
The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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Meditation

As usual, we will start with a short meditation. In this meditation, we can use our breath or an image of Buddha as the object. Whatever object we use, it's important that, to the best of our ability, we direct our mind towards getting rid of all our wandering thoughts and, if we can, to maintain a hundred percent focus on the object. That is what meditation is all about. It is just the mind focussing on the object and not losing that focus to something else.

If we forget the object, the scriptures say that it means we possess one of the obstacles to meditation practice called 'forgetting the instructions', which is the term used for this type of fault in meditation practice. In order to keep our mind on the object, we use tools such as the power of our memory, usually called mindfulness or recollection. We should also use the mental factor of alertness or introspection. These mental factors help us to retain the object and guard our mind against distraction. Along with mindfulness, we need to continuously use introspection which is like a watchman, checking to see if our mind is abiding on the object or not. Bearing in mind this brief explanation, we will begin the meditation practice.

[meditation]

The precious human life

In last week's session, we touched on the topic called 'the rarity of the human life with leisure and endowment'. We learned that we need to contemplate the fact that we have obtained a human life qualified with eight types of leisure and ten endowments, and that we have a unique opportunity to fulfil all our wishes. This precious human life has great value and meaning but it is extremely rare and difficult to find again.

If we recognise the value of life only in terms of mundane goals and the opportunities we wish to accomplish in this life alone, such as being successful in terms of victory to ourselves and loss to others, of acquiring wealth, position, reputation and so forth, then we have not recognised the true meaning of this precious human life.

In the text, *The Concise Meaning of the Stages of the Path*, Lama Tsongkhapa says, 'A life of leisure is more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel'. We know that a mystic wish-fulfilling jewel can grant us whatever we wish in the world so it is of great value. However, Lama Tsongkhapa says that the value of the human life of leisure is far greater than that.

Eight leisures

So, first we must recognise that, together the eight leisures and ten endowments are eighteen features that

characterise a precious human life. Leisure in this context is not about having spare time to do whatever we wish, rather it's about having the freedom and opportunity to accomplish the true meaning of life. 'Leisure' implies the notion of freedom from unfavourable conditions or obstructions from the eight unfavourable conditions. Literally in Tibetan *mi-kompa gye*, *mi-kompa*, means no free time. *Gye* means eight. Let's now go through each one of the eight leisures.

- First of all, if where we live has an assembly of the fourfold spiritual communities – novice monks and nuns, and fully ordained monks and nuns – then we have that leisure or a conducive situation in terms of that place not being remote. In other words, that place provides a unique opportunity and hence our time and life becomes very precious. We must recognise this.
 - But simply living in the right place is not enough, if we have defective sense faculties, for example if we are deaf, blind, or mute. This will be a disadvantage that obstructs us from fully utilising the potential of human life. Thus, considering the life we have, we should recognise how fortunate we are in enjoying sound health and having all our faculties and intact organs free from defects.
 - Furthermore, having a wrong view or belief system can be an obstruction to engaging in the right path. A wrong view is believing that there is no karma and its fruit; no natural law of cause and effect. It is not believing that a good action will yield a good result and a bad action will yield a bad result or that there is no life before and after and no object of refuge. Being free from wrong views that impede us from undertaking the true meaning of life is a leisure which makes life conducive.
 - Generally speaking, the cosmic world system is transient in that it goes through periods of coming into being and disintegration. It is said that in those periods, the Buddha rarely appears. So, to be born in a time when the Buddha appears is a leisure, as opposed to being born in a time when there is no appearance of the Buddha. We are so fortunate. Not only that Buddha came to this world, but he also turned the wheel of Dharma.
 - We should also recognise that we have not taken a lower rebirth, such as an animal. Animals are afflicted with and dominated by ignorance and stupidity.
 - We have not taken rebirth as a hungry ghost or *preta* constantly subject to unbearable suffering.
 - Likewise we have not been born as a hell being, also constantly subject to unbearable suffering.
 - Not only that, being born as a long-life godly being is also considered to be a disadvantage. Long-life godly beings get so absorbed in a state of bliss and tranquillity they don't find time to do anything else. Apparently, the only time they have a different thought is when they first take rebirth when they
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think, 'I am born' and then when they die when they think, 'I am dying'. So, taking a life of a godly being is considered an obstruction to extracting the true meaning of life and not being as born as a long-life god is considered to be a leisure

Ten endowments

The ten endowments are in two groups. The first group, called self-endowment, are the factors we need to possess from our own side. The other five are called the other endowments or the environmental endowments which are external factors.

The first five are: being born as a human being; being born in a central place, meaning being born in a place where the Dharma is flourishing; having all your faculties, like not being born mute or with an intellectual disability; not having committed any of the five heinous crimes or extremely negative karmic actions, and having faith in the Dharma, which refers to the *vinaya* or ethical teaching of the Buddha.

The other five endowments are factors depending on the outer conditions of our life, such as the Buddha coming to the world, the Buddha teaching the Dharma and the sustenance of the Dharma. Not only does the Dharma exist, but there are also followers of the Dharma. The last of the ten endowments is that there are those who show loving kindness and compassion for others, supporting the Dharma as benefactors and donors or giving Dharma teachings and so on.

Last week's homework

Those who were here last week will recall the homework, where I asked you to think about this question:- if someone possesses the eight leisures, do they also necessarily possess the ten endowments or not? Or the other way round – if someone possesses the ten endowments, do they automatically possess the eight leisures as well?

The first answer is no – that is to say the eight leisures don't encompass the ten endowments. We could have someone who has killed his father but still possesses the eight leisures. An act of killing one's father constitutes committing one of the five heinous karmic crimes, so someone who has committed such a crime doesn't possess the ten endowments. These five heinous crimes are literally called *tsam-me le*. In Tibetan *tsam-me* means boundless or without any break because the perpetrator will go directly to the hell realm after this life, unless such an act is purified. The word *le* means karma. So, we could have a person who has committed a heinous crime yet possesses the eight leisures.

In fact, the person can become a good Dharma practitioner after they have acknowledged their past crime. With regard to the purification of heinous crimes, the Buddhist lower school of tenets called Vaibhashika posits that purification is not possible within the same lifetime as the crime was committed. However, according to the higher Buddhist schools of tenets, it is possible to purify the karma in the same lifetime.

We can also have a person who lacks faith in the Dharma, so they lack the ten endowments but they could possess all

of the eight leisures. Here, you need to take into account that holding a wrong view and having a right view or faith in the Dharma are two separate things. That is to say someone may not have the wrong view, which is one of the eight leisures but they may lack faith in the Dharma, which is one of ten endowments.

Having no wrong view doesn't necessarily mean having a right view either. We could say that a person may not have any belief system such as the concept of life after and before, or even any wrong views. Nonetheless, they might respect the faith and view of others. They might not judge others or object to their view about life before and after this life or about the Buddha and so forth. However, all this doesn't mean that they have faith in the Dharma or they have a right view. For example, a child does not have a wrong view, right? But that does not mean that the child has a right view or that they have faith in the Dharma.

Making an effort

To engage in lam rim meditation, we need to familiarise ourselves with and remember all the essential topics. For example, to engage in the meditation on the precious human life we need to remember the eight leisures and the ten endowments. If we don't remember them, then we have to go over them again and again until they stay in our mind. Otherwise, how and what are going to meditate on? We cannot just say it is too hard and leave it. We need to put in some effort by first studying, then contemplating and finally meditating.

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Edited Version

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