

## Cause and Effect

Once the nature of experience becomes clear to the meditator as described in the previous chapter, the meditator will begin to notice how individual experiences relate to each other causally, affecting or even giving rise to future experiences entirely. Whereas the first stage of knowledge involves the understanding of the *nature* of experiential phenomena, this knowledge involves understanding the *relationships* between experiential phenomena; it is knowledge that comes to the meditator gradually as they continue observing the four foundations of mindfulness as outlined in the first volume on how to meditate. This knowledge is described as the understanding of causality, often referred to as the “law of karma”.

In modern times, the concept of karma is well-known, but not very well understood. Karma is often thought of as a law that ascribes repercussions to one’s actions — certain actions have positive results, others have negative results. In fact, as a meditator will quickly realize, it is not one’s physical *actions* that affect one’s future in any meaningful way, but rather *the state of one’s mind* while performing said actions.

In order to attain this understanding, it is recommended that one who has attained the knowledge outlined in the previous chapter continue on with the same practice that led them to that stage of knowledge. If walking meditation begins to feel overly simple, one may at this point break the walking step into two parts, noting “lifting” as one lifts the foot straight up to float level with the other ankle, then “placing” as one moves the foot down and out in a straight line to rest one foot length from where it was before. The added complexity will help hold one’s attention and sharpen one’s awareness, allowing more precise observation of experiences and the relationships between them.

As one observes the moment-to-moment experiences that arise and cease during the meditation practice, one will come to recognize patterns of cause and effect that govern one’s experience in a very real way; sort

of like a law of nature. Early on in the meditation practice, one will notice simple causal relationships; the desire to stand (mental) leading one to stand (physical), or standing up (physical) leading to an awareness of standing up (mental). During the observation of the rising and falling of the abdomen, one may become aware of the mind waiting for the abdomen to rise (mental) followed by the abdomen rising (physical) or the abdomen rising (physical) leading to a realization that the abdomen has risen (mental).

If such observations don't come to the meditator on their own over time, it is recommended that a meditator pay special attention to the intention to change positions, noting, for example, "wanting to stand" or "wanting to sit" before standing up or sitting down. Noting the mental intention will help cultivate an awareness of the causal relationship between the body and the mind.

Another common sign of this stage of knowledge is the mind's taking note of the sequential pattern of mental distraction — e.g. the observation of the abdomen being interrupted by a stray thought which causes one to stray from the abdomen, which in turn leads to an awareness of the distraction, which in turn leads one to note the thought, which leads to the thought fading away, which leads one to return to observe the abdomen rising and falling again.

When this sort of sequential observation occurs often, the meditator may feel as if they are unable to keep the mind in the present moment. The knowledge of causal relationships between phenomena is, however, an important stage in the progress of insight, and should be noted objectively. Eventually, it is this sort of pattern recognition that will lead one to understand how certain mental states lead to suffering; how anger, for example, leads to pain and sickness, and how greed leads to stress and disappointment.

It is mental relationships such as these that form the basis of the law of karma; while ordinary physical and mental phenomena work according to cause and effect as described above, they tend to do so without definite

repercussions either positive or negative. Certain mental activities, on the other hand — e.g. those based on greed, anger, or delusion — do have definite repercussions both on one's physical body and surrounding as well as one's state of mind.

If, for example, one were to step on an ant without knowledge, or kill a fly accidentally while attempting to save it from a spider's web, the result might be a sense of guilt or remorse, but it might just as well be one of indifference, since one's intentions were not directed towards harming. If on the other hand one were to consciously place poison around one's home in an effort to wipe out an ant colony, or if one were to drop helpless insects into a spider's web, the result would invariably be an increased inclination to cruelty and insensitivity towards the suffering of others. Through observation of cause and effect in this way, one comes to see the importance of one's mental state in determining one's future.

It is this stage of knowledge that leads one to see how mental states like greed, anger, arrogance, conceit, etc., bring about both negative changes in the body — leading to tension, fatigue, headaches, etc. — as well as negative mental habits that disrupt one's peace of mind and incline one towards acting and speaking in ways that cause suffering for oneself and others.

Likewise, one comes to see how mental states like love, compassion, objectivity, contentment, patience, etc., lead to positive physical benefits like reduced blood pressure, relaxation, proper digestion, etc., as well as having obvious mental benefits and cultivating positive character traits and habits that lead one to greater peace of mind and improved social interactions and relationships.

This stage is perhaps the first obvious example of a clear benefit to objective observation of reality. It is in fact considered a decisive victory for a meditator to attain this stage of knowledge; a meditator who is able to see the causal relationships between physical and mental phenomena is understood to have passed a crucial test in deciding whether they will be capable of attaining the higher stages of knowledge. It is said that if

such a meditator continues their practice, they are guaranteed to attain the higher knowledges without question, as they have proven themselves capable of discerning right from wrong based on their own direct observation.

Such a meditator no longer need take it on faith that one's actions (or rather the mental states behind one's actions) have repercussions; because of their direct observation of cause and effect, they are able to adjust their behaviour according to what brings true benefit to themselves and others. This knowledge of causality is thus an important step on the path to peace, one that should not be taken lightly or dismissed as inconsequential.

It is important to note that, as with the first stage of knowledge described in the previous chapter, this knowledge must arise without prompting or instigation; one cannot simply rationalize one's way to this sort of insight knowledge. Insight knowledge can only arise truly and genuinely through the practice of meditation similar to that outlined in the first volume of this series. Anyone who thinks that by merely reading or studying or even logic and reflection that they will come to understand these simple truths is most certainly mistaken and doomed to never experience the fruits of true insight knowledge.

To that end, let me once more repeat the encouragement to put these teachings into practice; the above is written not as a substitute for the practice of meditation as taught in the first volume, but merely as a guide to help those travelling the meditation path recognize the landmarks on their monumental journey to true peace, happiness, and freedom from suffering. May you all find this path and follow it to its goal.