



### 3. Relationships



**Q: What's the point of being kind and patient with bullies? It only encourages them to behave even more badly. Isn't it also a kind of hypocrisy on our part?**

Ans: Buddha advised us to also protect ourselves and thus not be the object of others' bullying. At the same time, we have to practice patience and compassion. Be confident in oneself and take the other person who is bullying you as the object of compassion by seeing that the person is being controlled by delusion and that the delusion is the actual thing that is harming you. Of course, physically, try to maintain distance from such persons – run away, get conventional realistic help (not just sit there to be harmed!) but always, mentally take the person as an object of compassion and pray for Buddhas to bless his mind to eliminate the delusion. One shouldn't be scared nor angry at bullies. Instead, think that this is the karmic result of past life actions (I have bullied others), therefore I must end this karma by applying Four Opponent Powers practice\* and generate compassion. To stop the karma is not to generate anger nor take revenge. Otherwise fresh causes for more harm to be received are planted! (\*The Four Opponent Powers practice involve (i) the power of regretting negative actions that one has committed on others (ii) the power of relying on the Triple Gem to guide oneself to live an ethical life (iii) the power of applying the remedy of reciting prayers to purify negativities and strengthen one's positive potential (iv) the power of the promise not to repeat the negativities that gave rise to the problem we are facing).



**Q: Mr A and Mr B are good friends who had a disagreement. Mr A realised that Mr B had a good reason to feel hurt but refused to apologise because he felt that what he said was based on principles. Mr B privately felt that if Mr A apologised, he would feel much better. The question is: Are one's principles more important than bending a little to make others feel happy?**

**Ans:** Principles are more important and thus we should always choose principles but in doing so, we need to act with compassion, honesty and selflessness. In ordinary worldly situations, one should likewise choose principles but it is always good not to offend others and thus one needs to be skilful and try to use right words and actions with good intention when upholding principles.

**Q: Relationship problems, whether in families or work-places, can be a major source of suffering – what must we do to ensure we have good relationships?**

**Ans:** In samsara, it is very difficult to ensure good relationships. If you play politics, there will be trouble and suffering; if you stay quiet, one could end up being bullied (or misunderstandings can still arise); if you take protective action, it is tiring and conflict-ridden. In fact, in the contaminated world, it is not possible to have a good relationship



with anybody but Dharma can help. As long as self-grasping lies in the minds of beings, there will always be problems. Mind transformation of situations can help. Always reflect into your own mind and learn to transform difficulties by being positive about every single aspect of life by understanding the contaminated nature of samsara. By doing so, then even if you are bullied, you are able to respond with a smile and are able to manage some kind of continued interaction with the bully. As long as self-grasping exists, there will be problems - it's just a matter of whether the problem is heavy or light. Further, there is a tendency in samsara to misinterpret others. Somehow there is no definite faith in relationships, so it could be good for now but there is no certainty about what will happen later.

If one is able to eliminate the grasping mind, then there will be no conflict. Samsara and all its aspects (including relationships) is like a bed of nails and we are like walking around with bare feet in samsara – the only way to protect ourselves is to either cover the entire bed of nails (which may be difficult) or protect your feet with iron shoes. Wearing iron shoes means to look into our own mind to subdue our own delusions which make us think and react negatively. In this way, one will be better able to handle relationships.

Guru-disciple relationships are also not perfect – the Guru is Buddha but shows the aspect of a human being. However, due to the disciple's afflictions, the disciple projects his own faults onto the Guru. So the perfect guru-disciple relationship will only be actualized when the delusion is purified.



**Q:** A has been deeply hurt by B. A believes that he could have hurt B in their previous lives and it is B's turn this life to hurt him. So A decides to forgive B, hoping that any karmic debt he owes B would then be settled and the negative karmic link he has been having with B would then be cut.

Questions:

- a. Is it correct to assume that A and B have created a negative karmic link between themselves by taking turns to hurt each other in their previous lives?
- b. By A forgiving B this life, is the negative karmic link between them cut?
- c. Although forgiven by A, does B still have to answer to the negative karma he created for hurting A?

**Ans:** For (a) the answer is Yes. For (b) the karmic link may not necessarily be cut because the other person giving forgiveness is not in itself the direct antidote. The one who commits the harmful act must apply the antidote. Therefore, there is the need to identify the exact negative karma and the find the direct antidote. Then it is possible to purify that negativity and cut the negative karmic link. For (c) If one is unable to purify the negative karma, the result must be experienced.



**Q: How do we explain to a child to have kind thoughts towards an abusive parent?**

Ans: Abuse is totally wrong. The poor child doesn't have maturity to carry out thought transformation efforts such as transforming the negative situation into a positive one. Best way to help the child is for you to provide some love and honesty from your side. And if you have opportunity to bring the child into your care, then gradually the child will be able to deal with his/her past experience and overcome it. As a Buddhist practitioner, the best way is to bring the child into a spiritual life/introduce Dharma in a gentle way e.g. learn about karma, compassion so that whatever suffering one receives from others, will regard the harm-givers as objects of compassion. Then that helps one to forgive and progress in one's life.