
Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

༄ ལྷོ་སྤྱོད་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



15 June 1993

Taking the Essence of This Life: Its Rarity, Meaning And Actually Taking the Essence

Lama Tsong Khapa: 'Foundation of All Excellence Prayer':

"Having understood that this life of leisure is found but once and finding it again is extremely difficult, generate a strong prayer that may I produce in myself the thought of constantly taking the essence of this life day and night."

This prayer has four aspects:

1. Contemplate the **rarity** of finding such a wonderful human life of leisure and freedom. This first line literally implies that this excellent human life, which one has obtained now is obtained only once. This does not necessarily mean that in the past one has not been a human. Rather by thinking of the number of lives that one has taken in the past, then most of these were a lower rebirth than now. It is therefore right to say that finding this type of life now is like finding it only once and finding this type of life again is very difficult. It is as if this human rebirth is found only once.
2. Contemplate the **meaning** of this life.
3. Then generate a strong, spontaneous thought to **take the essence** or **meaning** of this life.
4. If one has visualised Guru Shakyamuni Buddha on one's crown, then make a prayer:
"May Lord Buddha send down blessing to generate this urgent thought to take the essence day and night."

Three Ways Of Taking The Essence Of This Life

There are three ways to take the purpose or essence of this life:

1. **Small Level:** Use this human life to create the correct causes and conditions which will result in a better future rebirth - as a human or god rather than in the lower realms.
2. **Middle Level:** Use this human life to create the causes to completely free oneself from cyclic existence by attaining liberation.
3. **Highest Level:** Use this human life to work for full enlightenment for the sake of all living beings.

For whatever purpose one chooses to utilise this life, it is essential to overcome attachment or grasping to the temporary affairs or the pleasures of this life. Unless we reduce attachment to or concern for this life, we cannot use this precious human rebirth to fulfil any of these three purposes of existence.

Actual Method To Take The Essence Of This Life: Refuge & Karma

Firstly as the foundation of one's spiritual practice one should regard Buddha as the perfect teacher, Dharma as the perfect

path and the followers of Dharma as the perfect spiritual friend. Refuge is laying the foundation of one's practice.

Secondly one must practise the law of cause and effect.

The connection between taking refuge and observing the law of cause and effect is that by developing faith in the refuge objects and taking refuge in them, one can temporarily prevent any bad rebirths. That is one can save oneself from falling to lower realms once or twice. However, in order to be permanently free from the lower realms one needs more than the protection of the refuge objects. These instructions concerning the refuge objects must be practised and in particular the law of cause and effect must be practised. The only way to be free of all types of suffering is by practising dharma itself. This is analogous to a criminal, who convicted of some serious offence, might bribe an official to escape. But, if he continues those illegal actions, he will still (one day) have to go to prison. Therefore the topic of cause and effect comes after refuge since cause and effect must be practised to achieve one's final liberation.

The Actual Practice Of Cause & Effect: What Is To Be Practised And To Be Abandoned

For that prisoner to be completely free from prison, he must abide within the law. Similarly, if one is freed from a lower rebirth by taking refuge or by the help of the three refuge objects, one shall soon fall back to the lower realms, if the instructions of the dharma are not followed. The practice of dharma is mainly the practice of cause and effect - what is to be adopted and what is to be abandoned (or what to do and what not to do).

Gaining Conviction In The Law Of Cause And Effect: Two Methods

The practice of the law of cause and effect means to practise virtue and abandon non-virtue. This is because virtuous actions result in happiness whereas non-virtuous actions produce unsatisfactory results. This is what Buddha taught. The complete teachings on the law of cause and effect (e.g. the results of practising patience, generosity and morality) come from Buddha who also taught that any difficulties, which are faced in my life, are the result of one's own karma or actions.

There are various levels to the understanding of the law of cause and effect. The very subtle levels are completely beyond normal perceptions, and to prove these very subtle levels of truth a similarly subtle reason is needed. At this level cause and effect cannot be proved by using some outer example. It is more subtle than the theory of emptiness or impermanence. With emptiness and impermanence there is always an obvious argument to help understand their meaning, if one's mind is open to logic. Whereas when Guru Shakyamuni Buddha says "Generosity results in wealth and morality results in better rebirth", then at a gross level this can be understood, but at a

very deep or broad level there are cases which are hard to understand. This does not mean that the practice of the law of cause and effect is irrelevant. Rather it should be one's basic practice, since the practice of dharma in daily life really means the practice of karma.

It is very important to gain some understanding of this knowledge of the law of cause and effect. There are two methods to do this.

First Method: Faith In Buddha's Teachings:

These are the direct and main teachings of Buddha. Of course it is not right to believe in karma just because Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said so. Rather if this topic of karma is too subtle or complex, then one should consider so many of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's other teachings (e.g. on emptiness, impermanence) and gain a complete understanding of those other teachings. Then, even though one does not gain a complete understanding of karma, faith in Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's other teachings will lead to a faith in karma as well. This faith is very important. Without having faith or belief in the law of karma and the fact that virtuous action brings positive result and non-virtuous action brings a negative result, then one would become very careless about one's actions and whether they are harmful will be irrelevant to oneself.

Second Method: Our Own Experiences In Life

From one's own experiences in life an understanding of cause and effect can be gained.

Of course some things are conditioned by immediate circumstances but still there are other factors. Sometimes things seem to happen instantaneously without any expectation. This shows the truth of the law of cause and effect.

Even the sincere practice of dharma has to come from faith in the law of cause and effect. By having this faith in the law of cause and effect, then one shall naturally think, "Just as I am hurt by abusive, harsh speech so do others feel the same." In this way one tries to prevent harm to others and the reasons for tolerating others are obvious.

One Master said emphatically:

"Without personal faith in Dharma then, even if I develop my study in Dharma and seemingly do (Dharma) things, I am like a dog given a chunk of meat, who eats it without tasting it."

The very basic, step which is needed to be taken in order to make any progress at all in Dharma, is:

- To see the faults in worldly existence.
- This recognition of faults leads to renunciation.
- With this renunciation there is a sense of fear of this worldly existence.
- With this fear, then refuge is sought.
- With the seeking of refuge, then effort to follow the instructions of the refuge objects is made.

Main Sections In Karma

422.122: Thinking Of The Law Of Cause And Effect Which Is The Root Of All Virtue And Happiness

བདེ་ལེགས་ བམས་ ཅད་ ཀྱི་ ཚུ་ བ་ ལས་ འབྲས་

ལ་ ཡིད་ ཆེས་ ཀྱི་ དད་ པ་ བརྟེན་ པ།

This has three sub-headings:

422.122.1: General Explanation Of Karma

ལས་ འབྲས་ སྤྱིར་ བསམ་ པ།

422.122.2: Specifics Of Karma

བྱེ་ བྲག་ ཏུ་ བསམ་ པ།

422.122.3: How To Correctly Practise Karma

བསམས་ རྣམ་ འཇུག་ ལྷོག་ བྱ་ ཚུལ།

422.122.1: General Explanation Of Karma

ལས་ འབྲས་ སྤྱིར་ བསམ་ པ།

This has two sub-headings:

422.122.11: General: How To Contemplate On Karma In General

སྤྱིར་ བསམ་ ཚུལ་ དངོས།

422.122.12: Specific: How To Contemplate On Karma In Specific

སོ་ སོར་ བྱེ་ བྲེ་ བསམ་ པ།

422.122.11: General: How To Contemplate On Karma In General

སྤྱིར་ བསམ་ ཚུལ་ དངོས།

This has four sub-headings, the General Characteristics, which are the qualities of any type of karma either positive or negative:

422.122.111: Certainty Of Karma

ལས་ ཇིས་ པའི་ ཚུལ།

1Liberation.. p.430 The title used in the text is Developing Faith In The Law Of Cause And Effect - The Root Of All Health And Happiness.

422.122.112: Karma Increases

ལས་འཕེལ་ཆེ་བ།

422.122.113: Not Meeting With Karma Which Is Not Created

ལས་མ་བྱས་པ་དང་མི་འཕྲད་པ།

422.122.114: Karma Created Is Not Exhausted Or Does Not Disappear

ལས་བྱས་པ་ཚུད་མི་བླ་བ།

422.122.12: Specific: How To Contemplate On Karma In Specific

སོ་སོར་ཕྱི་སྟེ་བསམ་པ།

This has three sub-sections:

422.122.121: Thinking About The Black Side Of Cause And Effect

ནག་པོའི་ལས་འབྲས་བསམ་པ།

422.122.122: Thinking About The White Side Of Cause And Effect

དཀར་པོའི་ལས་འབྲས་བསམ་པ།

422.122.123: Teaching About The Doors That Unintentionally Lead To Powerful Karma

ཞུར་ལ་སློབས་ལྡན་གྱི་ལས་ཀྱི་སློབ་སྦྱས་ཏེ་བསྟན་པ།

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

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22 June 1993

422.122.11: How To Contemplate On Karma In General¹

སྦྱིར་བསམ་ཚུལ་དངོས།

The Four General Characteristics Of Karma:

422.122.111: Certainty Of Karma

ལས་ངེས་པའི་ཚུལ།

422.122.112: Karma Increases

ལས་འཕྲེལ་ཆེ་བ།

422.122.113: Not Meeting With Karma Which Is Not Created

ལས་མ་བྱས་པ་དང་མི་འཕྲད་པ།

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ལས་བྱས་པ་ཆུད་མི་བྲ་བ།

Four Determinations Pursuant To Contemplation Of The Four General Characteristics Of Karma

By contemplating each of these four characteristics there should follow four firm convictions:

1. Through contemplating the certainty of karma, the determination to establish positive virtue in one's actions should follow.
2. Through contemplating the increasing of karma, the determination TO NOT CREATE even a very tiny negative action but CREATE any positive action, no matter how tiny, should follow.
3. Through contemplating not meeting the outcome of karma which has not been created, the determination to apply the four forces of remedy to purify negativities should follow.

4. Through contemplating that karma after being created does not simply disappear of its own accord, the determination to see the importance of qualifying any virtuous action with the proper dedication should follow.

422.122.111: Certainty Of Karma²

ལས་ངེས་པའི་ཚུལ།

The certainty of karma shows the close link between the cause and its effect. According to Buddha, whatever karma is created, the result, which is similar to that cause, will automatically arise. The certainty of karma is that if any positive or virtuous action is created, the result will definitely be satisfactory. This is the certainty of karma. If the karma is non-virtuous, the result of that karma will definitely be something miserable. This understanding of the certainty should inspire the desire to create positive actions or karma, since everyone wishes for happiness and satisfaction. By contemplating this certainty of karma, there should be no doubt that, if a positive action is created, the desired result will be achieved.

Understanding Karma: The Root Of All Practice

It must be understood that one must be very cautious when creating any karma or actions. This is very important, since by being cautious, those karmas which result in suffering and misery, can be prevented. Also, one must be very aware of those negative karmas which have already been accumulated. If no action is taken against those accumulated negative karmas they will soon ripen their result, which will definitely be miserable. Also apart from experiencing that actual misery at the time of the ripening of that result, there is nothing which can be done to turn away that karma and misery.

The basic reason why it is necessary to develop faith in the law of karma is so that suffering can be minimised, and happiness can be increased. If this genuine faith in the law of cause and effect is cultivated, we shall be inspired to make every effort to create positive actions and remove any negative actions. From this point of

¹Liberation.. p433 The title used in the text is "Thinking about cause and effect in a truly general way."

²Liberation.. p433 The title used in the text is "How karma is fixed."

view, understanding and faith in karma, is what transforms our mind into dharma. This then transforms our deeds into dharma.

Alternatively lack of faith in karma is the reason why some are very absent minded about creating negative actions, and weak in confronting any unexpected situations and instability in life. This lack of faith in karma is due to a lack of understanding of karma. With a firm faith and a good understanding of karma, the whole of one's life can be seen in the light of that understanding. Normally, when unwanted situations happen in life, one not only loses patience, but also blames them on things outside oneself. In fact it is the karma (which is inside oneself), which should be blamed. This then changes how one views the situation, since that situation has now become one's own responsibility and therefore, can be better tolerated.

When honoured, immediately we become proud and excited. Whereas if by seeing that this good situation is all the result of positive karma, which we have created in the past, we shall be encouraged to create those same actions for the sake of our own future. Therefore, one's entire spiritual practice comes from understanding the law of karma. For example the practices of generosity, patience, etc., all arise from our understanding of the law of karma.

Certainty Of Karma: Generates Patience When Having Problems And Strength In Collecting Virtue

If this first characteristic of certainty is fully realised, then no one would ever be discouraged from practising right actions since it would become so fixed in the mind that the result of positive actions in any life is happiness. Any suffering, which is experienced in this life, is the result of negative actions created in the past (if not in this life then in past lives).

Understanding the certainty of karma prevents loss of faith in karma and the generation of wrong views on karma. For example, there are people who are always good and kind. They believe in God or the law of karma, and so always do right actions. Yet they are seen to be facing great difficulties and problems in life. A wrong view that there is no God or no truth in the law of karma could easily be generated in these circumstances. Consider this in more detail. What if without anticipation some "undeserved" major problems happened to oneself despite maintaining a faith in the Triple Gem, and as far back as one can remember one has never done any serious negative action and has always been kind? There is a danger that one's faith will be lost. It should be realised that these problems are the result of negative actions created in the past. Likewise there should be no doubt that positive situations are the outcome of accumulated positive actions.

Difficulties and problems as the result of negative actions are also influenced by accumulated positive actions. Without those past positive actions these problems would be far more serious and far bigger than now being

experienced. By tolerating these current problems, one is also relieving oneself of those negative karmas created in the past.

Therefore by always looking and judging situations from the point of view of karma we can generate:

- more patience in confronting problems and
- more strength to accumulate positive actions.

Story To Illustrate The Certainty Of Karma: Nyan-Pa Sang-Dan & The King Sergyel

During Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's time there was a monk called Nyan-pa Sang-dan^[3] (Sansk: "priyabhadra"). He had a very beautiful voice but physically was very unattractive. The cause for his pleasant voice but ugly body was that in one previous life he was employed by a King to construct a stupa or reliquary. Since it was very hard work he became very tired and complained to himself, "Why does the King want to construct such a big stupa? It seems that it will never finish." However, at the completion he felt good and regretted what he had said. With the wages from his labour he bought a bell made of silver and gold and offered this to the stupa.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha told this story to King Sergyel who was visiting Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, because he wanted to arrest and execute Angulimala, who had murdered so many people out of a wrong view. Before sending his men to get Angulimala, the King thought that he should check with Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. So the King on his elephant went to see Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. However, when the elephant heard the beautiful, melodious song of Nyan-pa Sang-dan, it stopped and sat down in the road. The King too became fascinated with that sound. When he met Guru Shakyamuni Buddha he told Guru Shakyamuni Buddha that his reason for being there was to capture Angulimala, but Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said, "You do not have to worry about him, as I have instructed him and he has reached the state of liberation, so it is not right to impose your law on him.

Then the King asked about the beautiful sound that he and his elephants had heard. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said, "That sound was the melodious voice of Nyan-pa Sang-dan." The King was very keen to see and admire that person, so he asked Guru Shakyamuni Buddha to meet him. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said, "I am afraid that you will change your mind if you see him." And then Guru Shakyamuni Buddha told the story of Nyan-pa Sang-dan to the King and how in the past he had complained about constructing the stupa so his body was now ugly, but afterwards, by offering the bell, his voice was now very beautiful.

End of discourse

Debate On Emptiness

Geshe-la: Jeremy, does emptiness have colour?

³snyan-pa bzang-ldan

Student 1: No.
Geshe-la: Does emptiness have light?
Student 1: No.
Geshe-la: The sun and the electric light have light and are lacking inherent existence.
Student 1: The light lacks inherent existence but is not emptiness.
Geshe-la: If emptiness can not have colour or light, then why cannot it have light, since emptiness is lack of inherent existence? Emptiness does not have light because it is lack of inherent existence. Therefore, the reason why it is lack of inherent existence is also that such a thing should not have light?
Why does it not have light? For example, the sun lacks inherent existence.
Student 1: The sun is not an example of the lack of inherent existence.
Geshe-la: What other reasons are there for emptiness not having light? Note: whatever proof you give for your reason should maintain your assertion.
Subject = Emptiness
Assertion (predicate) = Emptiness does not have light
Reason = because emptiness is the lack of inherent existence
This reason is incomplete because there are many things which are lack of inherent existence but do have light, e.g. sun.
Student 2: Emptiness does not have light since it is not apprehensible by a form consciousness.
Geshe-la: Therefore any object which can be apprehended by a form consciousness can not have light.
Student 2: The reason why emptiness does not have light is because every object having light must be apprehensible by a form consciousness.
Student 2: Emptiness does not have light because it is only apprehensible by mental consciousness.
Geshe-la: What about the mind of a Buddha or the five different lights emanating from (that) mind. Does clear light have light?
Student 2: No.
Geshe-la: Why is it called clear light?
Student 2: It is called merely an absence of darkness.
Geshe-la: What is this darkness?
If there is no darkness, there can be no night or day.
Does the Person, the I, the You, have light?
You can have a flashlight.
Is there a problem saying, "I have light" when I have a flashlight which has light?
Student 2: Yes. It means my flashlight is me.
Geshe-la: If the light which shines on my body

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

The original typescript is prepared from Alan Molloy's original transcript, which has been checked against Damien Busby's notes. Adair Bunnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.

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20 July 1993

Mixing Dharma Practice With Daily Life Brings Benefits

While formally engaging in meditation it is important to develop an altruistic mind and cultivate love and compassion towards other beings. It is also important to do the same thing in daily life. In daily life things, which are learnt from dharma study, must not be forgotten. We should do our best to find time to meditate while every now and then, reminding ourselves of the dharma teachings and integrate them into daily life. If this is done then dharma will result in benefits, not only future lives but also this current life. The dharma benefits assist in developing a more peaceful and gentle mind, compared to those who do not practise dharma. If life and dharma study are seen as separate things, then dharma would have no ability to bring happiness and peace into daily life.

Therefore, the benefits of dharma and of giving up the self-centred mind must truly be recognised. Even if the self-centred mind is not given up completely, at least thinking, "Just as I do not want that to happen to me, in the same way others do not wish for that," will lead to respect for other beings.

The Foundations Of The Various Practices Of Lam Rim, Sitting Meditation And Dharma Practice

The practice of Lam Rim begins with contemplation on leisure and endowments.

The practice of sitting meditation begins with establishing proper motivation.

The practice of dharma begins with faith in the law of cause and effect.

Lam Rim practice is begun by contemplating the leisure and endowments of this human life. This contemplation serves as the foundation of the practice. If it is done well, it enables to make good progress.

In sitting meditation good progress is only possible if the frame of mind is adjusted into a proper motivation. For the practice of dharma, faith in the law of cause and effect is like "laying the foundation". Without laying that foundation, i.e., by not having faith in the law of cause and effect, no matter how much is learnt about dharma or by becoming a great scholar, dharma is not being

practised, and so many negative actions will be continuously be created.

422.122.112: Karma Increases¹

ལས་འཕྲེལ་ཆེ་བ།

When a karma or action is created, a karmic imprint is imprinted on one's consciousness or mindstream. It is like taking a photo. The image cannot be seen until it is fully processed, but then every detail can be seen. Therefore, until the conditions are met, this karmic imprint in one's mind stays intact. When for example a mental craving for something arises, and the conditions are met, this karmic imprint will ripen its result.

Purpose Of Meditation On Increase Of Karma: To Be Cautious Of Even Small Actions

"Karma increases", means that the potential of Karma can produce either enormous or a great many results, irrespective of the size of the karma. To illustrate this consider an outer seed, i.e., a grain seed. Just one seed can produce an enormous result or harvest, which can feed many people. However, in terms of producing a number of results, the potential of karma is far greater than any external cause. Because of the certainty aspect of karma, one should affirm to oneself that:

"I shall now only create positive karma, since I wish for happiness and I shall abandon negative actions, since I do not want suffering."

Therefore this aspect of the certainty of karma, clearly shows that:

- if happiness is wanted, its causes (positive actions) must be created.
- if avoiding suffering is wanted, its causes (negative actions) must be abandoned.

Contemplating the certainty of karma leads one to do the right actions.

However, there is a likelihood of becoming very careless about minor actions, by thinking that minor positive

¹Liberation.. p434 The title used in the text is "Karma shows great increase."

actions are trivial, so they are not worth creating, or creating some tiny negative action by thinking that it is minor and harmless. In fact this should not be done. By realising the karmic aspect of increase, even if one thinks it is only a very minor negative or positive action, one should realise that it has the potential to produce an enormous result.

Therefore, by understanding the increase of karma one is encouraged to create positive actions, even if they are small or trivial, and to abandon any negative actions, even if they are very minor. In this way it is important to know how to relate each aspect of Karma into practice and to make an effort to practise it.

Pabongka Rinpoche said:

"As far as learning Dharma goes, if you read my teachings they are very clear and simple because of the way they are written."

As far as the style of writing goes, Pabongka Rinpoche's Lam Rim is one of the easiest to read, mainly because Pabongka Rinpoche saw the weakness of beings in these degenerate times and that such a text was necessary for these beings.

Benefits Of Practising Even Small Virtues Consistently

From this teaching on the increase of karma arises the inspiration to do regular practice, even if it is very small in terms of time.

One sutra:

"Never underestimate the benefits of a small virtue and of not practising it, because a dripping of water can fill a large container. And never become absent-minded about committing even a small negative action because it is very small. Even a small spark of fire can burn down a mountain of forests."

In this way by regular, consistent practice, even if it is just twenty five prostrations or one mala of recitation, by just continuing to do it then as the year goes by one shall accumulate a great number of prostrations and mantra recitations.

No matter how small is one's practice, if it is kept consistent, it is worthwhile. For example, reading a Lam Rim text is not like reading other texts, which are just to occupy the mind. Rather, Lam Rim has the potential to calm the mind and develop its qualities.

Even if there is not dramatic progress in this life, one's practice implants some seed in the mind so that there is the potential to make quick progress in the future.

422.122.113: Not Meeting With Karma Which Is Not Created²

ལས་མ་བྱས་པ་དང་མི་འཕྲད་པ།

This implies that everything follows from its own cause. Without creating the cause, there is no point in hoping for a result. If the wish is to be born as a human in the next life, then the cause for that must have been created. If the wish is to achieve the state of Buddhahood, then the cause, which is the accumulation of merit, must be created. Without the cause there is no result whatsoever.

In the Lam Rim text there are some illustrations:

Some people engage in war and conflict, but only some of them die, while others survive despite being struck by weapons. Similarly in a plane or bus disaster, many die but a few survive. Why do they survive? Because they have not created the causes. Therefore, they do not meet the cause of dying in those situations. All the things that do occur in a life are all due to oneself having created causes in the past. All those things which are wished for but never happen are because of not creating the causes for it in the past. This shows the inevitable link between cause and effect.

Recitation Of Heart Sutra: Benefits

The benefits of the recitation of the Heart Sutra are:

- to have no obstacles to one's practice
- to have peace in the world
- the cessation of disease
- to flourish goodness in the world.

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²Liberation.. p437 The title used in the text is "One does not meet with something if one has not created the cause for it to happen."

Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ཨོ ལྷོ་སྤྱོད་མཚོན་ཆ་འཁོར་ལོ།



27 July 1993

422.122.114: Karma Created Is Not Exhausted Or Does Not Disappear¹

ལས་བྱས་པ་རྒྱུད་མི་བྲལ།

This characteristic of karma indicates that the length of time in which the karma is created does not effect the karma. The karma does not simply disappear or vanish away because it was created in a very short time. Nor does it cease to exist or become exhausted simply because it has been a very long time since the creation of that karma. Any karma created by any living being can last for many aeons without any damage. However, when its time comes and all its necessary conditions come together, it is always ready for its result to ripen.

If the conditions to ripen the result of karma are not met, then the karma will not last merely for days or months or years but for aeons. Then, when the condition, e.g. a craving thought, arises, it will condition the karma to yield its result.

Karmic Imprints On One's Mindstream: Their Effects Upon One's Life

Although it is said that any karma or action created will produce its results when the conditions are present, this does not mean that there is nothing that can be done about karma after it has been created. Rather, if one does nothing then karma will produce its results. If the karma is positive and not destroyed by other conditions, then it will produce its result. If the karma is negative and not purified by the method to purify karma, i.e. the four remedial forces, then it will inevitably produce its result.

Relevance To One's Own Day To Day Life

From this aspect of karma one can also learn that day to day life is not something necessarily determined by immediate actions or karma created in this life. This is very relevant to one's daily practice, which is all about studying the matter of karma.

One Has In One's Mindstream Extremely Negative Karma

In general, being born as a human being on this Southern continent, we are in the position to create a very powerful karma which can produce a result even in this lifetime. Also, at the same time one must take into account all those karmas created in many other lifetimes which may or may not effect this life.

In reality it does not matter what we think of ourselves and how good we have been in this life. We think of ourself as a good person because in this life we cannot recall having created any extremely negative karma, but we do not know what negative karma was created in past lives. Perhaps even the animals we see can have in their mindstream the seeds of past created karma, which will yield the result of a better life. Despite not having committed any serious negative karma in this life and feeling bright about the future, there might be the imprint of an extremely negative karma about to fruit resulting in being thrown into a lower rebirth.

Some peoples' lives appear to be wonderful and successful. They are called successful and fortunate. Others face unending problems despite their hard work. They are called unfortunate.

"Luck," What Is It?

In this topic of karma we do not speak of "bad luck" or being "unlucky". Those situations are seen within the light of karma. One should feel very positive about creating a virtuous action even if it is small. If this virtuous action is maintained in the mindstream, even if it is small and if it is not destroyed by anger, then it will definitely produce its result, i.e. the result is guaranteed. Positive karma can be kept intact by dedicating positive actions to one's own enlightenment and to the long life of the gurus and by taking delight in the virtue created by ourselves and others. If one does not purify any negative actions, no matter how tiny they are, through the four remedial forces, sooner or later they will ripen their result upon oneself. Therefore, as soon as possible after creating a negative action it should be regretted and purified.

Geshe-la knows that we are all sincere in our dharma practice despite being very busy. Our time for the dharma practice is very small but still we make a tremendous effort. This inspires Geshe-la. The purpose of

¹Liberation.. p439 The title used in the text is "Karma once created will not disappear of its own accord."

our coming to teachings is to practise, which means to increase positive actions and to decrease negative actions both those consciously recollected and those accumulated in past lives.

Therefore one must try to purify negative karma. As an understanding of the subtlety of karma is developed, so an awareness that one might have an accumulation of very negative karmas develops. Therefore that negative karma must be purified.

Results Of Contemplating Karma: Tolerance Of Unhappiness, Strength In Collecting Virtue

It is a fact that not only did one decide to turn the mind to dharma, to study dharma and to find the time to actually learn about dharma but also Geshe-la himself found the opportunity to teach dharma. All these facts are the outcome of one's positive karma and the great accumulation of merit in the past. For this reason it is difficult to find the precise reasons why one ended up involved in the study of dharma. Similarly, Geshe-la finds it difficult to find the right vessel here to teach the dharma. In this society, which is very materialistic most people are after sensual pleasures. Most peoples' minds are completely neurotic and mad about pursuing indulgence in sensual pleasures. Therefore to practise dharma is a great opportunity for everyone of us.

The main foundation of our practice of dharma is faith in the law of cause and effect or karma. This faith is not something to be regarded as "out there" or something which one is trying to find. Rather one must try to cultivate and focus the mind inwardly and see that the study of the law of karma does really cultivate faith and conviction in karma. In the beginning there is no real acceptance that any form of unwanted experiences, suffering, loss or even a slight pain from any disease, are all the result of one's own past actions. However, when faith in the law of karma is generated very strongly and deeply, then every single event of daily life reminds us about the law of karma. When happiness or joy arises, there should be no pride in that, rather one should feel that this is the result of past positive actions. Since this feeling of happiness and joy is so pleasurable, we are encouraged to create the causes of it, so that we may always live in this enjoyment and happiness. Whereas when some unhappiness is experienced, if this also is seen to be the result of past negative actions, then the cause is being seen. If we have faith in karma, then we shall see that creating negative actions will result in pain whereas positive actions will result in happiness. The law of karma is fixed and unfailing in producing its specific result.

If karma is contemplated in this way, it gives us greater strength to tolerate suffering. This suffering, which is experienced, is a lesson not to repeat that same action again. It reminds us to regret past negative actions and to practise dharma more strongly. If deep faith in karma has been cultivated, then it is easier to engage in positive actions and we shall find ourselves busy in the creation

of positive actions. The outcome will be the quick development of positive qualities in the mind, calmness and happiness.

Why The General Aspects Of Karma Must Be Studied Prior To The Specific Aspects Of Karma

As a benefit of knowing the general explanation of the law of karma we generate some faith and conviction in the law of karma. We shall really want to practise the law of karma which in brief is the creation of positive karma and the abandonment of negative karma. However, negative and positive karma can be very complex. Knowing exactly what positive karma one needs to create and what negative karma one must abandon may be confusing.

Therefore, the next topic is the specific explanation, or "How to contemplate on karma in specific" which concerns the ten virtuous and ten non-virtuous actions.

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2 Liberation.. p442 The title used in the text is 422.122.12: "Thinking about some of the specifics of cause and effect."