

## *Defunct your previous kamma with vipassana*

8 September 2004

Dear Fred,

Sorry for late reply. Here are the answers to your questions.

*It is said that once one 'enters the stream' and becomes a Sotapanna one is then safe from rebirth in the lower realms. Why? Is it impossible for such a one to break any of the five precepts, or rather that they cannot create new negative karma weighty enough to merit such rebirth? As we know, there are many shades of grey between black and white, so an act which breaks one of the precepts can differ in severity and hence in result.*

Yes, a Sotapana can still easily break the five precepts, no doubt of that. This is due to weakness of Tom or our mental self, caused by the lacking of vipassana practice. The difference is that sotapana will be burdened by tremendous guilt after their immoral acts. You must understand that the person who is qualified to be the first level of holiness or sotapana, that person must reach all the requirements I lay down in The part one of the User Guide to Life which resulting in certain way of thinking. They must know the sole purpose of life. In the case of Thai people who are born Buddhist, it is in fact rather easy for them to say: my goal of life is to go to Nirvana. People who have this kind of perspective about life would naturally shape and mould their way of thinking into certain path. They naturally have high moral threshold, which deter them from doing bad deeds. Should they do any, they would be burden with guilt, which in turn will teach them not to do bad again. So, it is highly unlikely for a Sotapana to intentionally carry out an immoral action especially a weighty kamma because all the rough edges of their hearts have been smoothed over by the moral way of thinking. Consequently their habitual or regular kamma will be on the positive side. I want to say it is impossible for a sotapana to carry out a negative weighty kamma. Don't forget that Sotapana will not stop as they are forever. Life moves as an on-going process, sotapana will naturally seeks vipassana knowledge and will soon engage in the vipassana practice. Once they engage in the vipassana which is the weighty kamma in the positive side, even though they still have the occasional bad kamma, due to the failure of resisting the temptation, their vipassana practice will still be able to carry them through to the upper realm should they die.

Even though the sotapana haven't yet engaged much in the vipassana practice before they die, because they are naturally good people, their habitual kamma - good thoughts, good speeches and good deeds - will determine their rebirth. Nevertheless, there was an example, in my book, about a King's wife who went to hell for 7 days because she was thinking about how she had lie to her husband as she was dying. That was just some odd chance and not habitual kamma. Therefore, the lower realm rebirth will not be a long term, only a very brief one. To prevent this unfortunate incident is

to make sure that you are in good control of your mind at the critical moment of dying. So the death drill I talked in chapter page 126 chapter 9 is very useful.

Vipassana practice is designed to defunct all your previous kamma both good and bad. As you engage in your vipassana practice, you are actually working to defunct your previous good and bad kamma and that's why and how you can go to Nirvana instead of going to heavens or hells. Please read about the different type of kamma in chapter 16 page 296-297 of *The User Guide to Life* or go to my website <http://supawangreen.in.th/userguide/ch16.htm>

*Is it possible for a Sotapanna to literally 'fall from grace' and lose their Ariyahood to return to being 'Putuchon'? or is it like getting on a moving escalator from which there is no going back?*

It is impossible for a sotapana to return to being a putuchon. Once you enter the stream, there is no going back, you have booked yourself a one way ticket to nirvana. Once you have a glimpse of light, you cannot return to live in the dark again and pretend as if you knew nothing. This makes it even more difficult for the practitioners because from then on you cannot sit back, the fighting will have to go on and on and on until the whole mission is accomplished completely. So, don't be too cheerful and overjoyed if anyone rates you at the third level of holiness. Just ignore the praise, take it as a pinch of salt, it means nothing. Just remember that as long as you haven't reached the end of your journey, you cannot rest, keep on doing until you know for certain that you have no problem with yourself.

*What is your opinion on the subject of chanting? I know Thais think of 'Wai Pra suat mon' as being an essential part of daily practice. Most people probably chant 'under their breath' or in their hearts and only out loud when together. Christians would call it 'praying'. I understand that daily chanting can be a means to get rid of problems..... such as a woman chanting and dedicating the merit to her husband whom she knows is having an affair, in the hope that he will return to her. Or parents chanting and dedicating the merit to their children who are not studying in school as they should, or are conducting themselves improperly. It can also take a 'rough jewel' such as one who's heart is too coarse to practice Vipassana, and if they chant, to polish it and refine it until it is able to do so. It is one way to make merit.*

The chanting is the strategy to eradicate the existing Jerry (bad thoughts and feeling) and also to prevent the yet arriving Jerry. Chanting is meant to have the direct impact to the chanter, to make their minds clearer, allow them to have the better perspective regarding the goal of life and make their mind more peaceful, in control. To chant and ask the supernatural being to grant their wishes is not a way to Nirvana. This practice is still very much in the nature of animism. There is no real prove that it works. There are more proves that such prayers for help doesn't work. Many people have asked God at their critical moment to help saving their lives but their wish were in vain. I am sure those children, parents and teachers who were held hostages in the school gym in Beslan last week must be frantically pray for God to help them. But did he? I used to ask deities for things I wanted but I felt terribly selfish. I knew then it wasn't the right way for self-refuge. I just didn't feel right within my heart every time I asked

someone in heaven to help me. One day, I told myself to stop asking for things. As my vipassana practice was progressing, I found that this practice could help me more than my prayer for help. The vipassana practice will make you do less and less of such asking through prayer.

*Does an Ariyabukhon still try to make positive merit, or just the grey kind?*

Holy people do not bend over backward to do positive merit. They do it because it is so natural for them to do. They don't know any other way. Vipassana practice is the best of the best positive merit. As the vipassana practice is proceeding, the practitioners don't even know that they are doing good deeds. If you know you are deliberating doing good deeds, you must let go of that thought right away. Don't feed such unhealthy thoughts. So, I don't quite understand what you mean by the grey kind of merit.

*As you said, I am very fortunate to be able to read Thai and so read your books in both the english and Thai versions. The English volumes being mainly aimed at Non-Buddhists and in particular Westerners have a different flavour to the Thai versions, which are far more detailed. Ajarn Thong Rak (the speaker in the CD I sent you) also expressed his delight that I could understand his speeches, and I was able to fully agree with him.*

*Yours*

*in*

*Dharma*

*Fred*

I am happy for you. Please keep up with your practice as this is the only way to self-refuge. I hope the above helps to pacify your doubt.

Metta,  
Sue