
Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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5 March 2002

This human rebirth with the eight freedoms and ten endowments is like a wish fulfilling jewel; it has a very great potential but it also disintegrates very quickly. As the precious human rebirth is over in an instant, just like the lightning in the sky one shouldn't let it go to waste. One should try to take the essence.

If we practise the various meditations gradually and sequentially then we will gain a very good understanding of the graduated path. So sequential and gradual practice of the various meditations is very important. In that way one's continuum will become purified and developed.

The Superiority of the Precious Human Rebirth

Lama Tsong Khapa said, "This precious human rebirth is superior to the wish fulfilling gem". So when we meditate on it we also have to reflect on the great potential of that precious human rebirth.

Actually, the precious human body has greater potential than a wish-fulfilling jewel, which will only be able to give us what we wish in this lifetime. It will only be able to fulfil our very short transitory desires, giving us a very short happiness in this life. However on the basis of the precious human body, one can not only attain happiness in the next life, but one can also create the causes for happiness in the life after that, not to mention the happiness of future lives. By having the precious human body one can attain liberation from cyclic existence, and completely liberate oneself from taking rebirth again. One can even attain complete enlightenment.

So the potential of the precious human body is far superior to the potential of the wish-fulfilling gem. By reflecting on the great potential of the precious human body, our attachment to the meaningless activities of the small purpose of this life should lessen. We should become less and less attracted towards the activities of this life, which are quite purposeless and essenceless.

Our Potential to Attain Happiness

By reflecting on the great potential of the precious human body one will come to understand that one has the potential to attain both happiness and enlightenment. This meditation should generate a very strong self-confidence in one's potential to be able to practise the Dharma. Having recognised that one has this potential, it becomes necessary that one actually does practise the Dharma.

Since everybody wants happiness and doesn't want suffering, then everybody has to create the causes for happiness, and has to stop creating the causes for suffering. One recognises one's potential to be able to do

so by recognising that one has a precious human body. Recognising that one has this potential, it then becomes necessary to practise the Dharma. Why must one practice the Dharma? Why is it imperative that one practices the Dharma? It is because one has the potential, and because one wants happiness, and doesn't want suffering.

Why We Must Practise Now

Having reflected on, and understood the great potential of the precious human body, and also the difficulty of attaining such a precious body, it's still possible for a procrastinating and lazy attitude to arise within one's mind. One might still have the idea that it is possible to practise the Dharma a bit later. In order to overcome that, one reflects on the precious human body being just like a flash of lightning in the sky. It's over in a mere instant. By reflecting on the impermanence of the precious human body, then one overcomes the procrastinating thought of thinking, "It's good enough to practice the Dharma a bit later on".

Creating the Right Causes

We have to relate this meditation on the precious human body to our own situation, and reflect upon whether at the present time we are creating the causes and conducive conditions to again attain a precious human body in a future life. So we analyse our present life, and check up on whether we are keeping our pure morality, which is one of the causes to attain a precious human body. Are we practicing generosity, which is another cause to attain a precious human body? Both of those practices need to be combined with prayers to attain a precious human body. In our present life how much do we practise those three conditions so as to attain a precious human body again? If we are honest, we will find it is probably quite difficult to say to oneself that one is practising all of these three conditions perfectly.

Developing the Motivation to Practise Now

If we do this meditation, a great urgency should arise in our mind; there will be a very great wish of wanting to create those three conditions to attain another precious human life in the future. Even though one has a good situation now, we want to make sure that in future lives one again has a good situation. So by practising this meditation on the precious human rebirth and impermanence, then this type of motivation should arise within one's mind.

By reflecting on the difficulty of finding a precious human rebirth, and by reflecting on its impermanence, and how it disintegrates so very easily, then one first of all should generate the motivation wanting to practise the Dharma, and then secondly of wanting to practise the Dharma right now. So by reflecting on the impermanence of the precious human body, one will generate the motivation of wanting to practise the Dharma right now.

This basis with endowments is very easily destroyed and lost. As said before, it is as impermanent as a flash of lightning in the sky. By reflecting on this fact then one abandons attachment to the activities of this life. One shouldn't be overly engaged in the activities of this life. By reflecting on the impermanence of the precious human rebirth one will be able to lessen that attachment, and

become less and less involved with the activities of this life. Right at that very moment one starts to practise the Dharma.

Realms of Rebirth

This precious human body disintegrates very easily. By reflecting on the effect of one's approaching death we remember that when we die that we are not just becoming non-existent. Rather, after leaving this body our consciousness will go on to a future life. We will go on to a new body, and the only companion that goes with our consciousness is our karma. After death, the only two directions one can take is either upward into one of the three higher realms, or downward into any one of the three lower realms. The direction will be dependent upon one's karma.

Influencing the Realm of Rebirth

By reflecting that because of one's karma it is so much more likely that one will take rebirth in one of the lower realms, and remembering the sufferings of the lower realms, we are looking for a method or refuge that might possibly prevent us from going to the lower realms after our death. Here there are the Three Jewels, and by going for refuge to the Three Jewels one can close the door to the lower realms. Remembering the fact of one's death, karma and the lower realms, and having faith into the Three Jewels one then goes for refuge to the Three Jewels.

One also practises those practices associated with going for refuge. These practices are, in particular, watching one's karma, the practice of abandoning non-virtuous karma, and practising the ten virtuous actions. By practising the ten virtuous actions one closes the door to the lower realms, and creates the causes for higher rebirth.

Escaping from Cyclic Existence

Even if one again takes rebirth in a higher realm in the next life, there is no freedom there as one is still within cyclic existence. There's no guarantee as to how all of one's future lives will work out. In fact it is very unlikely that they will all be in the higher realms. Also, by reflecting on the general and particular sufferings of all the samsaric realms, one generates renunciation towards cyclic existence.

Renunciation

By remembering in this way the first noble truth of suffering, one then recognises that what binds oneself to this situation is the root of self-grasping. Because of self-grasping delusions and karma are created, and from them cyclic existence is generated, so one then generates renunciation to self-grasping. Once one understands self-grasping one understands that it can be opposed with the wisdom realising selflessness.

The Method to be Used

When one looks for a way out of one's situation, one understands that not only is one able to free oneself from cyclic existence, but also that the method to do so is the wisdom realising selflessness. For this one has to train in the higher training of wisdom. However the higher training of wisdom depends upon the higher training of

concentration, which in turn depends upon the higher training of morality. The very basic thing one has to do in order to free oneself from cyclic existence is to practice the three higher trainings. By practicing the three higher trainings one is able to attain nirvana.

The Goal of Enlightenment

Reflecting further, one realises that even though one might attain nirvana for oneself that is, in itself, quite unsatisfactory. All the sentient beings that have shown oneself great kindness over and over again over many lifetimes, and as well as in this life, would still be suffering. So remembering their kindness, and generating 'Pleasant Love' and great compassion for them, one determines to take upon oneself the responsibility to free from their suffering all the sentient beings who have been kind to oneself in the past, and to establish them in happiness.

Having made this determination, and also realising that at the present time even though one has a very good motivation, one's potential hasn't been yet developed, one realises that in order to be able to really fulfil what one has set out to do, and free other sentient beings from their suffering, one has to become an enlightened being. If we reflect again and again over the years in such a manner, using the various meditations in their correct sequence, then definitely some change will happen in our mind, and we will be able to generate the motivation of Bodhicitta. This is very beneficial for one's mind.

If we meditate according in the traditional way as has just been explained, then we will definitely generate some special qualities in our mind. First, reflect upon the precious human rebirth and then mentally go through all the different points up to enlightenment. Then having reached the point of enlightenment one can do the meditation in the reverse order, going back from enlightenment down through the various points to the beginning of the precious human rebirth. Meditating on these topics in both sequential and reverse order will definitely be extremely beneficial for our mind.

Integrating Dharma Practice into our Lives

Tonight Study Group starts for the year.

The reason why we are so destitute of both realisations and the benefit of meditation is not because we don't know how to practise, but because we don't practise. The fault lies not in the lack of knowledge about the different meditations, but with the lack of practice.

In order to receive the benefit of the different meditations one has to practise those meditations and apply the Dharma to one's life. From our mouths the words "all sentient beings" are often uttered, but then in our day-to-day life we harbour various resentments and aversions to different people. That is a very sorry situation. The Buddha said, "Giving harm to others definitely doesn't become Dharma; Dharma practice is cherishing others".

So we have to integrate our Dharma practice into our daily life. Also, every day we have to meditate a little. By having a long-term view, by meditating just a little every day, then over a long time period something will definitely happen. We have to have a long-term aim, and

take the long view. If we try to realise everything in a very short life span, then that might also create obstacles.

From my side, I will put lots of effort into the Study Group, and I ask you to please do the same from your side.

With regard to practising the Dharma, then many people say they don't have much time to practise the Dharma. There are always many so many reasons and situations, children, family situations and so forth, and people say, "I don't have time to practice the Dharma. I'm too busy". Although there is never any time for practising the Dharma there is always time in their life for many other things, for example, talking about one's own great qualities, and about all the faults of others. There are many hours of time for that!

Chenrezig Meditation

So it's good to make some time for Dharma practice. For example one can recite the mantra of Chenrezig, OM MANI PADME HUM. Then one sits in the meditation posture, concentrates or focuses one's mind inwardly and visualises in the space above one's head Chenrezig, being indivisible with one's root guru. Then reflect on the qualities of Chenrezig and, as at that time Chenrezig is also one's teacher, reflect on the qualities of one's teacher, of the qualities of his body, speech and mind. Then, while reciting the mantra, do the meditation of nectars coming down and purifying us. If we do this simple visualisation in this way then definitely we will receive some blessing within our mind. It will definitely make a difference to one's mind.

How Practise Helps Us

At those times when one feels unhappy it is good to practice this type of meditation, instead of going outside to the beach, or running around outside like a crazy person. It is much better if one practises a meditation that calms the mind, makes requests to the guru deities, recites mantras, or does the meditation of the nectars coming down and absorbing and purifying. Then definitely it will change one's mind, which will become subtler. One will experience inner bliss and peace, and some refinement within one's mind will happen. That's so much better than running around the streets like a crazy person. It is said that once attachment arises within the mind, then one becomes like a crazy person.

It can happen that a dog goes a bit crazy and runs away from its owner for a few days, but the dog will only be gone for a few days. In our case if we follow our crazy mind all the time then we can lose our whole life. So it becomes important to understand that our happiness and suffering depends upon ourself. We are the creators of our own happiness and suffering. We generate the causes to experience happiness, or to experience suffering. Its up to us. In the case of the dog, one could say, "Oh dogs can't think very well. Nothing can be done", but in our case it should be a little bit different.

Study Group

Pam and Anthony will explain the structure of the Study Group to you later, even though there's not too much to explain. There are some students who feel that they can't

study well enough, or that they can't do the homework. Then maybe they lose their enthusiasm or the self-confidence to come to the Study Group.

However even if you can't study, or if you can't do the homework, coming here and listening to the Dharma for two hours still makes a great difference to the mind. After two hours the mind feels more subdued, one has maybe received a few new ideas, and so in that way has benefited. It is better to come and listen to the Dharma than not to come at all. Also one receives the imprints of having listened to those teachings. There's no need to give up completely because we can't study as much as the other more studious students and so forth.

Sometimes one might be feel a bit depressed, feeling that one can't keep up with the Study Group, or that one's study has degenerated and so forth. It is also good to remember that everyone is part of the Study Group, that everyone else in the Study Group is doing exactly the same as oneself. So maybe one can become a little inspired by one's study companions.

In this case it is also quite good if a certain mind of competition arises. Ordinarily having a competitive mind is not very useful, but sometimes a little delusion becomes a conducive condition for Dharma practice. So if we feel our Dharma practice is not going so well, and we see that the practice and study of the others is going better, a competitive mind can give us some energy to study and practise more. So here then, the competitive attitude can be useful.

The text, *Entering the Middle Way*, shows unmistakably the extensive and profound meanings. Madhyamika is studied for four years in the monastery. In the first two years one would mainly concentrate on the text *Entering the Middle Way* and the *General Commentary* by Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen. Then in the second two years one would concentrate more on the root wisdom, and the various commentaries by Lama Tsong Khapa and so forth.

I estimate that we can finish in two years time. It takes four years in a monastery and we will do it in two. If in two years you have entered the middle way then that is good.

Entering the Middle Way is a very special text on Madhyamika because it both explains the hidden meaning of the Prajnaparamita sutras, as well the explicit meaning. By explaining both the explicit and hidden meaning of the *Prajnaparamita* sutras, *Entering the Middle Way* becomes a very special text.

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Edited Version

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