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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

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Once again generate the proper motivation.

We have discussed the way a given cycle of twelve links takes a minimum of two lifetimes and a maximum of three lifetimes to complete. It is important that everyone is familiar with the idea of the twelve links, which explain the way sentient beings are endlessly reborn within cyclic existence. We see that within one cycle sentient beings accumulate the karmas of many other lives yet to be born. The aim of contemplating the twelve links is to generate a renunciation of cyclic existence, which is the aspiration to attain the state of liberation from cyclic existence.

Through studying and learning the dharma we should try to detach our minds from cyclic existence, because there is no true essence within cyclic existence in terms of one's own body, wealth and friends. We may not be completely successful in losing our taste for cyclic existence, but if at least on a very artificial level we understand that while it might appear to be very useful, meaningful and pleasurable, this appearance is a delusion. If we see it in this way then cyclic existence has no true essence.

If we look at our life overall there is nothing which is reliable, so any security or safe direction is all entirely dependent upon ourselves. As it is said, we are born alone and so we leave this life alone. No matter how attached we are, there is nothing in this life which we can take with us when we die.

If through our spiritual practice we could produce some renunciation, or detachment, or distaste, towards cyclic existence, then this will not only lead us to the path of liberation. Even in the short term, such detachment can reduce the worry and confusion in your mind, and so you will find more happiness and peace.

The Twelve Links Integrated into the Three Scopes of Lam Rim

In fact this practice of the twelve links encompasses all the practices of the stages of the path. The great Geshe Purchuk based all the three scopes of the path on the twelve links meditation.

On the basis of meditation on the twelve links an understanding of the lower three realms and their sufferings can be developed. As regards the understanding of the lower realms we can contemplate how out of ignorance of cause and effect we create negative karma, leaving a karmic imprint on our consciousness. This imprint is nourished by the links of

craving and grasping. When it is fully nourished it is the link of becoming or existence. In this way we are born in the lower realms which is the link of birth. From that moment onwards the experience of suffering in that realm begins. It is immense and continues for as long as one is in that realm.

As one contemplates the lower realms on the basis of the twelve links, one feels very frightened, and in order to be free of the lower realms one takes refuge in the three jewels and adopts the practice of the law of karma. This practice of taking refuge and practising the law of karma out of the fear of being born in the lower realms is the stages of the path of the person of the lower scope.

Likewise the twelve links can be used to contemplate the higher realms. Here the nature of suffering and the lack of true happiness are also apparent, so the higher realms are also unattractive, and on this basis renunciation is generated. With this thought of leaving cyclic existence, the path to be followed is that of the three-fold trainings, and this is the stages of the path for the person of middle scope

Being born over and over again is the fate of all beings trapped in cyclic existence. Thus, in this way one can generate sympathy and compassion for other beings. The reason for feeling compassion is not because one directly sees their suffering, but rather that simply being born in cyclic existence, and engaging in the activities of cyclic existence, is a reason to feel compassion for them. The other being does not have to be undergoing some painful experience. They may even be creating negative karma. But, influenced by love and compassion you generate the bodhicitta mind and then engage in deeds of the six perfections. This is following the path of the person of great scope.

So you can see how the subject of the twelve links can lead one to follow all three stages of the path.

We are studying this twelve links topic not just to increase our intellectual knowledge. Our purpose is to motivate us to follow spiritual practice.

The teachings can only benefit us if we take them into our hearts, and not just to learn new things to talk about or to count. The only benefit is if the dharma, or what we learn, is thoroughly mixed with our mind. It is like adding different flavours to your cooking. You know this has been successful when what you cooked tastes good.

Similarly when what you practise is fully mixed with your mind, then there is some true benefit from it. In terms of our immediate experience of life through dharma we find more happiness and comfort within us. It is said that the dharma serves as the true friend of this life, providing joy and happiness, and solving all problems.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said "there is liberation to be found in the household life." He said this because in the householder's life there is the opportunity to practise dharma and develop dharma realisations. In this practice one is instructed to counteract delusions since they are the source of all immediate and future suffering.

For example, to find more benefit in a relationship with a partner, it is important to minimise, or reduce, the mere desire for each other. Desire can not only bring unnecessary problems and sufferings to the mind, but will also cause the other to see one as very selfish, lacking love and care. It is very obvious that with desire your mind will always be very suspicious of your partner, because you cannot simply relax. Without desire, you can show more support and love, and be more inwardly relaxed.

The dharma, or spiritual approach, focuses on the mind and its actions. Spiritual practitioners are always very aware and mindful of their actions. At the end of the day you recollect what you have done during the day. If you have committed any negative actions in that day, then you have created a cause to be born in the lower realms. If you take this seriously, then you cannot sleep without purifying it, since you might die during the night. Then if you die all that is required is for the links of craving and grasping to nourish that karma. Therefore if you contemplate karma in conjunction with your own mind and life, then naturally your contemplation would motivate you to practise the law of karma.

If we are told "give up this life now" then it is extremely difficult. To stop the affairs of life is almost impossible since in daily life we become preoccupied by so many things and activities. Therefore it is important to find some time to focus our mind, in meditation, on spiritual practice, and in that we generate some sense of renunciation. We can do this by meditating on the twelve links topic.

Although we are born in degenerate times, and all that surrounds us is against what dharma teaches, if we take this opportunity to utilise this life in the right way by practising dharma, then we have had a most fortunate life. We have created the causes to improve the status of our future life, by meeting all the favourable conditions - conditions that we have created for ourselves.

By continuing our practice from lifetime to lifetime then we can attain our goal of buddhahood. The only way to attain this goal of buddhahood is by making each life a step closer to the goal. It is like an aeroplane taking off. It has to run for a certain distance, then after it leaves the ground it must gradually rise to a flying altitude. Stage by stage, like a plane climbing to cruising height, we shall reach the final goal of buddhahood.

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

Edited version checked by Alan Molloy

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