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# The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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## Meditation is to put the mind at rest

We are here to discuss meditation. Having a very relaxed state of mind can help us to be more effective and productive. To bring about this relaxed state of mind we should try to get rid of any disturbing thoughts, distractions or agitation in our minds. Just let go of all these thoughts and let the mind rest completely and fully within.

This makes a huge difference to any activity we then undertake. To put our minds at rest we need to have an object to direct or focus our minds on. Usually, an object with which we are familiar and which is easy to remember and focus on is recommended. For beginner meditational practitioners, breathing – the inhaling and exhaling of our breath – is highly recommended.

So, in this session, we will use the incoming and outgoing of our breath as the object. After we get rid of all the outer distractions, then, as the mind turns inward we rest and direct the attention of the mind on this incoming and outgoing breath as much as possible. Just try to keep the mind there and try to prevent the mind from wandering off to other objects. To retain your mental focus on the breath you will find it very helpful to mentally count each round of breathing – the breath in and out as one round – keep mentally counting, first round, second round and so on without losing the mental attention on the breath.

So, we begin this breathing meditation together.

[Meditation]

## The great potential of human life

Now we will continue the teaching on how finding a human life is very difficult and rare. Previously we talked about why a human life is so special and how it offers a great many opportunities. Depending on this human life, this human potential, we can accomplish great purpose or meaning.

This teaching shows us how to recognise how special and unique human life is by presenting eight pleasures and ten endowments making up eighteen qualities or eighteen attributes. If we are born as a human being and our life is qualified with these eighteen attributes, it means we have found a precious human life. It is important to recognise that we have obtained a precious human life and to truly appreciate it and feel how fortunate we are to have found such a unique, special human life.

## Temporary and ultimate happiness

The uniqueness or specialness of this human life is in terms of its potential to achieve what we want to achieve. If we think about what it is that we want to achieve it is that we all want to achieve happiness and avoid suffering. So, what is that happiness? We can think of happiness as some sort of pleasure and satisfaction that we can experience in this life and in future lives – primarily on the sensual level or through external or physical factors. This type of happiness is only

temporary happiness because it is not everlasting. We can also think of everlasting happiness as the result of achieving the state of liberation from this worldly existence or samsara. Furthermore, the supreme and highest happiness is achieving the complete enlightenment of the state of buddhahood. So, the state of happiness of the liberation from samsara and complete enlightenment is the ultimate happiness.

Therefore, when we talk about recognising this special human life which is characterised by eighteen attributes – giving us the most favourable conditions to achieve what we want to achieve – we need to recognise its potential to achieve both the temporary and ultimate happiness. For example, if you possess a very valuable material object you will cherish and safeguard it only if you have a clear recognition of its value. Not only that, you will then think of how to make use of that object to benefit yourself. Similarly, if you see the value, the meaning of this very special human life that you have found, you will think of utilising it to make it meaningful.

The ultimate and highest spiritual meaning we can achieve is complete enlightenment or the state of buddhahood. We can also say that that is the ultimate and supreme state of happiness and state of bliss. It is said that with this unique human life of leisure and endowments we have the capacity to achieve the ultimate spiritual goal of complete enlightenment, even within a short single lifetime in the age of degeneration. All the great ancient masters and meditators who achieved the state of liberation and complete enlightenment, such as the great Lama Tsongkhapa and other masters, achieved their spiritual goals by depending on and utilising their unique human life. Therefore, we should be inspired by them as we have also obtained the same form of life and have the same opportunity and potential.

The next topic is thinking about the rarity or the difficulty of finding the same life again. This topic is important. Even though, having recognised that the life we have found is really special and that we now have a great opportunity and potential, we may still be led into thinking that we will make use of this life and opportunity a little bit later. We may even think that we can find the same opportunity again in a future life. But such thinking is wrong and deluded, as finding the same life again is extremely difficult.

## Why is the human life of leisure difficult to find?

There are many reasons why finding such a life of opportunity and potential again is very rare and extremely difficult.

First, finding a perfect human life is rare in the sense that it is very difficult to create. Any very precious object is of high value because the causes for it are rare and difficult to gather. Similarly, from the point of view of the causes for a human rebirth, we can understand that it is rare because gathering the causes for finding such a life is very rare and extremely difficult to find.

When we think in terms of numbers, we can also understand the rarity of a human life. A human life might not even be one per cent of the number of animals and other species

And then within that one per cent how many human beings possess the eighteen qualities – the eight pleasures and ten endowments? Very, very few. Only a very, very small percentage of human beings qualify as having the eighteen attributes of a precious human life. So we can see how small the number of precious human lives is.

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Also, when we leave this life, what happens? According to the concept of rebirth or reincarnation which is held by all the major religions, we take rebirth after we die. But some say humans come back as a human and animals come back as an animal. But this idea doesn't conform with the theory of the law of karma or causality according to which things arise from their respective causes; positive karma results in a good rebirth and negative karma results in a bad rebirth.

### **Is there life before and after?**

We accept the concept of a life before and after not just because it is presented by past great scholars but because it is logical and backed by sound reasoning. One important reason to prove the existence of a past life is that there are people who can remember their past lives; there are many books that tell stories of people sharing their past life.

Another important reason which we must consider is in terms of the substantial or the main cause of our mind or consciousness and our self or being. Just as when we look at the causes of any other object, we see there is a pattern of a suitable or concordant relationship between cause and effect.

A cause does not produce just any result, nor does a result arise from any causes. Based on this principle of the law of cause and effect, our mind or consciousness must come from its concordant cause. As we trace the cause of our mind, we can understand that our current mind comes from its previous moment and that comes from its previous moment and so on. We can trace to the first mind at the time of our conception in the mother's womb. We can consider whether that mind comes from both or just one of our parents. If we consider that, we can conclude that it doesn't come from either. This shows that it has its own previous moment of mind, a mental continuum. If that is the case then we too come from our past life because the person who possessed that continuum of the mind before our conception into the mother's womb was our former life. The bottom line is that matter cannot be the main cause of the mind or make a mind. So, by using reason or the logic of cause and effect we prove the existence of life before and after.

### **How to make the best use of life?**

Having recognised the difficulty of finding again a human life of leisure, we will have an urge to make the best use of it while we have the opportunity. But the question is, how do we take its essence? To address this, the text now presents integrating Dharma practice into our life as this is the best way to render life meaningful. Furthermore, the text teaches what kind of Dharma practice we should integrate or follow to train our minds.

There are three headings on how to train the mind in the stages of the path.

- Training the mind in the stages of the path shared by the person of small scope
- Training the mind in the stages of the path shared by the person of middling scope
- Training the mind in the stages of the person of great scope.

### **The person of small, middling, and great scope**

In this outline, we find three levels of spiritual person in terms of their mental scopes.

The first is the person of small scope whose main goal in following the path is to find a good rebirth as they are terrified

of being born into a bad rebirth and having to undergo the suffering there.

The next is the person of middling scope who is not satisfied with just a good rebirth but aspires to achieve liberation from samsara. Compared with the person of small scope they are seeking a higher goal but their goal is not as high as that of the person of great scope; hence they are called the person of middling scope. They see suffering not only in the lower realms but also in the higher realms, such as human beings who are subject to the suffering of birth, sickness, aging and death, and godly or celestial beings who are subject to the suffering of death and the of waging war with other gods and so forth. Therefore, the person of middling scope aspires to achieve liberation from cyclic existence.

The person of great scope sees that achieving self-liberation is not sufficient. In fact, they see self-liberation as a selfish goal, a sign of lacking gratitude to all other sentient beings. They have genuine compassion, coupled with a sense of responsibility for freeing all other sentient beings. They recognise that they have received an incredible amount of kindness and love from every single sentient being, the same as they have received from their current mother. Indeed, they recognise that all sentient beings would have been their mother in previous lives. This follows from the fact that the number of rebirths we have had is infinite.

So, the person of great scope thinks that, just as our current life depended on our mother, we have depended on other beings as our mothers in past and limitless lifetimes and have received tremendous love and support from them. Therefore, instead of seeking self-liberation, the person of great scope or of great mental capacity aspires to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings.

*Question: We hear people remembering their past lives, but usually as human beings, not as any other forms of life. Why?*

*Response: That's true. I haven't come across any books which narrate stories of past lives of people as being animals or other forms of life. However, we can find stories in the scriptures which record the past life of the Buddha in which the Buddha said 'In the past when I was a swan ... when I was born in the hell realm', and so on.*

*Question: What is reincarnation?*

Reincarnation is the concept of being reborn life after life. We are born as human beings when our mindstream or consciousness is conceived in the human aggregates. If it is conceived in the aggregates of an animal, then we are an animal.

What is a person? It is just a label on the collection of the five aggregates of form, feeling, recognition, compositional factors, and consciousness. If those aggregates are that of a human being, the labelled person is called a human being. A person is a mere label because if we search we cannot find it. For example, is my hand me, is my head or leg me and so on. None of our parts or aggregates is us. We cannot identify the person or us with any specific thing. Hence, we exist but merely as a label or designation. We exist by dependence upon others and not inherently or by ourselves independently. To say that we do not exist is falling into an extreme view of nihilism. A person does exist and functions nominally as a person.