

DHARMA – JUST DESERTS

I found an interesting discussion about karma near the end of very long teaching (six days) that I doubt that many will labor through. It is just audio/video and I don't think that it has been transcribed for reading. I've never found it. It's about karma and its effects.

This reminds me of the old chestnuts "Things are not as they seem" or perhaps "You can't judge a book by its cover." And this has come up in my own life as well, so I will get to that in a moment.

The teachings clearly say that if you do good things, you create good karma and if you do bad things, you create bad karma. It was part of a question-answer session and this question was something like: when we look around in the world, we quite often see people who are very good in their conduct suffering many calamities and difficult times, while people who are very bad are getting rich and living the good life – something like that. How can that be? And this is where appearances don't always seem fair. In answer to that question, Rinpoche explained the following.

Rinpoche said it is very true that many very good people, even lamas and fine practitioners, are beset by all kinds of hard times, while real scamps, people who deceive and hurt others only get rich and prosper. What's fair about that?

Rinpoche pointed out that quite often it has to do with our next life and the kind of rebirth we will get. Even though we may live an exemplary life, a life of good conduct and kindness to others, many difficult things may arise to confront us and block our path. This may

have nothing to do with our actions in this life, but rather are the residue of “bad” actions in previous lives that are ripening in this one. Rinpoche went on to say that this is a good sign, a sign that our bad karma is finishing up and may signal that our next life will be a rebirth in a higher rebirth, with even greater opportunity for enlightenment

By the same token, with those who do nothing but “bad” deeds” in this life (yet are rewarded with wealth, health, and prosperity), this is not a good sign because they are in the process of using up the very last of their good karma, while busy sowing seeds of very difficult karma to come in future lives. And it suggests that the next life will be rebirth in a lower rebirth, which may be very difficult to get out of.

So, before we freak out in self-examination, Rinpoche went on to say that the emphasis in what he said is on people who commit bad deeds in this life, but prosper, and those who do good deeds in this life but suffer. The first case may be headed for a lower rebirth, while the second is headed for a higher rebirth. The rest of us are as we are.

I find the above interesting; and now my personal story: When our dog Molly (Molotov) was nearing death from old age, it became very difficult for him and for us. We had to carry him outside many times a day and cover the floors with washable water-resistant clothes because he was incontinent, and so on. It was a downhill slide toward death and we were busy with at all the time. It was horrible to see someone we love suffer so.

When we asked Rinpoche whether it would be kind to

put him down and save him suffering, he responded as in the above teaching that I just went over. He said that if we put him down and saved him the suffering (this karma of a hard death), he will just have to do it all over again in a subsequent rebirth. But if we allow the difficult karma of a hard death to play out, chances are that he would have completed and exhausted this hard karma and be ready to move forward.

We took Rinpoche's advice, which was very hard on Molly and us as well. It was day and night care. And even with pain pills, the suffering was all-consuming. We stayed with Molly until his last breath, holding his head, comforting him, and so on. It was a huge learning experience for all.

[Photo of a rupa (statue) of the Bodhisattva Manjushri in the main shrine room at our center. In his right hand he holds the flaming sword of wisdom that cuts the root of ignorance and duality. In his left hand is the stem of a lotus flower believed to contain the Prajñāpāramita (Perfection of Wisdom) teachings.]

“As Bodhicitta is so precious,
May those without it now create it,
May those who have it not destroy it,
And may it ever grow and flourish”

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