
The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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We will begin with a short breathing meditation together. While we do this meditation, we want our mind to be fully focused on the incoming and outgoing breath, and not on any external mental distractions. If we have any troubling or restless thoughts we let go of them and, at the same time, ensure that every part of our body is physically relaxed. We will do this meditation for a few minutes.

It is said that motivation is very important at the beginning of any meditation practice. We should also think about why we are engaged in this meditation and why we want to achieve a calm mind. It is not just for our own sake but also to benefit all sentient beings. In short, we begin with the motivation of bodhicitta or the altruistic mind of enlightenment. Therefore, we cultivate and generate this mind of enlightenment as a motivation to engage in meditation.

We will now begin the meditation practice.

[Pause for meditation]

In the teachings last week, I explained the advice given by Buddha that we are our own protector, our own enemy and a witness to our own good or bad actions.

This quotation says we should be a witness to our own actions, but there is one question. We have all engaged in actions, but we may not remember them all. So how can we witness all our actions?

The actions we remember are actions we have committed in this current life. However, we have no recollection of actions we have committed in our past lives. But there is a way to remember what sorts of actions we have done in past lives. If we think of our current life situation, we know that our current mind and body are not completely free from suffering. The body we possess is subject to sickness and various kinds of physical health problems. If we look at our current state of mind, we can see that it also suffers various forms of unhappiness.

Observing the state of our body, we can guess the sorts of actions we have done in our past life. But if we observe the state of mind we cultivate throughout a single day and examine which thoughts are wholesome and which are unwholesome, we can gain some idea of what sort of future life we will have.

The current topic of the teachings is the law of karma and cause and effect. From this idea of karma, we come to understand that if we do the right actions through our three doors – our body, speech and mind – then the result will be positive. If the actions of body, speech and mind are negative, then the results are undesirable, such as experiencing unhappiness.

To gain faith in the law of karma, we come to understand that whether our future will be good or not depends on our actions of body, speech and mind. All the actions we create will leave an imprint within us, and this imprint will yield its results in the future. To cultivate this concept of the law of karma, we must reflect on and develop an understanding of it. Karma has four characteristics. First, karma is definite. Second, karma increases. The third type of karma is not meeting with karma that has not been created and the fourth is that karma is not dissipated, nor does it have an expiry date.

When it says that karma has the characteristic of increasing, it means, as we sow the seeds, so we will reap the results. The characteristic of karma or in any action we create is that it will predetermine the results. If the action is virtuous, then the result is happiness. If the action is non-virtuous, the result is unhappiness. So, karma has these definite characteristics in terms of cause and effect.

This relationship between cause and effect, or karma, can also be seen with external things, such as the relationship between a seed and the fruit it produces. A sweet fruit must be the result of a specific seed which produces that result. It cannot arise from a different seed. Likewise, a seed that produces sour fruit only produces a fruit that is sour and not sweet. This explains how karma is definite, which is one of the characteristics of karma.

There is a story that has been part of the prophecy of Lord Buddha. There was a lay practitioner who had a melodious singing voice but was physically ugly. When Lord Buddha was asked why this person had such a life, he explained how, in one of his past lives, he was just a worker for a king. One day, the king ordered him to build a large stupa. He was not happy and complained a lot about why the king gave him such a huge task. He made a lot of fuss, but because it was ordered by the king, the work for the stupa was done and, in the end, it was beautiful. When the stupa was finished, he felt bad about the negative comments he had made in the beginning. To make up for that, he made a small offering of a bell to the stupa. Buddha said the reason he had the beautiful singing voice was the result of making the offering of a bell, while his looks were the result of his complaints and criticism about building the stupa.

The next characteristic is that karma increases. Even if the karma we create and accumulate is small, such as a minor non-virtuous action, it increases if we do not purify that negative karma, which we do by recognising it as negative, repenting and engaging in purification practices. Karma increases over time. Day by day it grows, just like a tiny seed can grow into a huge tree with lots of branches and an abundance of fruit; all from a tiny seed. So, each karma has the characteristic of increasing.

There is another story relating to the understanding that karma is increasing. Once, Lord Buddha was in town, and a woman offered him a handful of barley. The Buddha then predicted that by the virtue of offering the barley, she would achieve the state of liberation of a pratyekabuddha. But her husband thought that the Buddha must be lying, and he asked how that would be possible. The Buddha

picked up a tiny seed from a gigantic tree. Buddha said that if you planted that seed in the ground you could make one to two hundred horse carts from the wood. The man immediately understood the meaning of how karma increases and then developed faith in karma.

The third characteristic is not meeting with uncreated karma. In other words, we do not meet with the results of karma we have not created. This means that if we have not created the karma, whether it is good or bad, we will never experience the results of that karma. This explains what we experience in our lives; the results of what we find in our lives indicate we have created the karma for them.

There are regular stories about people falling from very high buildings and surviving. It's like a miracle. There are also stories about major car accidents in which the car is completely destroyed but the people inside the car survived. The fact that people survived and did not die in such extreme situations shows that they did not have the karma to die under those circumstances.

The fourth characteristic is that created karma does not dissipate. In other words, whatever karma we have created, it does not disappear or have an expiry date. There is a sutra that says that the karma we create and accumulate, even if it stays with us for hundreds of eons, will yield its result when the right conditions arise. Therefore, we should not think that the result of a karma will disappear. There is no such thing. Even if it does not ripen immediately or after many lifetimes, a karma will inevitably yield its result.

There is a story of a disciple of Lord Buddha, Maudgalyayana. Amongst all of Buddha's students, he excelled in performing miracles. One day when he went into town for his regular begging rounds, the townspeople shooed him off. Before Maudgalyayana became a monk, he had some unresolved issues with the people in town. After he became a monk, the villagers attacked him and beat him up when he went begging for food. When he returned home, his friends were shocked and asked him how he could receive such beatings from ordinary people, and why he didn't use his miraculous powers. Maudgalyayana replied that he could not even think that he had any powers. He said he could not think of anything and just had to receive harm from the people. The story also explains that, when we have created karma and when the time and conditions are right, it will yield its result, and nothing can stop it.

Not only that, but the sutra says that part of the cause for Maudgalyayana to be abused had something to do with his former life. He was not nice to someone to whom he should have been grateful. The sutra says that his treatment was related to that karma.

These are the four characteristics of karma. By understanding them we should not think that once the karma is created that we cannot alter or purify negative or non-virtuous karma. In fact, we can purify negative karma by engaging in purification practices and reducing a large number of karmas to small karmas. We can completely eliminate karma through purification practice.

What follows next is the teaching on how we can create positive karma and get rid of negative karma. The next topic will explain the sort of practices we can do relating to karma. We are talking about our actions and the sort of actions we do. Actions can be good or bad. Every single day we are doing some sort of activity. In all these activities we are accumulating karma because we are leaving some sort of imprints, tendencies or seeds in our minds and these can produce results for us in the future.

After this, we will talk about how best we can engage and integrate this practical karma into our lives.

We will leave tonight's teaching here.

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