

Making the most of our Precious Human Life

As taught by Ven.Geshe Sangey Thinley at Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling on 6th April, 2014.

Before one begins to engage in a dharma practice, one prepares by arranging oneself in a comfortable seat, chair or cushion in order to be ready to engage. And then we establish both the outer and the inner motivation, which adds great power to the great activity of engaging in dharma. Establishing the proper motivation is very important.

Contemplate the true fortune you have to be in this position with the freedom and endowments to be able to engage in a practice like this. I have this body with the endowments and can make my life meaningful with this precious human rebirth. I have the potential to create merit and create fortunate rebirths.

If we think about it we have two great works in this life, accomplishing the circumstances for happiness in this life and that of future lives. These are the two great works for us in our Buddhist practice.

The life that we are currently experiencing is the result of the merit from our previous lives. We have a human rebirth and our fortune today relates to the positive karma we have accumulated in previous lives. We have to be careful to retain this fortune of positive merit and develop the firm resolve to engage in virtue and avoid non virtue thereby increasing merit and not wasting it.

As the great Indian Master, Chandrakirti said, one has to be very cautious. If we do not build upon the merit formally accumulated we may fall into the lower realms and it will be difficult to resume a human rebirth in the future. Like a car that is wrecked in an accident, it will be impossible to drive it again.

We can defeat the purpose of having a human rebirth if we waste this precious opportunity. We have two clear options; One: we can cherish ourselves or, Two: we can cherish others. If we keep a self-centred attitude it will not benefit us. If however we choose to benefit others or cherish others then our future lives will be positive.

So we do this by practicing the 'Exchanging of Self for Others'.

For instance if we maintain self-cherishing we will not be happy and others will not like us. If we have the attitude of cherishing others we will be happy and others will like us, others recognise a good kind heart. Others will be grateful and will treat you well. This is an example of the immediate benefit of cherishing others.

All beings are the same in that they have minds, this is the consciousness. Since this is the case we all wish for happiness and fear suffering. We are all the same in this way.

In the case of animals, they do not have the ability to learn and understand how to avoid the different types of suffering. Perhaps superficially they understand, but they do not know how to achieve the great transcendent happiness. However humans have the ability to do this, they do have the ability and the means to achieve this ultimate happiness and freedom from suffering.

Even in a limited way if you look at the difference between animals and humans. If you look at an animal and its means of dealing with wounds, it has to let it heal naturally. Humans can skilfully deal with illness and wounds. This applies to the means and tools and skills human can apply to understanding concepts and philosophy and apply this to developing the mind and heart.

As humans we have the choice and have the ability to create the causes for true happiness, the transcendental happiness. If we don't create the causes, and worse create the causes for suffering, then we will have lower rebirths. However if we create the right conditions we can achieve the great liberation from samsara. It is ultimately our decision. We have a responsibility to make the right choice.

Sometimes we think we wish to engage in dharma practice but say we don't have time. But eventually we will, like maybe next year. This is a form of laziness. We need to apply ourselves now to the best of our ability. We have to be very committed. There are some who say they are too busy and can't apply themselves. This is a mistake as there is no certainty you will have time in the future. If you have an illness and die you will have lost the opportunity. This is faulty thinking. For this reason we have to do what we can now while we have the opportunity to do so. We have this attitude based on the presumption of time. But time is passing quickly and each day we get closer to the end of our lives. Constantly time is passing and our lifespan is being exhausted. If we put off our practice there will be a time when there will be no option, so we have to engage while we have the opportunity.

When we observe this moment by moment process of change, we can see the law of cause and effect and the cause and conditions created from this.

Every thought or action creates a shift and change. If there was no karmic interdependence then there wouldn't be this cause for change and all things would be permanent. We can see this clearly with an external phenomenon like a flower. The seed and the conditions applied to it will bring about a flower. If the right conditions are not applied then it won't produce a beautiful flower. This is how it is with respect to the inner experience of happiness and suffering. If we don't create good causes then no happiness will be achieved. If we create negative causes then negative experiences result. We must understand that if we want to avoid suffering then we have to make sure the causes and conditions are not there for the opposite to happen. We have to understand that it is not just coincidental, that it's not beyond our power, it happens as a result of definite causes created by ourselves.

We have two components body and mind. Of these two, the mind is the most powerful. If you have an illness for example and are suffering, if the mind is well it is able to lessen the suffering of the body. But if the mind is suffering and distressed then one has greater suffering and is not able to heal the body. In this way the most important thing here is the condition of the mind.

Whether we have happiness depends on our way of thinking. If we have a mind of positive and content disposition we will be happy and content. If we have negative mind we will never be satisfied and will be unhappy. The mind is first and foremost. If we cultivate our mind in a positive way this will colour our experiences. If we have a negative mind we will only respond and see life in a self-limiting way.

As Buddha said, one is responsible for one's self and is the friend of oneself. We then have to understand that we have the power to create the conditions we wish to have. If we examine this and are cautious about our actions and ones results being our experiences. In the world there are more people who do not accept the dharma than do, but they still have love and compassion. People can have love and compassion without faith in dharma. For those who have developed faith in the dharma there is a difference, in that the love and compassion one develops has a vast, unconditional quality and is more profound.

We have to be convinced of the incredible power of the altruistic mind. If we have the two purposes as stated, the happiness of future lives is much more important than this life. We don't have much time we should use our time well and apply ourselves. If we don't think long term then this will be a huge mistake and be such a shame.

For those who practice and have faith in the dharma we have the possibility of cessation and liberation. If we achieve this then we achieve the final and stable transcendent happiness. This is achieved only by liberation from cyclic existence.

Although some achieve the higher states of the demi gods, these states are not anywhere close to the final unchanging ever lasting happiness. There is no lasting happiness as long as we remain in samsara, until we achieve this mind state of liberation. Therefore the opportunity is right now. There are different versions of liberation, but this tradition views liberation as being when one abandons afflictive emotions and the route is cut to cyclic existence.

As far as realising the ultimate view this is not easy. In this lifetime then we can study and develop some conviction in the law of karma. We need to do the best we can to have a pure heart and abandon a negative mind state. We do not have anything to fear if we practice like this. We will then definitely not have a lower rebirth in the animal realms.

We hear this advice but if we look at our lives there are so many different causes positive, negative and neutral. We look at these and ask what is the most powerful or dominant. If you think about what makes virtue very strong or determine the karmic weight? It's not only the motivation.

Object.

If, like with stealing, first there is the intention to steal, then they carry out the activity, then they have the attitude of rejoicing they have the car. This is very powerful. But if one of those three are not present, like you regret what you have done by stealing the car, then the non-virtue is not so strong. These factors define both the karmic weight and strength of the deed.

Like with a virtuous activity. Like coming to the teachings, you had the intention and you listen well. You then feel good and you gained from this. This all has good virtue. But say you regret coming for some reason this then has less value.

The rejoicing is particularly powerful. With all factors, the intention, the action, the response and the rejoicing this is so important, in particular the regret or lack. If you regret a non-virtue, or have remorse and you recognise the non-virtue, then it is not so powerful. This is very powerful - the awareness of the negative or positive action and its effect.

Intention, action,

From Tibetan the terms are: 1. base/object, 2. intention, 3. action, 4. completion.

It is important to understand this and the power of completion then you know if one of these is missing then the non-virtue and karmic result is not so strong. Like if someone goes fishing, involves killing, then they regret it, this reduces the negative karma. If we can remember this then we can apply it. Like on the TV the fishing programme the people are so happy about it. It goes both ways, remember to rejoice in virtuous action – this is important.

Question: If you complete a negative action that at the time you rejoiced, then later you regret can you get rid of negative karma?

Yes, thinking about virtuous action like generosity then regretting this later will negate the positive result. The reverse is true for negative actions that are ultimately regretted.

Causes and conditions have to come together like the car with petrol. It's like this, we can't expect the results to come if we don't have both.

(Translated by Virginia Blum from New York: Typed out by Teresa Rudgley: Edited by Kaari Schleich)