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Chance and fate
Phra Bunchuang
- translated by Phra Mang Kone

Abridgement of Unibuds Dhamma talk given on Friday,
May 27th 1994 at the University of NSW.

I arrived from Thailand yesterday and was invited by Phra Ratsamee and Phra Mang Kone to join you all tonight. I feel extremely happy to see you all. Usually in the forest monastery, the monks practise in the forest to train & learn. But the Buddha taught us not to focuss outside ourselves, but to reflect on own existence and to question ourselves. I am very pleased to have this chance to talk to you about the Buddha's example!

Our topic tonight is chance and fate. What does this mean for us? These words in ordinary language may mean something like luck or bad luck, or the good or bad condition in which we live. When we think about our worldly condition and situation, we can see this relates to our karma. We are where we are through previous causes. This is cause and effect as the Buddha taught.

We can reflect on this and think about how it applies to our family situation. Our actions at home affect all the family, and we should try to behave with consideration. Our actions with with our family, friends, or teachers may produce good or bad results. The doing is the cause or in Pali, karma. This cause can become the effect or the chance of the future.

Sometimes we need to reflect more to think and understand how our actions have led us to our present condition. If we think more carefully about what results our actions will bring to our family, friends and teachers, then it will help us to behave more wisely. This will be the effect from understanding the cause. Then we will not blindly accept superstitious advice about our situations being the result of nihilistic or existential chance or fate!

We monks devote our whole lives learning the teachings of the Buddha. We try to create the causes now to understand and cultivate a future mind free from greed, hatred, and delusion. If we devote our time creating and developing our spiritual path, it will help us let go our attachments and our bad luck!

We live only about 80 years, and yet really, our lives are so short when we compare this to the age of the earth! So now is a good opportunity to think about the value of your lives. We should practise giving to others, and create good causes for good future effects now! We should share this knowledge with all beings. We can look at the Buddha's example. Did he get paid wages? He didn't ask for rewards from us. Yet his life was full of blessings and prosperity just through setting a good example!

Q1 What is the difference between chance & fate?

A1 I think chance can be considered as having an opportunity to do different things. Fate may be considered to be the sickness and death that all beings must experience.

Q2 How much opportunity and choice do we have for

improving our past karma?

A2 We can observe, practise, and see the results of our past actions. We can see the bad things for ourselves. By reflecting on the results of our past actions, when opportunities arise, we have a choice to improve our future situation by behaving wisely rather than selfishly.

Let me tell you a story. Mogalina was Buddha's right hand disciple. He was known for his psychic powers in meditation. Many lives previously, he had tried to get rid of his mother because she was old, sick, and useless. He took her to the forest. He tried to pretend that a robber had come to get her and kill her. From that action, Mogalina himself observed that in the next life, he was born in the hell. But many lives later he had a chance to meet the Buddha and become an Arahant. However, another sect tried to kill him because he was famous for his psychic powers. Eventually, they killed him, which was the result of his past bad karma. Mogalina tried not to let them create more bad karma for themselves, but he couldn't.

Q3 Does our fate differ if we are Christians ?

A3 We teach cause and effect in Buddhism. In Christianity, they use the god to punish us. We Buddhists can still contemplate on this to keep us alert and moral. It is a different teaching to Buddhism, but its aim is for same result - that people should behave respectfully to one another. All religions try to teach the same things - to try to avoid doing evil. But Buddhism goes beyond that. By understanding the Four Noble Truths; - (1 Suffering is universal, 2 The cause of suffering is craving, 3 The cure for suffering is the elimination of craving, 4 The way to achieve the elimination of suffering is to follow the Middle Path, which is described in the Noble Eightfold Path. ie:- 1 Right understanding, 2 Right thought, 3 Right speech, 4 Right action, 5 Right livelihood, 6 Right effort, 7 Right mindfulness, 8 Right concentration.), it will help us relinquish our mental defilements of greed and anger.

Q4 Is this Dhamma talk by chance or by fate?

A4 It is a good opportunity, for us all to reflect how we can improve ourselves and practise more positively.

Q5 Buddhism explains events are a result of karma. How does Buddhism explain the miraculous healings that have occurred to believers in the Christian faith?

A5 When we meet someone holy or someone for whom we have great respect, we may find great inspiration through their loving kindness and purity. A sick person may absorb this energy and this may help them to practice better. Practising this goodness will help the process of their healing.

Q6 Can we run away from our fate?

A6 We cannot physically avoid problems, but mentally we can, just like Mogalina.

Q7 What about using biotechnology, DNA and gene manipulation to alter our karma?

A7 The new baby or beings will still need to mentally cultivate and develop good habits, regardless of their physical perfection!

Q8 If a baby avoids an hereditary disease through genetic manipulation, does this mean it has good karma?
A8 Each of us determine our own karma. The baby's state of mind and attitudes will still determine its later conditions and life.

Phra Bunchuang was ordained in Thailand 14 years ago, and is currently residing at Sunnataram Forest Monastery, Bundanoon. Abridgement of the Dhamma talk given on Friday, May 27th 1994 at the UNSW as reported by Mike Kiddle. Friday Dhamma Talks between 7pm - 8.30pm are conducted regularly by the Unibuds through out the university semesters, and are open to all students and the general public.