

protection should be their primary concern. It also helps the teacher and the sangha, for speaking out can prevent further harm. Even without direct harm, in many situations, interactions between student and teacher provoke the student's disillusionment and the confusion that goes along with it. It helps to return to reality and get back our own power. While this may be painful, we may end up being more connected with our own inner authority and our own inner teacher, and thus learn to trust ourselves. If there is less illusion in the first place within the teacher-student relationship then the process of becoming independent is faster and less painful.

It seems that modern life is disillusionment's friend. Espe-

cially in Western culture, we are encouraged to be self-sufficient. In a way, this creates a healthy suspicion of others and their motives. In another way, it inhibits healthy connections with others. This self-sufficiency can also inhibit cult-like behaviors in different religious organizations, making it less likely that the student will spoil the teachers with too much respect.

What is the perfect model of a teacher, then? In the words of Rob Preece: "authentic in his openness about himself, his joys, and his struggles." I would add: always developing, empathetic, challenging students, a great listener who helps students to be fully human. ♦

Karma Does Not Define Our Situation. What's Important Is What Kind of Choices We Make.

Zen Master Bon Shim (Aleksandra Porter)

From a dharma talk given during winter Kyol Che at Wu Bong Sa Temple

The most common explanation about karma is cause and effect. What that means is that whatever happens in our life, whatever we are facing, what we are dealing with, whatever obstacles and hindrances and pain and suffering—whatever we have comes from some primary cause. But if you practice for some time then you see the meaning of karma in a broader way. That means that karma does not define our situation. What's important is what kind of choices we make.

This is an important point. You cannot make excuses like "that is my karma" because it's an open situation. What's important is what you do with your karma, what kind of choices you make. And if you make right choices, then your karma might become your dharma. And then you can get free of your karma. Or at least you can control your karma. It always works in this way. Either karma controls you, or you control your karma. Having a human body means we have some karma. You cannot get rid of it, but you can use it.

You can practice, and then for the first time you can see your karma. This always comes first. You have to see your karma, and sitting a retreat, even a one-day or one-week retreat, is enough time to see your karma. Some of it. Not the whole picture—you cannot get the whole picture in one week, but you can see some of your tendencies. If you are very careful and really pay attention, you'll see your tendencies. You see your craving and you see what you are trying to get away from. You see your mind, which is maybe judging. You see yourself as not having enough confidence or believing in yourself. All of this is karma. So first see it and face it.

And then if you see it and you face it, and you have enough courage to really face it, then you can work with your karma, deal with your karma, which is to control your

karma, and eventually use your karma.

Of course it is a long process, because as we all know very well, our patterns are deeply rooted. It's true. Practice is like going against the stream, so it's hard work. And it requires a lot of effort, a lot of determination and perseverance. And of course, paying attention, because you can see your tendencies, but you can transform that if you pay attention.

This is like a first gate. You cannot do anything if you do not pay attention. It's the small things; it's not like a big transformation happening like this. [*Snaps her fingers.*] It doesn't happen this way.

Sometimes we look at our path like it is one line, and we hope that going on this path just means getting better, being more happy, having more joy, having a more successful life.

But that has never been my experience. It doesn't go like this; it's not a linear movement. It always goes around. We have life and death, and we have samsara. You are going up, then you are coming down. You have success; you have a good sitting. We can see this during one week. Every day, every block of sitting: one moment you are happy and you feel good. "My meditation is great, so clear, so strong." And the next moment, even the next round of sitting, sometimes the next five minutes, "What happened?" Some fear or maybe anger just came out of the blue. But if you sit long enough then you don't pay so much attention to that. It's changing, changing, your thinking, your feeling, your emotions are changing. Don't worry about all this karma coming and going; what is most important is to return back to before thinking, our original mind, over and over. We practice letting go, and we practice starting over again and again. What a privilege! ♦