
Study Group - *Madhyamakavatanama*

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Generate a virtuous motivation, thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and in order to be able to do so then I have to practise the Dharma well. For that purpose I'm now going to listen to this profound Mahayana teaching.'

Lama Tsong Khapa said in his *Lines Of Experience* that the precious human rebirth that has freedoms and endowments is like a wish granting jewel. It has great purpose, is very rare, and very easily lost. Like a flash of lightning in the sky it is lost quickly and it lasts just an instant. Therefore one should try to make the greatest use of it. The great yogis have meditated on this and travelled this path, and you who desire enlightenment should do likewise.

It is important that one put what one learns into practice. Out of subduing one's mind and acquiring intellectual knowledge, subduing one's mind is more important than acquiring intellectual knowledge. Of course intellectual knowledge supports the action of subduing one's mind and it is important that one is able to subdue one's mind, but out of the two the emphasis should be on subduing one's mind.

The precious human life is even more precious, more valuable, and superior to a wish granting jewel. One has been in cyclic existence since beginningless time, so there is no type of rebirth that one hasn't experienced yet. Therefore it is important that one makes use of this very precious opportunity now, and tries to take its essence.

This precious human rebirth is superior, more precious and more valuable than a wish granting jewel. It is difficult to find and very easily lost. It lasts only a mere instant. When there's a flash of lightning in the dark night, it lights everything up for just one instant. Similarly that's the time span the precious human rebirth lasts. So therefore one should make great use of it.

Why is the precious human rebirth so precious? It is because one can achieve the three types of purposes. This is not just thinking about the temporary transitory benefits of this life. Rather, on the basis of having a precious human rebirth now, one can create the causes for a happy future life, or one can create the causes for liberation on the basis of this precious human rebirth, or one can attain the causes for enlightenment and become enlightened.

The only reason why one now wastes the precious human rebirth is because one doesn't regard it as something valuable. It is because we don't hold it to be very precious and valuable that we waste this precious human rebirth so easily. So we have to contemplate its preciousness, value and potential. If this precious human

rebirth were not so rare then one could perhaps relax and sit back. However since the precious human rebirth is so very rare then one has to make use of it right now, as one can not rely upon getting the same opportunity again in the future.

If we look at the causes for a precious human rebirth then the main one is morality. How difficult is it to practice pure morality? Of the ten non-virtuous actions how many can one really keep purely? Morality has to be practised in conjunction with generosity. One has now attained a human rebirth with sufficient material means, which came about through one's previous practice of generosity. How does one's good human body come about? Good physical form and so forth comes about through the previous practice of patience. Having charisma comes about through the previous practice of enthusiasm. Being able to practise meditation and keep one's mind on the object of meditation even for a short while comes about through having previously created the concordant cause of practising mental stabilisation. It is the same with regard to wisdom. One is able to generate discriminating awareness through the concordant cause of having practised wisdom before.

So you can see that if one looks at one's present situation and contemplates its causes, then that is something that one should rejoice about, because one was able to create those causes previously.

This precious human body is very easily lost, and there is no definiteness with regard to it. We take it for granted that if we get up in the morning that we will go to bed in the evening, and the other way round, but there is really no guarantee.

The precious human rebirth is superior to a wish granting jewel. It is very rare and it is very easily lost. When we meditate on how easily the precious human rebirth is lost then we meditate on impermanence. So we should meditate on the three roots that are supported by the nine reasons.

So at the time of death the conscious, together with the self, separates from the body. Where does the self of this life come from? It also comes from a preceding continuum. In the same way as the self stretches over this lifetime, so too it stretches over all lifetimes. It comes from beginningless lifetimes and it goes towards the future limitless lifetimes. Together with the self goes the consciousness: wherever the self goes the consciousness goes. Within the consciousness then karma is active, and we have virtuous karma and non-virtuous karma. At the time of death one sends you to a higher realm and the other one sends you to a lower realm. So it's very good now to meditate on death impermanence, and make a preparation for death.

Reflecting on how the non-virtuous karma will send one to the lower realms, one then generates fear of the lower realms and develops a single-pointed conviction ascertaining that the Three Jewels - Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha - definitely have the ability to rescue one from the lower realms. If you take refuge on the basis of fear of suffering in the lower realms, then your refuge will become very solid.

One generates a strong conviction that the Three Jewels can protect oneself from the dangers of the lower realms, and then one takes heartfelt refuge in the Three Jewels. One also needs to put into practise the practices that come with going for refuge. These are abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions and practising the ten virtuous actions. By abandoning each of the ten non-virtuous actions then one practises the virtuous actions.

So practising the Dharma, reflecting upon the infallibility of the Three Jewels and the law of cause and effect, should also give some sort of mental comfort. Through one's practice one should get some mental comfort, feeling it is OK to die. If one is not joyfully looking forwards towards death, then at least one should die without any regrets, and have some kind of conviction that one will not be reborn in the lower realms.

Of course the door of the lower realms is completely closed only from the forbearance level of the path of preparation onwards. Through one's patience in abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions, one should develop some kind of confidence that one will not be reborn in the lower realms in the next life. It is very good if one can die with that type of mind. Then at least one doesn't have any regrets.

Reflecting further, one realises that even if one takes a higher rebirth in the next life, then that still would be a rebirth within cyclic existence, which would mean continuing to experience the various sufferings of cyclic existence.

One realises that even though one might close the door to the lower realms by practising the ten non-virtuous actions, taking rebirth in the higher realms still means that one experiences the general sufferings of cyclic existence, as well as the sufferings of the higher realms. Looking to the cause for those sufferings of cyclic existence, then one finds that the root is ignorance grasping at self, true grasping.

When one searches for the antidote to the root of suffering, then one finds that the wisdom that realises selflessness is the antidote to the ignorance grasping at the self. Then one will generate very strong conviction, and will arrive at a point feeling that, 'If I put an effort into it then I will definitely be able to liberate myself from cyclic existence'.

One also understands that developing the practice of wisdom, which is necessary in order counteract true grasping, depends upon the training of concentration, and that the training of concentration depends upon the training of morality. Then by practising the three higher trainings one will arrive at a point where one feels, 'If I just practise enough then I will definitely be able to attain liberation. I will be able to free myself from cyclic existence.'

Then to go one step further, one thinks that, 'If I only attain liberation myself that would be very limited, because all other mother sentient beings are still within cyclic existence. Even though I might be liberated all the other sentient beings are still experiencing the same sufferings as myself. There's no sentient being that hasn't been my mother in the past, they have always been very

kind to me.' By reflecting upon those points one finds out one's motivation is thinking that one has to liberate not only oneself, but all sentient beings.

One reflects upon the kindness of sentient beings and then makes the determination to repay that kindness, then one meditates upon great compassion. One meditates upon pleasant love reflecting that all sentient beings lack happiness and experience suffering, and then one generates love and compassion to the point where it becomes spontaneous. Then, reflecting that if one doesn't take upon oneself the responsibility to liberate all sentient beings, then they wouldn't really be OK, so it is something that one definitely has to do. So one generates the superior intention of taking upon oneself the responsibility to liberate all sentient beings.

Those three awarenesses - love, compassion, and superior intention - are awarenesses that are concerned with the welfare of others. Then one realises that one doesn't actually have the ability to bring about the welfare of others at the present time.

If one looks for one who has such an ability, one finds that only an enlightened being has this ability. Then one generates the wish of wanting to become enlightened in order to fulfil one's aspiration of wanting to help all sentient beings. That's when one generates bodhicitta. One meditates upon bodhicitta again and again, and makes it stronger and stronger, so it becomes more and more natural. One also practises the six perfections and the various bodhisattva practices in order to achieve one's aim.

What I have just said is like a short glance meditation on graduated path to enlightenment. There's not really anything there that you don't know. Everything I've explained here you already know, but it's also important to know that there are things there you need to practise.

You can add a further meditation on how while generating bodhicitta you enter the Mahayana path of accumulation, and then from there you proceed to the path of preparation, to the path of seeing, and to the path of meditation. Then when one enters the path of meditation, one enters the first ground. Then one proceeds through all the ten grounds up to level of buddhahood. The detailed explanation of the grounds is not found within the *Lam Rim*. So it is good to add the knowledge that one gains from studying *Entering the Middle Way* to one's *Lam Rim* meditation. One needs to be skilful in that way. In such a way one does not forget the exposition of the grounds and paths.

It is important that one generates knowledge of contentment. If one can be content then one can be happy within this life. It is also important that one gets benefit from one's practice. Otherwise, without some benefit from one's practice, one feels there is nothing to show for one's practice, and one gets the idea that maybe the methods don't work, and then one loses one's aspiration to practise. Then one starts to put oneself down, thinking in a negative way, 'I've tried this, I've tried that, and nothing works!'

What I have explained today is nothing that you haven't heard before. In the past you couldn't know that there

was some benefit in Dharma practice without me telling you. I had to tell you that the practice has these and these benefits, but by now you should be able to tell me, 'I received these and these benefits from Dharma practice'.

If one generates pure concern for the happiness of future lives then through that one will give up grasping for the happinesses of this life. One will cling less and grasp less towards the happinesses of this life by generating concern for the happinesses of future lives.

Happiness is an inner comfort within one's mind, so that at the time of death one is not destitute of Dharma knowledge. One won't be destitute of an inner refuge, an some inner form of help, discriminating awareness and so forth, at the time of death. Because at that time one will experience outer destitution. One will be separated from one's friends and relatives, one will be separated from materials, one will even be separated from one's body. At such a time it's very important that one has some inner type of refuge otherwise one will experience heavy suffering.

The mind is very concerned now with the things of this life: one is very concerned with the help one has received from others, one is very concerned with how kind others have been to oneself, one is very concerned with how much pleasantness one experiences in this life, but this type of attitude shows a very strong worldly concern. If we think about all these things at the time of death what type of benefit do they have? We find that they have very little meaning at the time of death, because one has to leave all of them behind.

It is important that one has some strong inner refuge, and that one is not destitute of Dharma knowledge, not destitute of inner wisdom, or discriminating awareness, and that one has some inner sources of help. Then in such a way one can die relaxed and comfortable. Without those things, when the outer things fall away then the person becomes mentally very unhappy. As one gets older and the outer things fall away, then the person becomes more and more unhappy and depressed.

So there are things that one has to practise, and also one's practice should show some inner signs. The practice has to do with subduing ones mind, and is not about kneeling or sitting down, or being able to talk very cleverly about the Dharma. The Buddha didn't teach that the world is bad or that the body is bad. What the Buddha taught was that craving attachment for the body is bad, and that attachment for wealth is bad. If one doesn't have attachment for the body, then if one is separated from the body one doesn't experience any suffering. Likewise if one doesn't have any attachment for wealth, then if one is separated from wealth one doesn't experience any suffering. So really it is the attachment that is the problem.

So one should try as much as possible to just sit down for a short while, and try to have some good meditation, such as thinking that one shouldn't covet the possessions of others, that one shouldn't be jealous of the possessions of others, that one should rejoice in the success of others, and so forth. Being able to direct one's mind in that direction even just for a little while, like a minute or just a few moments, is very powerful. Meditating like that for

short periods of time again and again acquaints the mind with those virtuous states. It is important that one also practises the Dharma.

Maybe that's enough for today.

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Edited Version

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