

Turning the Wheel of the Dharma

Gen Rinpoche's first teaching of 1994

The following is a translation of the teaching Gen Rinpoche gave on Sunday 20 March, 1994. It has been edited by Ven. Ani Sönam Chökyi from the oral translation by Losang Dawa.
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Today is the first day of this year's teaching. Of the twelve months of the western year two are already gone and only ten remain. According to the lunar calendar it is already the 10th day of the year. Thus no-one can say that there is one year--1994--remaining.

I am drawing your attention to time's passing to remind you that your lives are also running quickly to their ends. The past has gone, and time spent cannot be regained.

Whatever studies and practices people engaged in last year have left rich and lasting predispositions--latencies--on their mind-streams, but people who put all their effort into earning money have already spent a large chunk of it.

The great Tibetan master Jamgön Lama Tsong Khapa says that this human life of leisure and endowment is far more precious than the wish-granting jewel--though such a jewel can immediately fulfil one's desires for any amount of money or great wealth. Although this jewel would be regarded as an extremely valuable possession, compared to precious human life it is nothing.

"This human life of leisure and endowment
is far more precious than a wish-granting jewel"

By using our precious human life wisely the highest state--of Enlightenment--can be gained even in one lifetime. Failing that, one may attain nirvana--the state of liberation from ordinary existence and its suffering. At the very least one can use this life's potential to achieve another rebirth as a human, or as a being in one of the other favourable states of existence. This human life can be used to achieve any of the goals one sets. Praying to a wish-granting jewel, however, will not help you in any way to achieve one of these three goals.

Not all humans living in this world have what is known as "the precious human life of leisure and endowment". Only humans who have Dharma contact, the final source of temporary and ultimate happiness, have it. Among hundreds of thousands of people only one or two have this.

Concerning the quality of this precious human life Jamgön Lama Tsong Khapa says, "Finding such a wonderful life, full of such potential, occurs only this once." This is stressed to make us realize that in all our limitless past existences we have not found such an opportunity as we have now, and in the future it will be extremely difficult to have such a wonderful chance again. Unless the correct causes are created--virtuous activities and enlightening deeds--then we are most unlikely in a future life to gain the chance that we have now.

An example that illustrates this is that of a beggar finding a precious jewel while sifting through a heap of refuse. This would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the beggar--no-one would ever expect it to happen again. In our own case it is most likely that it is only this one time that we will be born as a human with the precious qualities. This is a very rare occurrence--we should make the most of it.

Jamgön Lama Tsong Khapa then says, "It would not matter, if this life were solid and lasting as stone." However this is not the case. Life is fleeting, highly perishable, and passes in a flash, like lightning in the night sky.

Human life is difficult to find because it is a result that arises from certain causes and it is rare for beings to create these causes. One can see that human life is difficult to find when one considers

the enormous numbers of sentient beings and realizes that humans are only a tiny fraction of that number. One can also appreciate the difficulty of finding human life through contemplating the various analogies of its rarity--a human life is like a single grain of sand among all the sands of the Ganges; finding such a human life is as difficult as it would be for a blind tortoise to find a golden ring that was floating on the ocean, and succeed in putting its head through the ring.

"To expect a rich harvest without sowing
healthy seeds is a vain hope ..."

Human life arises from certain causes and conditions. To expect a rich harvest without sowing healthy seeds at the right time and in the right conditions would be a vain hope; likewise, it would be an empty hope for us to expect to gain a precious human life in the future without creating the correct causes now, in this life. To do this we must engage in positive--virtuous--activities. It is this simple--no cause, no effect.

Of particular importance is to live a pure, ethical life. This is the main cause of gaining a human life in the future. Ethics are of two types: those observed by the ordained and those of lay people. It is not necessary to be ordained to be able to create the causes for a precious human rebirth (although it would be a wonderful thing to have such precious qualities). Even by following the lay ethics such a life can be gained.

These are the teachings about precious human rebirth and the qualities of human life that Buddha taught and that are recorded in the scriptures. The great Tibetan saint Milarepa pointed out: *"The more you contemplate and reason the teachings of the Buddha, the more clear they become. Things which seemed like contradictions at first are clarified, and an ever-increasing understanding arises."*

People like ourselves who have come into contact with the teachings must have had contact with Dharma in the past. This will also be likely to repeat itself in future lives. If you try your best to apply yourselves to study and contempla-tion of the teachings you will find a great surge in your enthusiasm for practice, your wisdom will become ever more keen, and your reasoned faith in the teachings deeper.

Your life will be over in a flash, like night lightning. A healthy young person goes shopping in the market place but is carried back a corpse on a stretcher--such is the uncertainty of life's duration even if you are in perfect health.

This wonderful life is short and fragile by nature. Please understand this. It is not good enough to think, "I will practise well in the future". Practise right now!

It has been said by a great master, "Death will come before the time of tomorrow's practice."

Take this advice to heart.

For meditation today, as all these teachings have come from the Lord Buddha, we will meditate on Buddha Shakyamuni on the crown of our heads.