

Causality of the Past, Present and Future

We often hear: “Why does someone who commits many evil acts do not get punished, while others who have done many good deeds have such hard lives?” This is because ordinary people do not know the truth and base their conclusion solely on what they can visually observe and believe that there is no justice or retribution. They no longer trust that they will reap what they sowed. In reality, consequences of our actions follow us around like our own shadows. We normally fail to realize this because we cannot see beyond this current lifetime. When Buddhism teaches cause and effect, it refers to cause and effect in multiple lifetimes, not just this very life that we can experience now. Every sentient being has its past, present and future lives. There is a Buddhist saying: “In order to know what happened in your past, simply look at what you bear in the present. To predict your future, look at your actions now.” There is absolute truth in Buddhist causality of the past, present and future. Everything we do now, good or bad, gain or loss, has its effect. If you hope for a certain harvest, you will have to plan accordingly. What we sow this life will be the fruit we reap thereafter.

The cause and effect of Buddhism isn't limited to just this current lifetime. Take crops as an example. For some crops, seeds that are sown in the spring or summer, crops are harvested in the fall or winter of the same year. This is an example of a cause that results in an effect during this very lifetime. For other crops, seeds that are sown are not harvested until the next year. Cause of this harvest does not produce an effect until the next life. There are yet still other crops of which there are no fruits to be harvested until many years later. This is a cause that takes many lifetimes to produce an effect. One of two stories were described in the Damamūka Nidāna Sūtra, vol. 5, "The Elderly who does not have ears, eyes and tongue episode" no. 24 stated: during the Buddha's days in Sravasti, there lived an elder with unparalleled wealth. He had five beautiful daughters but no son. The law of the kingdom ruled that the estate of a deceased father would automatically become the property of the kingdom if he did not have a son. Fortunately, the elder passed away when his wife was pregnant and later she gave birth to a son. The son inherited all the wealth of the father but he was born without a tongue, eye, or ear. The elder's wife sought insight from the Buddha regarding the cause of this fate. The Buddha recounted that once upon a time there was an honest and generous man named Tanrushize who was appointed by the king as a marshal to settle financial disputes, and was known to be very impartial. One day Tanrushize's brother Huluoshize came before Tanrushize to authenticate a big business loan to a merchant, bringing along the merchant and Huluoshize's son as witnesses. Shortly after, Huluoshize passed away. The merchant's boat

sank and the merchandize was lost and he made no profits. Huluoshize's son did not bear to ask the merchant to repay him back the loan at the time. A few years later, the merchant made a big profit from his business but refused to repay the money. To cover up his transgression, he bribed Tanrushize's wife with a beautiful jewel. Since she was madly in love with the jewel, she threatened that she would take her own life and that of their young son unless Tanrushize committed fraud. Tanrushize complied helplessly. Because of the karma of this grievous false speech in his previous life, he was reborn without ears, eyes and a tongue. However, since he was generous and charitable to the poor, he was reborn into a wealthy family. In the Ksitigarbhasutra Sutra, "The Karma Based episode of Ordinary Sentient Beings" vol 4, Buddha stated that in the future life, anyone who performs malevolent acts, does not believe in the law of causality, engages in sexual misconducts, lies, gives divisive and harsh speeches, or slanders Mahayana practitioners will fall onto unwholesome paths. (CBETA, T04, no. 202, p. 0382, a06-p. 0383, a22)

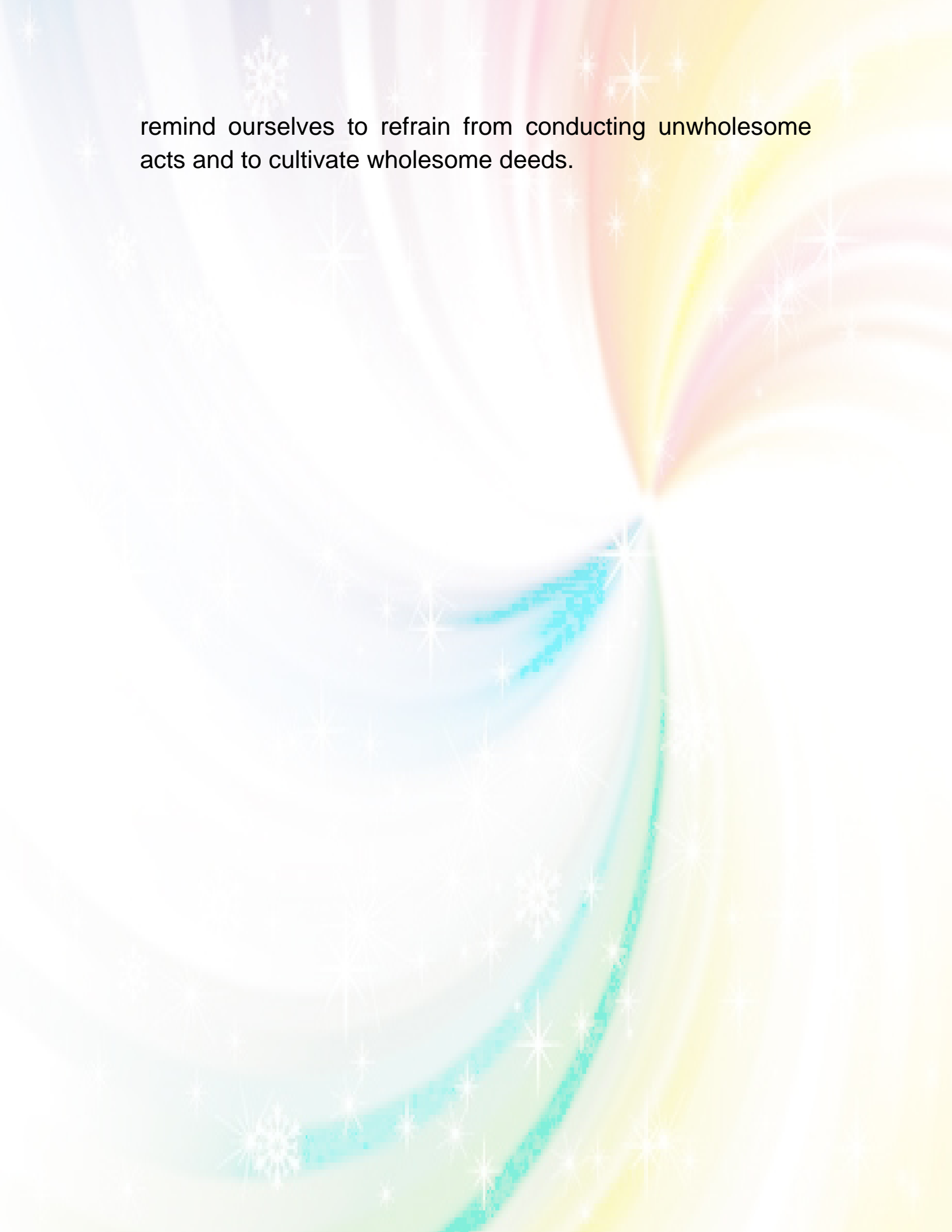
Also in the Damamūka Nidāna Sūtra, another account demonstrated a similar occurrence:

Once there was a poor old servant who worked for a wealthy family. She was not given enough to eat nor clothes to wear and often beaten by her wealthy master. One day as she was fetching water by the river she was overcome by sorrow and started to cry. Katyayana, Buddha's disciple inquired sympathetically: " Dear old lady, why are you so sad? If you are tired of being poor, why not sell the poverty?" The old servant replied, " No one likes to be poor, so how is it

possible for me to sell it?" Katyayana then said, "You certainly can! Please believe me. If you would like to sell poverty, you should wash this vase very well, fill in clean water and offer to the monks and nuns that pass by." The old servant asked again, "But this vase belongs to my master, how would it be my offering?" Katyayana answered, "The vase is not yours, but you fetch the water yourself, how would it be not your offering?" The old servant immediately did what Katyayana told her: she washed the vase, filled it with water and offered it to Katyayana and other monks and nuns. Because of her sincere offering that planted the wholesome seeds, she was reborn as a celestial lady in the gods' realm in her next life. (CBETA, T04, no. 202, p. 0383, c29-p. 0384, b19)

In the Ksitigarbhasutra Sutra, Buddha taught that anyone who plants wholesome roots, practices charitable giving or offerings, renovates temples or pagodas, repairs sutras or contributes even just a dust, a hair, will reborn into wondrous paths thousands of life times if he or she dedicates the merit to the dharma realms. Such a person will be reborn into this wondrous path three lifetimes if he or she dedicates the merit to himself or his own family.

From the above, we can learn that karmic retribution follows us like our shadows. If one plants wholesome seeds and when the conditions are right, one will surely receive wholesome fruits. Similarly, if you owe debts, you will surely have to repay someday. It's inevitable that one receives retribution for one's actions and it is only a matter of time. We should believe in the law of causality and constantly



remind ourselves to refrain from conducting unwholesome acts and to cultivate wholesome deeds.