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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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The Special Opportunity Of This Human Life

Shantideva said "There is no more ignorance and deception than not utilising this human life of leisure after having found it."

This verse indicates the unique qualities of this life of leisure. Having obtained such a human life of leisure, we must see it as a unique opportunity and then generate the thought of achieving something special from this very special life. We must utilise this human life of leisure to become familiar with virtue. Not using this life for virtuous practice shows that we are deceiving ourselves and are very ignorant.

Reasons Why We Must Practise Dharma And Why We Must Practise It In This Life

We need to practise dharma. In order to have strong motivation and to be inspired to practise dharma we should contemplate the question, "Why should I practise dharma?" The reason is because we want to experience happiness and avoid suffering. As we examine the sources of suffering and happiness we realise that both of them depend upon our state of mind. It is obvious that positive states of mind bring more happiness in this life. That positive state of mind is also the cause of happiness in future lives as well. The purpose of practising dharma is to facilitate happiness and overcome suffering.

We might recognise this reason for practising dharma but feel discouraged due to a lack of courage. Therefore we should think "I am fully capable of practising dharma." To realise this we must understand that we have all the necessary conditions to practise dharma. By focusing on the conditions necessary to practise dharma we can see that we do have all the necessary capabilities and conditions.

One might still postpone the practice of dharma. This procrastination can be eradicated by contemplating that the very rare opportunity which we have now, will not last forever. Once you lose this opportunity it is extremely difficult and rare to obtain another human rebirth in future. This contemplation encourages me to practise dharma before the end of this life.

This is not enough, because in reality this life is becoming shorter, and may end at any moment. Therefore you must think "I must practise dharma right now". This encourages one to practise dharma now. In

this manner we should see every reason to encourage ourselves to practise dharma as soon as possible and in every moment of our life.

Another reason why we might not practise dharma is by saying "If I do not practise dharma this does not matter, since sooner or later my life will finish." This is not a good reason since after death the cycle of life continues. Given this we ask "Do I have choice over my next life?" If we do not have this control then who does have this control? As you contemplate, you realise that the type of future life is determined by the positive and negative energies within our mindstream. If the negative energy is stronger, the following life will be unfortunate.

Therefore we become convinced that we must practise dharma and that we must practice it now.

The Benefits Of Practising Virtuous Actions

The true practice of dharma is the practice of the law of karma. From our study of the law of karma we understand the main practice to be adopting the ten virtuous actions and refraining from the ten non-virtuous actions.

Of the ten virtuous actions the first is refraining from killing. The direct reason for refraining from such an action (which ends the life of others), is because inflicting harm on others is negative. On that basis (i.e. causing harm to others is negative and unskillful) we begin the practice of the law of karma. In all Buddha's teachings the teaching on non-harmfulness is the most essential one. Whatever progress we make in the rest of our practice, the very foundation of it is not harming any other being - either human or any other sentient being. As part of our daily practice we must remind ourselves "I shall never cause any harm to any person or any other living being." Refraining from killing is the practice of morality. It is the substantial cause to obtain happy rebirth in the future.

There are also many benefits to this life as a result of not harming other beings. Respecting the life of other beings means that we help them. As a result we shall naturally find more happiness and peace because there will be less harm to our own life as well.

There are results or benefits for future lives from practising the ten virtuous actions. Not killing ensures a good rebirth in the future life.

Practising the second virtuous act of not stealing results in having abundant wealth, resources and other necessary conditions in a future rebirth. It is not simply the case that just by being born in a higher rebirth we shall be happy, since happiness depends upon other conditions as well. Through the practice of not stealing, these conditions will be good. Other conditions such as having good friends are the result of the third virtuous act of refraining from sexual misconduct. Contemplating the results of the ten virtuous actions shows us how they are the source of happiness both in this life and future lives.

It is also important to know the essence, or actual meaning of the practice of refraining from killing, stealing, and so on. Although these practices refer to a physical restraint the emphasis is on gaining progress in the mind through becoming more familiar with positive thoughts and attitudes. All these positive benefits of practising virtue should be seen in the context of controlling one's own mind. Understanding and experiencing these benefits is when we begin to taste the real benefit of dharma. This experience might take time, but it is important that we always make an effort with our practice to control and calm the mind.

Adopting A Relaxed And Balanced Practice

It is wrong to think that engaging in dharma practice means sacrificing our day-to-day enjoyments, and facing hardships in learning and practise, in the belief that the fruit of your practice will only come in the future. In fact, when one knows how to practise properly and makes some progress, there is immediate joy and progress in this current life. So it is important to not force our practice since, just like anything we do, progress depends to a great deal on our state of mind. If our mind is relaxed when we meditate, our practice becomes more effective. It is not so much the duration, as the quality of the practice. This quality depends on skill. With good quality and skill, we can achieve great goals quickly.

If it is still too difficult, then it is better to break from practice and spend time with friends, talking, walking and eating out. We must know what will give rest and satisfaction to the mind. If we can maintain some relaxation in the mind, then we can gradually make progress which is the adoption of the ten virtues in thought and action.

We must realise that the true source of satisfaction is within our own mind. Satisfaction is not something that necessarily depends upon external factors such as material wealth and friends, because we cannot rely on such things. Rather, satisfaction is when we are content with that which we do have. We are happy with those and so feel satisfaction in them. Peace and happiness have to come from within our own mind. Therefore if one feels deprived of those external objects, the source of this dissatisfaction is also within our own mind. By calming the mind and being content with whatever one has, satisfaction is achieved.

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

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