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Freedom From Temporality

The realm of karma, where thinking is being studied, has a temporal quality: There is a past and a future, and between the past and the future is the present. The present is where karma lives. Your present thinking connects your past with your future. It's temporal. We have to study that, and you can study it, because your present thinking is the shape of your present mind. It's the way you're thinking, it's the way your mind is tending now. It connects past and future, and as you study the link between this past and this future—the future that would ordinarily be expected from this past, the kind of thinking that this past tends to lead to in this present, and the future that this present thinking would lead to—sometimes in this present, the karma turns. Instead of being a link that goes straight, it turns into a link like a switch in a railroad track, and you switch from one future to another. In other words, you don't necessarily keep going in the direction of thinking selfishly forever. You don't keep thinking unskillfully forever. This past unskillful, unwholesome thought can lead to a present wholesome thought, which produces a different future.

When you do something in the present, your action creates a future that changes your past. The future that happens can change the past through karma, just the way the past usually changes the future through karma. Karma is the present, and it has consequences. It is the aspect

of our life that is the focus point of temporality, cause and effect, bondage, and suffering. By studying it, we open to the possibility of becoming free of it, by the very nature of the process. In addition, the nature of the process is such that becoming free of it does not mean that you stay in freedom, the way freedom manifested originally. You also study that process, and become free of that process, and are able to return to the infinite worlds of karma, to test and prove your freedom.

For example, say you had abusive parents, in other words, you think of them as having been abusive in the past. Your present karma is to think of them as abusive. If you want to keep thinking of them as abusive, you can keep a nice steady abuse pattern going: “I thought of them as abusive in the past, I had low quality parents in the past, so it is pretty easy for me to think of them as low-quality, abusive parents in the present. That makes a nice link to thinking of them as abusive parents in the future.” That’s what often happens. Thinking of them a certain way in the past becomes a condition for thinking of them that way in the present, and those two together incline the mind to think of them that way in the future. To some extent, you have a wish to make sure that your parents will always be thought of as unskillful and abusive, so that in the infinite future you’ll have abusive parents, so then back there in the past they will always be enshrined as abusive parents and you’ll be enshrined as abused. They’ll never change, because you’re going to keep that story going, and therefore you will always be the abused. one.

However, you might consider thinking of them in a different way in the present. Since you’ve been thinking of them as very negative bad parents for a long time, one moment of thinking of them slightly differently probably won’t upset the apple cart, but there’s a chance that it would. That’s why you don’t want to think it. You don’t want to think, “Maybe they

weren't so bad. Maybe they actually were the greatest parents that I could have possibly had. But I shouldn't think that because that's hard to think. I've thought the other way all this time." Still, it can happen. Due to some new conditions, you can think a new thought. All this other conditioning is behind you, but the new thought, that you had great parents, itself becomes a new condition. It's possible that the new thought would condition the birth of another similar thought. And another and another and another. Now we have a new overall pattern of thinking, and the future now is changed from the future we thought we were going to have. Now we've got a future of thinking well of our abusive parents. If this goes on much longer, the history will be revised.

Studying karma is revisionist; it will revise your story. It will not destroy anything, it will not annihilate those past stories, it will revise them. But when they get revised in the future, guess what? They get revised in the past. In other words, the whole situation, not just the future, but the past and the present can change. They are always changing anyway, and the story can change, and when the present story changes, it changes the future stories, and when the present and the future stories change, the past stories change.

The present alone changing is not enough. It's not enough to think once that your parents were the most wonderful beings that they could possibly be. It has to change the future, too. Which it will, but you have to see it, and when you see it you have to join it. The more you join it in the present and change the future, the more the past gets changed, without getting rid of any of the old stories. It's just that they change. "I used to think they were this way, and now I think they are this way, and they and I together are free. They are free." Maybe they've been dead a long time. Now they are liberated. You can liberate your parents and your relationship with them even after they're dead by studying your mind.

Ordinarily when you think about your parents, whether they are alive or dead, you think about them conceptually, in other words, through an image. And the image is generic, or somewhat permanent. So I'm looking at my parents right now, my parents are so-called "not alive," but I'm looking at both of them, and basically I'm looking at an image. It's a conceptual cognition. Now, what is the shape of that conceptual cognition? That's the way I'm thinking about my parents. The way I think about my parents right now is influenced by the way I thought about my parents before, and the way I thought about them before is my karma relative to them. The way I thought about them before was my basic karmic response, and that basic way of thinking conditioned the way I talked to them, and the hand gestures and body gestures through which I related to them. Those physical, vocal, and mental acts led to me think about my parents in the present. Many presents were conditioned by those pasts, but all those presents, influenced by all those pasts, were all thinking about my parents, usually through the medium of an image. The image may be not changing, but the thinking is changing. But even though it's changing, sometimes it's changing in by just getting deeper and deeper into a rut.

I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't practiced, but during forty years of practice my way of thinking about my parents did evolve. My father died before I had practiced very long, but I continue to change my way of thinking about my father, the longer I practice. And because of the transformation of my way of thinking – becoming free of my way of thinking through studying my way of thinking – my father becomes more and more wonderful, with all his problems.

I remember his problems, but now I see his problems as gifts to me. Now I see his problems as his life being sacrificed to show me the wholesome way to live. His

unwholesome, unskillful ways of living, the more I meditate on them and see the skillful and unskillful ways to think about his unskillfulness, the more I appreciate him. He's a successful father, because he is the father of a person whose thinking about him has evolved to be more and more appreciative of him. Without denying his unskillfulness. He was a big, beautiful, intelligent person who drank and smoked and ate improperly and overworked and didn't get any exercise. He was a tragic person and his life was of great benefit to me. And if I'm of any benefit to you, it's because of him. If I'm any good in the world, it is because of him. He had a lot of bad habits, and he missed out, but we can make him a great man, if our thinking evolves. But still, I see that same guy, you know. That handsome guy, the same image.

And it is the same with my mother. My mother died just recently, so I had many more years to actually act in new ways of being with her, more years to get over thinking about her in ways that were conditioned by the ways I had thought about her before, which were conditioned by ways I had thought about her before. I started to think of her in new ways and be with her in new ways, because I studied the way I was thinking about her. I studied how the way I was thinking about her now was conditioned by the way I thought about her in the past. My thinking was transformed through meditation on my thinking.

My karma in relationship to my mother changed a lot, while she was still alive, because I studied my karma in relationship to her. It got better and better and better. My mother smoked for seventy-two years; she had tried to quit many times. She had other unhealthy habits, too, but smoking was the big one. She had some pals at this place she lived, a very nice place with lots of pals, some of whom smoked. They would go outside and smoke. And one of the last times I visited my mother, I actually had a good time being outside with them, breathing in the secondary smoke. It was just great. I wasn't down on her

smoking anymore. I was free. And she got to enjoy my company. With me being free, she shared my enjoyment. She was able to have a nice time while doing this thing, which my brother, who had been struggling to get her to quit for many years, could not enjoy. Many wonderful things happened toward the end of her life. The past can change. Without erasing anything, without denying anything, it can change. Because the future can change, because the present can change. We can have new responses in the present.

You see what this is? In this way you're becoming free of time. You are becoming liberated from temporality. We have to thoroughly tune into temporality in order to become free of it. And when we're free of it, future can change past and past can change future. It all becomes one completely interdependent wonder. And to prove it's really so, you even come back into the world of time, where things are chopped up into little pieces again, to see if you can, even in that realm, continue this practice.

But we have to study, we have to notice what's going on. Otherwise, the main thing about karma is that it keeps itself going. The thinking wants to think the same thing again, as well as it can under the circumstances.

Studying this is meditation. It is different from tranquility meditation, the meditation, in which you give up discursive thought, the meditation that begins, "In the heard there will be just the heard, in the seen there will be just the seen." That is the calming type of meditation.

Now we are talking about an insight meditation: observing your karma, studying the psychophysical pattern of the constituents of mind accompanying a moment of cognition, noticing whether it's skillful or unskillful, seeing how it's conditioned by the past, and how

the present way of thinking conditions the future. Contemplating this karma will be easier if you're calm. If you're not calm don't do this kind of meditation.

These are the two types of Buddhist meditation. Both are highly recommended.