
Study Group - “Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*”

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



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Achieving Life's Goal

All living beings, capable of experiencing pain and pleasure, want to have happiness and avoid suffering. In order to achieve that happiness and eliminate suffering we must depend upon a form of life. The human form of life is the most suitable, especially that form qualified by the eight freedoms and the ten endowments. Those of us here have all obtained this excellent form of human life.

The Different Levels Of Happiness

There are different levels of happiness:

- The gross physical enjoyment we experience in this life
- Happiness within cyclic existence or samsara. This is all the happiness that we will experience in the future, whether it be as a human or godly being. It still occurs within samsara.
- Happiness beyond samsara - the happiness of nirvana or liberation from cyclic existence.
- Far beyond the happiness of liberation from samsara is the happiness of the full state of enlightenment. Here one is completely free of all faults, and possesses all good qualities. This is the state of Buddhahood.

The Great Potential Of This Current Life - To Achieve Happiness In Future Lives

There are many things in this present life that are seen as pleasurable, and therefore a source of happiness. Each of us has different ideas as to what will bring happiness. Day and night we search for those things in our different ways. The common element which underlies our search is happiness. However those things which we seek may not necessarily be good. Rather they are very personal, so if we achieve them, they bring some personal happiness.

Happiness in the future is not perceived as clearly as happiness now. Therefore future happiness has a lower priority than the present. This way of pursuing happiness is very mundane, very worldly.

As spiritual practitioners however, we must hold happiness of future lives to be more important than happiness in this life. This present life passing away day by day is a very short moment, compared to our future

lives. Therefore it is very misguided to become attached to material things or friends and relatives. Spending the entire time being concerned over these things is a great loss.

Spiritual practitioners see that there is great potential, even in this short life, to achieve far reaching goals. So we should try to develop the aspiration for future happiness as clearly as possible.

Seeking Happiness In Future Lives

Future happiness is obtained by achieving the higher rebirth of a human or godly being or even the state of liberation from samsara. Every day this life becomes shorter and future lives draw closer. This means that each time we secure some good cause for our future life, then our future happiness draws closer. For the spiritual practitioner there is no need to feel unhappy or frightened, since at the end of each day they are closer to a better future. It is very easy to forsake some temporary gain or pleasure. So whatever good or bad happens in our life is made easier, because we know that it is only for short time.

We ordinary beings are attracted to this life and can keep busy without ever feeling tired. Similarly pure dharma practitioners (those who completely renounce this world), tirelessly use all their human potential to engage in virtuous actions. Although outwardly they may appear to be very poor or physically weak, within them is complete peace and happiness.

Material wealth and good health are dependent upon previous karma. Material wealth and good health are also dependent on one's own skills in accumulating wealth and some immediate circumstances however the immediate circumstances which affect the accumulation of wealth are very momentary. This shows that if we wholeheartedly pursue happiness in future lives, just as pure dharma practitioners do, we will not be deprived of happiness in this life.

Whether it is this life or future lives, to lose a moment of happiness is a loss.

As we say,

Reverse happiness of this life
Seek happiness of future lives

Consistently seeking future happiness does not exclude

enjoying happiness in this life. We should not deliberately deprive ourselves of happiness in this life. All happinesses are valuable, since they are a very rare experience.

Proving The Existence Of Past And Future Lives

In order to practise the dharma seriously some knowledge about the truth or knowledge of the law of karma, or cause and effect is required. To see happiness beyond this life, there must be some understanding of cause and effect. Initially, without this understanding of cause and effect, there can be no faith in the future or past lives. Without the law of karma it is difficult to find other scientific proofs.

The most simple way of knowing of the existence of past and future lives, is to analyse our own experiences. Through this we observe this deep sense of "I" which exists, and which is the focal point of any action. This "I" can be identified in connection with our name. When we hear our name we think "Someone is calling me". So "I" is attached to the name by which one is called.

There is also an "I" which is not attached to a name. This "I" has little to do with this life i.e., with our name or other factors of this life. We can get the idea, through this sense of "I", that there is a past existence.

When we leave behind everything we possess, even our body, this "I" continues. So there is not only life before, but also life after this present one.

Applying The Law Of Karma To Successful Relationships In Daily Life

What then, is the true cause for happiness in future lives? The main cause is extending love and compassion to other beings. With a selfish attitude or strong sense of ego there is no consideration for the needs of other beings. So we create actions that cause suffering not only to others, but also for ourselves.

Even if we have not fully rid ourselves of self-interest, we can still practice patience with those close to us. Even though one has not fully removed the selfish mind, if not to all beings, who may be far distant, but at least to our friends we practise patience and share the good things in life. There are some who give food to others even though are very hungry themselves. They do this because of a different frame of mind. With a selfish attitude the only concern is to enjoy that food, and ignore others. Giving food to others, instead of satisfying one's own hunger, shows a compassionate mind. To have such a kind and generous attitude is *true* dharma practice. Such behaviour is admired by all, even non-dharma followers.

The result of giving is wealth, and the result of morality is a happy life. Therefore giving is the cause of happiness in the future. By practising dharma in this way, we also start to create more causes for a better future. Because one's dharma practice affects everyday behaviour, this life is happier and more harmonious. If people share a house together, and they all truly follow the practice of

dharma, then they will also enjoy a better friendship with each other.

Happiness is something that comes from the mind. Having more friends or wealth does not ensure happiness. Without contentment these same things become a source of unhappiness! We may have a good, stable relationship but start to worry that it may end. This harms the relationship. We might worry that we may lose that friend to another. This harms the relationship and unnecessary problems arise. Then one starts to think "If I lose my friend how shall I cope?" So before anything has actually happened, fear and confusion have been created. The root cause of such suspicion is the self centred mind and strong attachment to this life.

In spiritual training the faults of negative states of mind are learnt. Rather than attachment to this life one gives thought to future lives. This loosens attachment to this life with the result of peace and happiness in this life.

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