

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



25 June 1996

Just ensure that you generate the right motivation.

422.221.3 How You Die and are Conceived into Another Life

འཆི་འཕོ་བ་དང་ཉིང་མཚམས་སྤྱིར་བའི་ཚུལ།

We are now going to discuss the topic of how, following your death, you are conceived into future rebirths.

Under this heading we learn about the way in which we die, and the way in which we are conceived into a future rebirth.

422.221.31 What Happens at Death?

འཆི་བའི་ལྟར་འབྱུང་ཚུལ།

Firstly, the way in which we die.

There are three causes of death which are:

- the ending of our lifespan
- the ending of our merit
- because of immediate unpredictable conditions or factors we may die, even if we are not short of lifespan or merit.

The Three Causes of Death

1. End of Lifespan

This means that the lifespan of each person depends on the karma which they created in the past. A person may live for up to sixty or seventy years, and the length of the lifespan is influenced by their past life karma.

When the length of karmic lifespan finishes then death will occur unless there is some effort to extend that life. The end of lifespan does not mean that the lifespan is completely fixed, because it can be extended by, for example, engaging in the meditation of White Tara, and accumulating mantras of that long life deity. It can also be extended by receiving a long life initiation from others.

In general though, it is said that our body is like a guest house and we are a guest in it. We book the house for a period of time. When that time comes you either have to extend your stay, or you have to leave. So unless we extend our stay we must leave it. In any case we cannot live forever in a guest house.

2. End of Merit

The end of merit as a cause of facing death means that a being faces death because of being deprived of living conditions such as food or drink and so on. It is said that lacking resources for living is the indication of the weakness of their merit.

To prevent such circumstances as a cause for death one has to engage in the practice of making offerings to the three jewels, or being generous to beggars. In this way merit can be increased and negativities purified.

We must understand that the fact that we enjoy all these good living conditions, with an abundance of food, drink and so on is the result of the meritorious actions which we have created in the past. If we wish for the same conditions in the future, we must create the same causes.

3. Immediate Causes of Death

The immediate cause of death may be because of overeating, others die because of indigestion, and others die because of some immediate disease.

Overall how long, and in what conditions, we live is all determined by our very own karma. Therefore in order to enjoy a long life with all the comforts, the necessary positive karmas need to be created. Even though three main causes of facing death are mentioned above, each one of them can be avoided. If facing death due to the end of a lifespan, then that life can be prolonged by receiving long life initiations or engaging in practices relating to the long life deities. Even if one is facing death due to a lack of, or end of merit, the actual death can still be prevented by creating merit.

As we study this topic, we should also reflect upon our own life to realise how fortunate we are. Firstly we have obtained this human life. Then, in this life we are not short of any suitable conditions of living. We also find ourselves with the opportunity to cultivate a good heart, and other such positive qualities of mind. We can appreciate our life if we imagine what it would be like if we did not have these suitable conditions. There are people who starve to death, or who suffer throughout life due to poor living conditions. We should not only think of our own life, but also of the beautiful living conditions around us. Then knowing their causes and how we created them in the past, we realise that it is not easy to attain such good fortune. The main cause for these conditions is to safeguard pure moral ethics. On top of this we have to accumulate enormous virtue and merit in order to create all the good living conditions for future lives. These good living conditions are very important, because without them being born as a human would mean having to face unbearable suffering in life.

In fact our living conditions are so comfortable that they can even seem to be the cause of day to day problems. Some people have so many clothes and shoes that they worry about choosing what to wear. When we dress to

go out we can only choose to wear one set of clothes. However some people feel concern that they cannot also wear the others in their wardrobe. So they worry, and it is so unnecessary because all these possessions are the result of the accumulation of virtue and merit in past lives. Good living conditions are not something we can have without having created the cause, as is shown by the many other people who do not have these things.

We have found a very fortunate form of life at the moment - a human life, with a sound mind and surrounded by life's suitable conditions. So we should make a prayer to create the causes and conditions for such a life in the future. Gaining a human life is achieved by practising pure moral ethics, and in addition it is necessary to accumulate merit and virtues. Then we should generate a prayer to have a life where a positive state of mind can be cultivated, as well as all the suitable conditions for living.

In learning any topic of Dharma the most thing important is to apply it to develop our way of thinking, which means subduing our minds.

The Dying Mind

Although we leave this body behind at the point of death our mind goes on to take future rebirth. Just before the actual moment of death, when we stop breathing our mind is called the dying mind. If we go into detail here we can identify both a gross and subtle level to this dying mind. Gross death is when the external breathing stops and subtle death is when the internal breathing stops. The dying mind is just before the approach of death. At this stage it is said that the actual death occurs when our karma for the future rebirth is activated or nourished by the two causes of craving and grasping. These two are part of the twelve links.

With craving we have strong attachment to our own body and a sense of not wanting to be separated from it. This craving activates the karma to take future rebirth. This karma is further ripened by grasping, which has some thought of wishing to take future lives. So grasping is clinging to future rebirths. Then the karma to take rebirth is fully activated by the craving and grasping, and so when death occurs, we take a future rebirth.

This dying mind can be virtuous, non-virtuous or indifferent. It is said that having a very virtuous mind is the vital cause which determines a better form of future life. So focussing on this topic of death and beyond, is not meant to frighten us, rather it is meant to inspire us to prepare ourselves for a better future.

To a large extent, the frame of mind in which we die all depends upon the type of mind with which we have familiarised ourselves during our lifetime.

The point here is that we should try to get ourselves used to sustaining a positive state of mind within, by familiarising ourselves with virtuous states of mind; by making as much effort as possible to cultivate a virtuous mind; and by removing any non-virtuous thoughts which occupy us. If we do this then it takes very little effort to have a positive or virtuous state of mind at the time of death.

Next teaching we shall discuss the types of karma which get activated or nourished at the time of death, and also discuss the twelve links.

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

Edit methodology

The initial transcript is prepared from Alan Molloy's notes. These are checked with Damien Busby's notes by Alan Molloy and any differences noted.

Adair Bunnett then compares her notes against the typed transcript and prepares this edited version.

Edited version checked by Alan Molloy

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Please note below corrections to transcript 18 June 1996.

Under the following headings:

422.221.2 How Karma is Accumulated

དེས་ལས་གསོགས་ཚུལ།

replace para beginning "The subtle meaning of karma .." with:

The subtle meaning of karma refers to a type of mental factor which has the specific function of affecting both primary and secondary minds concomitant with it. In other words it affects both the mental factors and the sensual consciousnesses. Take for example the eye sense consciousness. If there is a visual object, in front of us we see it with our eye sense consciousness. In seeing it our eye sense consciousness is engaging with that object, and may judge it to be appealing. It is the mental factor which we call karma which is the main cause for our eye sense consciousness and all its mental factors to engage with that object.

Immutable Karma

replace para beginning "whereas the karma to be born .." with:

Whereas the karma to be born in the form and formless realms of godly beings is fixed at the time of creation of that karma. For instance the propelling karma to be born in the first level of concentration of the form realm cannot be changed to bring about rebirth in other realms.