials; there is no other way that we can know immaculacy.” When we live in this way we can see the “JAR” as delusion and when we let the flow of the Eternal wash through the “JAR” we can move away from the suffering it causes when we go with it.

In conclusion, I know that this practice takes a good deal of diligence. It is always our choice. We can use all the things that come up in daily life to bring us back to the magnificent Flow we all have, or we can go with suffering and a hardened heart. On paper here the decision looks easy, but in our daily life we know it is not easy. Again, I can say for myself and for many others that this works and practicing it really helps us. It is truly a wonderful way to live!

With all my heart,
Rev Basil