

THE TRACKS OF MY KARMA

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This is one of my reoccurring themes, a favorite if only because it is something I have to work on every day, my accumulation of karma. In other words, I seem to accumulate karma constantly and need I tell you that not all of it is good?

We accumulate karma all the time. If we move and breathe, we are imprinting and laying down tracks in our mindstream, day in and day out. And if we worry about something we cannot do anything about, we are carving and reinforcing deep grooves in our consciousness. However, it is possible to drastically cut back on our karma imprinting, but it takes discipline and practice. At least in theory, the process is easy to understand.

Whenever I'm on a walk and my dog picks up a dead bird or something else equally smelly I just say "leave it!" and he usually does. We can do something similar ourselves if we are willing to pay attention. We can start with things we obsess over, ideas or feelings that get stuck in our minds and that we turn over and over with worry.

There is a very simple rule I remind myself of all the time and that is "Don't add insult to injury." For example, let's say someone says something very unkind to me. It strikes at the heart and hurts my feelings. That is the injury. The insult is, if after being injured by the remark, I spend the next few days or weeks going over and over it in my mind trying to make it come out right. That is where we can tell ourselves to just "leave it."

And the Buddhist training would have us not feel injured in the first place but to understand that whoever made this remark to us was probably in a bad state and deserves our compassion and understanding rather than our ire. Buddhist monks would not blink at an insult. I can't say that I can often rise to that level, but I am learning to just drop it and not insult myself with hours of worry and self-examination on top of whatever injury I imagine took place in the first place. I am learning to just leave it.

Even something as simple as not prolonging these simple events that upset us, by not endlessly worrying about them, greatly affects our mindstream in a very positive way. It is bad enough that we allow someone to hurt our feelings, but so much worse if we add to that our own endless imprinting and deepening of the event. By just leaving it, we accumulate no additional karma. Our mind is clear.

Multiply this by all the "heartache, and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to" (to quote Shakespeare) over the course of a day and you have some very real karmic savings. If you keep in mind that the Buddhists teach that all the karma we accumulate (whatever goes in, whatever inscribes itself) will at some point have to ripen and come back out, then learning to just "leave it" saves us much suffering both now and in the future.

I pointed out earlier that grasping this concept with our understanding and actually living it are two quite different things. However, we can at least be aware of this and begin to practice it as we can. And dropping or just "leaving it" feels so good too!