
Study Group - "Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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༄ ལྷོ་སྤྱད་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



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Taking the Essence of This Life: Its Rarity, Meaning And Actually Taking the Essence

Lama Tsong Khapa: 'Foundation of All Excellence Prayer':

"Having understood that this life of leisure is found but once and finding it again is extremely difficult, generate a strong prayer that may I produce in myself the thought of constantly taking the essence of this life day and night."

This prayer has four aspects:

1. Contemplate the **rarity** of finding such a wonderful human life of leisure and freedom. This first line literally implies that this excellent human life, which one has obtained now is obtained only once. This does not necessarily mean that in the past one has not been a human. Rather by thinking of the number of lives that one has taken in the past, then most of these were a lower rebirth than now. It is therefore right to say that finding this type of life now is like finding it only once and finding this type of life again is very difficult. It is as if this human rebirth is found only once.
2. Contemplate the **meaning** of this life.
3. Then generate a strong, spontaneous thought to **take the essence** or **meaning** of this life.
4. If one has visualised Guru Shakyamuni Buddha on one's crown, then make a prayer:
"May Lord Buddha send down blessing to generate this urgent thought to take the essence day and night."

Three Ways Of Taking The Essence Of This Life

There are three ways to take the purpose or essence of this life:

1. **Small Level:** Use this human life to create the correct causes and conditions which will result in a better future rebirth - as a human or god rather than in the lower realms.
2. **Middle Level:** Use this human life to create the causes to completely free oneself from cyclic existence by attaining liberation.
3. **Highest Level:** Use this human life to work for full enlightenment for the sake of all living beings.

For whatever purpose one chooses to utilise this life, it is essential to overcome attachment or grasping to the temporary affairs or the pleasures of this life. Unless we reduce attachment to or concern for this life, we cannot use this precious human rebirth to fulfil any of these three purposes of existence.

Actual Method To Take The Essence Of This Life: Refuge & Karma

Firstly as the foundation of one's spiritual practice one should regard Buddha as the perfect teacher, Dharma as the perfect

path and the followers of Dharma as the perfect spiritual friend. Refuge is laying the foundation of one's practice.

Secondly one must practise the law of cause and effect.

The connection between taking refuge and observing the law of cause and effect is that by developing faith in the refuge objects and taking refuge in them, one can temporarily prevent any bad rebirths. That is one can save oneself from falling to lower realms once or twice. However, in order to be permanently free from the lower realms one needs more than the protection of the refuge objects. These instructions concerning the refuge objects must be practised and in particular the law of cause and effect must be practised. The only way to be free of all types of suffering is by practising dharma itself. This is analogous to a criminal, who convicted of some serious offence, might bribe an official to escape. But, if he continues those illegal actions, he will still (one day) have to go to prison. Therefore the topic of cause and effect comes after refuge since cause and effect must be practised to achieve one's final liberation.

The Actual Practice Of Cause & Effect: What Is To Be Practised And To Be Abandoned

For that prisoner to be completely free from prison, he must abide within the law. Similarly, if one is freed from a lower rebirth by taking refuge or by the help of the three refuge objects, one shall soon fall back to the lower realms, if the instructions of the dharma are not followed. The practice of dharma is mainly the practice of cause and effect - what is to be adopted and what is to be abandoned (or what to do and what not to do).

Gaining Conviction In The Law Of Cause And Effect: Two Methods

The practice of the law of cause and effect means to practise virtue and abandon non-virtue. This is because virtuous actions result in happiness whereas non-virtuous actions produce unsatisfactory results. This is what Buddha taught. The complete teachings on the law of cause and effect (e.g. the results of practising patience, generosity and morality) come from Buddha who also taught that any difficulties, which are faced in my life, are the result of one's own karma or actions.

There are various levels to the understanding of the law of cause and effect. The very subtle levels are completely beyond normal perceptions, and to prove these very subtle levels of truth a similarly subtle reason is needed. At this level cause and effect cannot be proved by using some outer example. It is more subtle than the theory of emptiness or impermanence. With emptiness and impermanence there is always an obvious argument to help understand their meaning, if one's mind is open to logic. Whereas when Guru Shakyamuni Buddha says "Generosity results in wealth and morality results in better rebirth", then at a gross level this can be understood, but at a

very deep or broad level there are cases which are hard to understand. This does not mean that the practice of the law of cause and effect is irrelevant. Rather it should be one's basic practice, since the practice of dharma in daily life really means the practice of karma.

It is very important to gain some understanding of this knowledge of the law of cause and effect. There are two methods to do this.

First Method: Faith In Buddha's Teachings:

These are the direct and main teachings of Buddha. Of course it is not right to believe in karma just because Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said so. Rather if this topic of karma is too subtle or complex, then one should consider so many of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's other teachings (e.g. on emptiness, impermanence) and gain a complete understanding of those other teachings. Then, even though one does not gain a complete understanding of karma, faith in Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's other teachings will lead to a faith in karma as well. This faith is very important. Without having faith or belief in the law of karma and the fact that virtuous action brings positive result and non-virtuous action brings a negative result, then one would become very careless about one's actions and whether they are harmful will be irrelevant to oneself.

Second Method: Our Own Experiences In Life

From one's own experiences in life an understanding of cause and effect can be gained.

Of course some things are conditioned by immediate circumstances but still there are other factors. Sometimes things seem to happen instantaneously without any expectation. This shows the truth of the law of cause and effect.

Even the sincere practice of dharma has to come from faith in the law of cause and effect. By having this faith in the law of cause and effect, then one shall naturally think, "Just as I am hurt by abusive, harsh speech so do others feel the same." In this way one tries to prevent harm to others and the reasons for tolerating others are obvious.

One Master said emphatically:

"Without personal faith in Dharma then, even if I develop my study in Dharma and seemingly do (Dharma) things, I am like a dog given a chunk of meat, who eats it without tasting it."

The very basic, step which is needed to be taken in order to make any progress at all in Dharma, is:

- To see the faults in worldly existence.
- This recognition of faults leads to renunciation.
- With this renunciation there is a sense of fear of this worldly existence.
- With this fear, then refuge is sought.
- With the seeking of refuge, then effort to follow the instructions of the refuge objects is made.

Main Sections In Karma

422.122: Thinking Of The Law Of Cause And Effect Which Is The Root Of All Virtue And Happiness¹

བདེ་ལེགས་ བམས་ ཅད་ ཀྱི་ ལྷ་ བ་ ལས་ འབྲས་

ལ་ ཡིད་ ཆེས་ ཀྱི་ དད་ པ་ བརྟེན་ པ།

This has three sub-headings:

422.122.1: General Explanation Of Karma

ལས་ འབྲས་ སྦྱིར་ བསམ་ པ།

422.122.2: Specifics Of Karma

བྱི་ བྲག་ ཏུ་ བསམ་ པ།

422.122.3: How To Correctly Practise Karma

བསམས་ རྣམ་ འཇུག་ ལྷོག་ བྱ་ ཚུལ།

422.122.1: General Explanation Of Karma

ལས་ འབྲས་ སྦྱིར་ བསམ་ པ།

This has two sub-headings:

422.122.11: General: How To Contemplate On Karma In General

སྦྱིར་ བསམ་ ཚུལ་ དངོས།

422.122.12: Specific: How To Contemplate On Karma In Specific

སོ་ སོར་ བྱི་ སྦྱིར་ བསམ་ པ།

422.122.11: General: How To Contemplate On Karma In General

སྦྱིར་ བསམ་ ཚུལ་ དངོས།

This has four sub-headings, the General Characteristics, which are the qualities of any type of karma either positive or negative:

422.122.111: Certainty Of Karma

ལས་ ངེས་ པའི་ ཚུལ།

¹Liberation.. p.430 The title used in the text is Developing Faith In The Law Of Cause And Effect - The Root Of All Health And Happiness.

422.122.112: Karma Increases

ལས་འཕེལ་ཆེ་བ།

422.122.113: Not Meeting With Karma Which Is Not Created

ལས་མ་བྱས་པ་དང་མི་འཕྲད་པ།

422.122.114: Karma Created Is Not Exhausted Or Does Not Disappear

ལས་བྱས་པ་ཚུད་མི་བླ་བ།

422.122.12: Specific: How To Contemplate On Karma In Specific

སོ་སོར་ཕྱི་སྟེ་བསམ་པ།

This has three sub-sections:

422.122.121: Thinking About The Black Side Of Cause And Effect

ནག་པོའི་ལས་འབྲས་བསམ་པ།

422.122.122: Thinking About The White Side Of Cause And Effect

དཀར་པོའི་ལས་འབྲས་བསམ་པ།

422.122.123: Teaching About The Doors That Unintentionally Lead To Powerful Karma

ཞར་ལ་སློབས་ལྡན་གྱི་ལས་ཀྱི་སློབ་སྦྱོར་ཏེ་བསྟན་པ།

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

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