



the case of the talkative traveler

Sam Sera, Karma Investigator, puts his *Lam Rim Chenmo* into his holster and takes off on an airplane. Even there, he finds he has to solve another karmic puzzle.

THAT PARTICULAR DAY I WAS NOT IN THE OFFICE. I was flying back from a Dharma teaching. You have to keep learning when you are in this business. I wish there was some way to get the teaching in real time, like a teleconference or something. I dislike flying by myself.

Most people dislike flying alone because you're not really alone. You are stuffed into an aluminum tube with scores of people, many of them drinking, and you can't choose who you sit next to. Just one more minor suffering in this realm. On this flight, I wanted to catch up on some Dharma reading and maybe even pretend to nap while I meditated. But it was not to be.

The man crunched in next to me was busy almost the whole time – typing emails into his computer, talking on the

phone, holding open a magazine and watching the in-flight movie. He was a salesman of some kind, I think. It was not a peaceful setting.

He finished one call, put down the phone, and said out loud in a way that was meant to invite a conversation, "Wow, I need a vacation! Say, bud, are you on vacation? Or business? I'm doing a little of both, really. You see, I'm working on this deal ..."

HE WENT ON ENDLESSLY. I hoped he would notice that my eyes were glazing over and I was trying to read my book. Again he invited me to speak. "But enough about me, my name is Bob." He stuck out his hand in a friendly manner. "Who are you and what do you do?" Since I could no longer ignore him, I decided maybe I could help him.

"Sam. Sam Sera. I'm a Karma Investigator." Short and to the point.

"Really?" he enthused. "Karma, huh? You know, I have a niece who's into that karma stuff. She also has crystals and things all over her house, it's a nice house though, I helped her to get financing by talking to this banker friend of mine ..." Bob proceeded to give me a short course on alternative real estate financing. I was trying to get a glimpse at my book again. I don't think Bob ever inhaled.

"... BUT ANYWAY, I NEVER UNDERSTOOD THIS KARMA STUFF SHE TALKS ABOUT. What do karma people do?"

It was my turn to talk again. "I help people to understand why things happen, and what they can do about it."

"Well, maybe you can help me get a day off, heh, heh. The last time I was on vacation ..." He seemed to be addicted to the sound of his own voice. He needed a 12-steps group, something like On-and-on Anon.

I cut him off. "Funny you mention time off. I hear that for people who talk meaninglessly 'there are no places to take your leisure, no parks, no glades, no pools of cool water ...'" I lovingly stroked the loaded *Lam-Rim* under my coat in its shoulder holster as I quoted the great Je Tsongkhapa in its pages on Karma and Results. I realized too late that he took offense. Now he cut me off.

"Hey, what do you mean, 'meaninglessly?' Are you some kind of wise guy? Some kind of guru going to ask for donations and convert my children?" He eyed me suspiciously.

"No, I'm just a Karma Investigator. I help people." I finished the quote in my head, "... and many things to make you afraid." I didn't want to aggravate this guy any more.

"Well, good! So I'm a talker. I'm a good talker and a good salesman. Well, pretty good. I just need to be at the right place at the right time, that's all." He cheered up and started chirping again. "Now, my buddy Fred, he's a good salesman. He just sits quietly while sales drop into his lap. He's amazing. We call him the Wizard, because he's like this wise old ..." I let him describe Fred's and his history together in the sales business, then I tuned out again. Bob, frustrated, noticed I wasn't listening.

"Oh, hell. No one cares what I have to say. No wonder I'm such a bad salesman! You help people? Tell me, Mr. Karma Guy, what will make me a better salesman?" He looked at me pleadingly

"Well, if you really want to know ..." I was hesitant to speak up because I didn't want to hurt his self-confidence any more. Bad self-confidence was also a karmic effect of useless speech.

"Yes, I do. Why do my deals always fall through?" He asked for it. I whipped out my *Lam-Rim* and opened it to the relevant section. I read out loud.

"BECAUSE YOU HAVE TALKED MEANINGLESSLY, FRUITS REFUSE TO GROW ON THE TREES, or they start to grow at the wrong times, never at the right times, and seem ripe when they are not yet ripe ..."

He considered the words. "Fruit, to me, sounds like sales. They're never ripe when I'm there." Bob was catching on quickly. "Maybe there is something to this."

I encouraged him. "Yes, maybe. Here's some more.

"No one listens to you. No one respects what you say. No one thinks what you say has any particular value, and you are afflicted with a lack of confidence." I stopped there as he considered more.

"So, all of that from just talking too much?" he asked.

"Well, no, it's not just talking too much," I explained, as it had been explained to me, "It's the content. Limit your words to what is important, like, Life, Meaning. Use your speech to help others – to solve their problems. I mean, isn't that what a salesperson really does? Helps to solve people's problems?" I asked the question because Bob had become way too quiet. It unnerved me. I wanted him to talk again, oddly.

"Well, yes, I guess that is what I do. I help people, too! Wow, all of those problems, just from useless talking." Bob was doing some serious self-reflection. This was a good sign.

I gave him more. "And it not just useless talking, it's 'useless information.' You're overloaded with stimulus, like most of us. I mean, look." I pointed to the magazines, the emails, the phone and the movie playing. "We don't make time to think about the bigger picture, to gather wisdom, not just information."

Bob protested, "But I have to keep up with things to do my job."

"OH, REALLY? I BET YOU DON'T EVEN REMEMBER WHAT WAS IN THE NEWS YOU READ THREE DAYS AGO. Or who you just sent emails to, or even one quarter of the movies you've seen. Have you?" I challenged him.

"Hmm, well, now that you mention it ... Hey, I could save so much time by ignoring the stuff I don't need or remember, and focus on the stuff that matters! Maybe even get some rest finally!" Now he got it.

I decided that I liked Bob after all, so I asked him about himself. "So what do you sell, anyway?"

"Oh, it's not that interesting. I make teleconference systems so people can have business meetings remotely, rather than traveling all the time. We're looking to set up the equipment somewhere as a demo at reduced cost, but no one seems to have time to think about it." An idea was dawning. "Say, why did you say you were traveling?"

So, after I was musing about not liking to travel for teachings, I meet someone who might be able to solve the problem. This 'karma stuff' is starting to amaze even me.

You never know who you might meet in the Karma Investigation business. ☸

Sam Sera is the alter ego of Jim Dey who seldom flies from his home in Tucson, AZ. All characters in Sam Sera, except for Holy Teachers, are purely fictional. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is the projection of your karma. He solved The Case of the Dirty Debutante in MANDALA March 2002.