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live in a town and have many social interactions, but mentally you can remain calm and in control of yourself. You do not allow mental delusions like desire, hatred, and jealousy to disturb your mind, so that it is always peaceful, even if you live in a noisy, busy, large environment and get involved with doing many things. If your mind is peaceful, there is less likelihood that mental delusions will arise and more likelihood that your mind will remain peaceful and happy.

The next two lines of the verse say:

Discourses we hear teach us most noble practice,  
Yet we spend all our time telling fortunes with dice.

This reminds us of the contradiction between what we hear and learn about, and what we actually do in our lives. In the case of living in a monastery, what you hear are the profound teachings on the stages of the path to complete enlightenment. However, your actions may have no connection - they may be totally opposite to these teachings. So, rather than spending your time telling other people's fortunes - making divinations and even deceiving others out of a desire for wealth or reputation and so on - you should be putting the teachings into practice.

If you do not put the Dharma teachings into practice, then whatever you learn will not enhance your mental peace or help you become a calmer, better person. Why? Because if you do not put the Dharma into practice, you are not decreasing the mental delusions - rather, through your actions you are increasing them. It is important to understand that the purpose of Dharma and meditation is to diminish the mental delusions. Not only do we have to learn the Dharma, but we also have to effectively put it into practice so that we can diminish mental delusions. When the delusions are diminished, more peace will arise in the mind.

When we learn worldly knowledge and skills, to make use of those skills we have to undertake some action and put them into practice. However, worldly actions are usually motivated by desire, hatred, pride, or competitiveness. The more worldly actions we do, the more restlessness, stress, and unhappiness we experience. Therefore, it is important to remember when you are putting Dharma or spiritual practice into action, that the motivation that precedes your spiritual actions should not be the same motivation that precedes your worldly actions.

The main cause of our wrong and unskillful actions is the self-cherishing attitude. The text says next:

Trample him, trample him, dance on the head  
Of this treacherous concept of selfish concern.  
Tear out the heart of this self-centred butcher  
Who slaughters our chance to gain final release.

We will leave tonight's teaching here and, as usual, we will chant Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra seven times. Could you again sit in the meditation posture, relax yourself, and check the mind, making sure there are no distracting thoughts. Then, as we begin the chanting, try to focus the mind on the mantra.

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