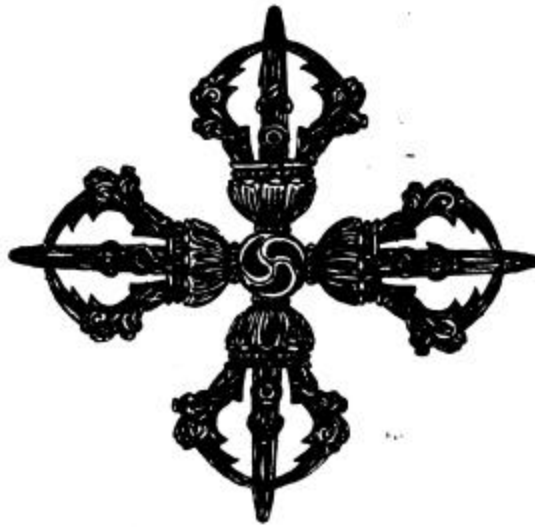




DIRECTING IN THE SHORT CUT PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT





**THE WISH~FULFILLING
GOLDEN SUN
OF THE
MAHAYANA
THOUGHT TRAINING**

**by
Thubten Zopa**

(The greatest simpleton amongst
all the followers of Guru Shakyamuni)

THE MIND IS BEGINNINGLESS

If the mind had its beginning with the birth of the being then there would be no purpose to life nor any reason for the mind to exist. If then there were no reason for birth or rebirth and death, then there would be no continuity of lives nor existence of different beings, and there would certainly be no reason for seeking the Truth (inner method), nor for eagerly running after external possessions.

If there were no continuity of mind there would be no logical reason for the suffering of life to exist in spite of all human attempts to find happiness in, for example, material comfort and scientific progress. However, the present world is becoming more unsatisfactory, aggressive and unsubdued.

No worldly educated physicians have been able to preserve life indefinitely for themselves or others, nor have they been able to overcome undesirable physical decay; this situation proves that external conditions are not the principal cause of suffering and happiness. Neither do the same external material enjoyments always give the same pleasure to all living beings. As this shows, the principal cause of suffering is to be found nowhere but within the person's mind.

In the same way, the sperm and the egg of the parents are not the principal cause of the mind but only the co-operative cause. The principal cause of a baby's mind exists before the relationship of its parents; therefore, the principal cause of most present suffering and happiness was created in the continuity of past lives.

As is explained by the fully Enlightened Ones, the nature of the mind is clear light and formless, and the mind has the ability to perceive objects. If the fertilised egg were the principal cause of the mind then this also should have a formless nature. Something whose nature is formless, e.g., space, cannot become a principal cause of something whose nature is form, e.g., earth. Thus the sperm and the egg are the seeds of the brain and the other parts of the body but not of the mind. No logic or experience can prove or find that the mind began to exist at the same time that the sperm and the egg conjoined.

Another wrong conception is to think that nothing of the physical part is mind but that the baby's mind comes from its parents' minds, in which case all of that generation of children should have the same understanding and experience as all the previous parents back to and including the original. Thus, if one boy's father was suffering and strongly angry and his mother happy and strongly patient then he would have to be suffering and happy, angry and patient with the same object at the same time. But anyway, two ignorant minds cannot become oneness while they remain uncontrolled.

In reality the mind is beginningless. Ten children of the same family, who are all brought up in the same way and educated in the same manner, never have exactly the same interests or level of Wisdom. These children's minds are all affected by different pasts.

Another example demonstrating mental continuity is that of children born with imperfect bodies from parents whose bodies are perfect. Some may think that this is due to external and environmental factors such as drugs, irradiation and so forth; but while this may explain how the situation arises, it doesn't explain why it should occur to the particular beings involved. Furthermore, no matter how much parents want their baby to have a beautiful shape, without choice it is born resembling one or the other parent or looking completely different from either. What causes this whole evolution of external conditions and results? Despite the eagerness of parents to implant their levels of knowledge in the minds of their children, they are not free to do so and find it difficult. All this shows that a baby's mind comes from no other source than its own previous mind, and not from the mind of any other being.

A split second of mind causes the next split second; today's mind causes the future life's mind. That is why the mind is impermanent and continual. The mind is created by impulse and depends on many conditions; because the mind is dependent it is not self-existent. Hence, the ignorant mind is beginningless. If beings' minds began with their birth, then what created the original being's mind?

In addition, there are many factual stories of children from both East and West who do remember their previous lives; therefore, it is greatly worthwhile to believe and try to realise such a logical evolution of the mind. If we can believe in the scientific explanation of the evolution of mind merely because it has been written by scientists in scientific books, not even doubting that the scientific mind is fully understanding and without error, then we are extremely ignorant to discredit such a realistic evolution of the mind that truly exists, and to have complete trust instead in the non-existence of our past and future lives. We dare not say that the true nature of our mind and the experiences of other living beings do not exist just because they are not perceived by our limited wisdom.

We people, whose minds are full of wrong conceptions negating the logical objects of the logical pure mind, and who believe in the non-existent wrong objects of wrong conceptions, only close the door to infinite Dharma Wisdom and to realisations such as perception of our own and other beings' past and future lives. All Wisdom and realisations of outer and inner subjects are blocked by ignorance. The thousands of deluded ignorant minds can all be cleaned away by the achievement of different levels of Wisdom through methods based on the understanding of the evolution of reincarnation. The perfected Being is never overwhelmed by ignorance; he has not even the slightest mental problem once his mind has been completely cleaned. Such ignorance is the source of all the various sufferings that we uncontrollably experience. Since we do not desire such physical and mental sufferings, but wish to achieve the supreme happiness of these perfected Beings, it is extremely necessary that we utterly extinguish ignorance and subtle wrong conceptions. Thereby we extinguish the resulting sufferings and completely achieve fully purified Enlightenment, the Omniscient Mind of the Buddha, completing our purpose of leading all other sentient beings into the most supreme happiness of Enlightenment, and away from sufferings. But trying to achieve Enlightenment without feeling the

necessity of utterly extinguishing ignorance and subtle wrong conceptions is just dreaming.

BUT HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO RECEIVE ENLIGHTENMENT?

There exists a state of mind completely free of gross ignorance (the delusions) and subtle ignorance (the impressions of delusion). This is the Svabhavakaya (Tib., *Ngo.wo nyid.ku*)—the pure, clearlight nature of the Omniscient Mind. To experience this is Enlightenment, and the Enlightened Being is also called a Buddha.

Why have we not experienced Enlightenment yet? Because in us the pure nature of mind has always been obscured by the pollution of ignorance.

The potentially pure mind obscured by ignorance is like a mirror covered with slime. The mirror can be made clear because it is not inextricably mixed with the slime, and, similarly, the mind can be purified of ignorance because the two are not inseparable. And just as there are many ways to clear the mirror, yet all involve removal of the slime, so too are there many ways to reach Enlightenment, but all require destruction of ignorance.

Not only the minds of humans, but those of all sentient beings contain this potential purity that is not one with the ignorance that obscures it. However, it is only when this impermanent obscuration has been completely removed, and not before, that the being can be said to be Enlightened.

Ignorance can be permanently eradicated by following the perfect path of Method and Wisdom, experienced by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and taught in his Tripitaka (Tib., *De.nö sum*)—the “Three Baskets” of Teachings on Conduct, Concentration and Wisdom.

It was because of his infinitely Great Compassion for all sentient beings that Guru Shakyamuni Buddha showed this perfect Teaching, and if we aspire to his Enlightened State we must train our minds to become One with the Dharma, as he himself did.

MEDITATION ONE: PART 1: THE PERFECT HUMAN REBIRTH

From time without beginning until the present, in all my numberless previous lives, I have been dying and being reborn in the cycle of samsara, the six realms of suffering. Now I have received a perfect human rebirth which has eighteen attributes: the eight freedoms and the ten receptacles.

WHAT IS THE PERFECT HUMAN REBIRTH?

The eight freedoms (Tib., D'äl.wa.gyä)

These are conditions of existence out of the eight unfree states in which beings do not have the chance to practise Dharma.

Freedom from birth

1. in the hells (Tib., *nyal.wa*; Skt., narak),
2. as a hungry spirit (Tib., *yi.d'ag*; Skt., preta),
3. as an animal (Tib., *d'ü.dro*),
4. as a long-life god (Tib., *lha.tse.ring.po*).

Although born human, freedom from being

5. a barbarian (Tib., *la.lor*) in an irreligious country,
6. deaf (Tib., *wön.ba*),
7. a heretic (Tib., *log.ta.chän*), or
8. born during a time with no orders of Buddha, when Buddha has not descended (Tib., *yül.t'a.k'ob*).

If I am born in the three lower realms—narak, preta and animal—I have no freedom to practise Dharma because of the unimaginable suffering and deep ignorance that I continuously experience.

In the realm of the long-life gods I have no freedom to practise Dharma because I am constantly distracted by objects of the senses and higher samsaric pleasures, or because of rebirth as a cognitionless god, unconscious from birth until death.

If a barbarian, I have no opportunity to meet the Dharma. If deaf, I cannot communicate with others properly, cannot hear the Teachings and cannot be ordained. If a heretic, I have no belief in the Dharma—the existence of past and future lives, of karma, of Absolute and relative truth—and no faith in the three Jewels: these wrong views give no freedom to practise Dharma.

If born in a period without the Buddha or his Teachings there is no freedom to practise Dharma because I cannot find it.

The ten receptacles (Endowments), (Tib., jor.pa.chu):

These are the chances I have received that give me the opportunity to practise the Dharma perfectly.

1. Birth as a human being.
2. Birth in the centre of a religious country.
3. Birth with perfect organs.
4. Avoidance of creating or having others create the five extreme negative actions: killing my mother, killing my father, killing an Arhant, wounding a Tathagata or causing disunity amongst the Sangha.
5. Belief in the practice of Dharma, the three divisions of the Teachings: The Vinaya, Sutra and Abhidharma.
6. Birth during a non-dark period.
7. Being shown the Teachings of the Buddha or his followers.
8. The existence of experienced Teachings—the still living realisations of the Buddha himself.
9. Following the path of the Buddha's Teachings.
10. Receiving the kindness and compassion of others, i.e., help for my Dharma practice: with temporal needs such as food or robes from a benefactor, and with Teachings from a compassionate Guru.

HOW IS THIS PERFECT HUMAN REBIRTH USEFUL?

This perfect human rebirth is extremely useful because it gives me the chance to achieve both ultimate and temporal goals, and allows me to create much merit, in a very short time. Thus:

1. This is the perfect chance definitely to end the continuous, beginningless suffering of bondage to the wheel of life, and to achieve Enlightenment. The perfect human rebirth makes Enlightenment possible by completing the collection of merits:
 - a. in three countless great aeons,
 - b. in eight great aeons,
 - c. in this lifetime, by increasing its length through the co-operative

practice of Sutra and Tantra,⁶

- d. in this lifetime, even if short, through the practice of Tantra,
 - e. in twelve or even three years.
2. I can become a great Bodhisattva, having achieved infinite Knowledge.
 3. I can become an Arhant, a supreme Being who has attained the complete cessation of suffering.
 4. I can receive the Bodhicitta, the will to become Buddha for the sake of others.
 5. I can achieve other realisations, such as true compassion, or fully renounced mind.
 6. I could become the king of many universes through realisations.
 7. As distinct from the above Dharma benefits, even worldly benefits can result, such as becoming the richest man in the world through having created good karma by being generous and giving lavishly to others.

This perfect human rebirth also gives many other possibilities, according to my interest. I could become a minister, scholar, doctor, judge, commercial artist, ski-instructor, barman, hotel porter, secretary, etc. We could lead a free and happy life without one single possession, which is impossible for those people who believe that all pleasure is derived solely from material conditions and external phenomena. Actually, some of those deeply ignorant and confused beings really believe what they did in dreams or under the effect of drugs to be real.

Wasting this very precious human rebirth is many millions of times worse than losing universes full of precious jewels because:

1. It wastes the numberless lives spent trying to gain this precious rebirth, which has resulted from good karma, created by morality and charity. These virtues have been practised mainly in the human realms during several previous lives, each of which was the result of many others.
2. It wastes the present opportunity of gaining Enlightenment and achieving all other realisations.
3. It wastes the possibility of better future lives, in which I could have achieved realisations and attained Enlightenment, stopping all suffering.

Numberless jewels, as many as could fill numberless universes, could never have the value of this present perfect rebirth. If all the jewels I have possessed in all

⁶ The Sutra Teachings demand a gradual practice without initiation, involving ten grounds, following the Bodhisattva's Path of Perfection. The Tantric Teachings are a short-cut, enabling one to reach Enlightenment without passing through the ten Sutra Grounds, but still requiring true understanding and pure practice of the basic Sutra Teachings.

my past lives could fill an infinite space, what good would that do? If I really think deeply about it I can see that no real happiness would come from that because it is of no use in controlling this negative mind.

We must check up on our own past experiences or put ourselves in the position of a wealthy man to see how material possessions cannot help us put an end to suffering. It is important to deeply see and feel our own experience of such situations.

There are spirits called nagas, inhabiting the animal realm, who are very rich and possess many stores of jewels. (The naga spirits have bodies half-human and half-animal, or of other shapes; they can see humans but most humans cannot see them.) We ourselves have had the experience of possessing such stores of jewels numberless times; we have possessed enough jewels to fill an endless space, yet no suffering has been cured. In the narak there are similar experienced beings, in great suffering.

The eight worldly dharmas

1. Craving for pleasures of the six senses.
2. Craving to be free of the unpleasant.
3. Craving to hear sweet, ego-pleasing words or sounds.
4. Craving to not hear ugly, displeasing words or sounds.
5. Craving to acquire material things.
6. Craving to avoid losing or not obtaining material things.
7. Craving for personal praise and admiration.
8. Craving to avoid personal slander, blame and criticism.

If I use this precious human rebirth only to gain the eight worldly dharmas or higher samsaric pleasures with self-cherishing thought, I shall circle continuously in the six samsaric realms of unimaginable suffering, as I have circled since beginningless time in all my previous lives. The beginning of these lives is not even seen by the Buddha's Omniscient Mind let alone by the minds of ordinary beings, and if I continue to work for these things I shall continue to suffer in the circle of samsara.

Usually I am afraid of the slightest temporary physical sicknesses such as colds or headaches, of suffering from heat or cold, or of the pain of a too-full or empty stomach; I find these things really unbearable and try to stop them by all kinds of temporal means.

On the other hand, I am not at all afraid of the greater sufferings I have experienced in past lives—those of rebirth and death and the many other unspeakable sufferings of the six samsaric realms that are caused by greed, ignorance and hatred. Neither to think or worry about these sufferings, merely trying to stop those of the moment, only creates the cause for more future suffering. Such

actions are extremely foolish and nonsensical—like those of a crazy person. I can have human thoughts and actions, yet I behave as a dumb animal.

Shantideva said:

The perfect human rebirth, the most difficult to find and a greatly beneficial foundation is, however, received by opportunity. If, while having the wisdom to know practice and avoidance, one again leads oneself to the narak, one is purposely making oneself ignorant.

If I care so much about any momentary sufferings and sicknesses why do I not care about the tremendous, continuous suffering of my future lives; why do I not worry about and try to eliminate the true cause of suffering?

Spending this perfect human rebirth desiring only the eight worldly dharmas and working for the enjoyment of samsaric pleasures is like trading universes full of jewels for ka-ka. But even this very dirty thing is much more useful than attachment—it can be used by both people and animals.

The more I desire and enjoy the eight worldly dharmas and higher samsaric pleasures, the more I create confusion and remain ignorant.

IS IT EASY TO RECEIVE THE PERFECT HUMAN REBIRTH?

1. The cause of the perfect human rebirth

This perfect human rebirth is extremely difficult to acquire because the cause that brings this result—the practise of morality and charity—is extremely difficult to create.

It is almost impossible to practise these virtuous actions if I am not human, and even then it is not easy. Firstly, I should be born in the southern rather than the other human worlds because the humans here are more sensitive and therefore see suffering more easily (see pp. 23-25). They also have the advantage of being able to practise Tantra, being endowed with the six physical prerequisites for such practice: three of these come from the father—bone, marrow and sperm; and three from the mother—skin, flesh and blood.

There are many other factors involved in the creation of morality and charity. For instance, if I am a heretic and believe that there is no such thing as the law of karma, I make no effort to collect merits. If I am physically handicapped by, for example, a missing limb or am deaf-mute, or am mentally retarded, I am unable to practise these two virtuous actions perfectly.

To effectively bring the result of the perfect human rebirth I should understand that it is causative and what the cause of it is: I must understand karma and its results. Many people talk about this but, not recognising the true nature of the mind, have gross misconceptions about the practice of morality and charity. Even

those who have correct knowledge of karma find these practices difficult to follow properly.

So I must know how to practise them correctly. Many people think that sacrificing other sentient beings to the gods is the right way to relieve their own suffering and find self-happiness by being reborn in heaven. In fact, the result of such actions is rebirth in the lowest narak stages in as short a time as possible.

It is essential that both morality and charity are created. Since rebirth in the upper realms mainly depends on moral conduct, practising charity alone cannot bring me this result.

The highly-controlled Guru Shakyamuni said:

*The being who has a missing leg cannot follow the road.
Similarly, one cannot attain Liberation without practising
morality.*

Chandrakirti said:

*One who breaks the leg of the precepts and is reborn as an
animal never receives enjoyments once the result of charity has
finished.*

Likewise, it is insufficient to practise morality alone. The resultant poverty and difficulty in satisfying temporal needs can hinder my Dharma practice greatly. If I lack material enjoyments now it is because of my previously imperfect practice of charity. Although rich and famous, if I am very avaricious and unable to create charity, I cannot receive a perfect human rebirth despite keeping pure morality. Also, a lower being can enjoy the results of charity but never practises charity because he is too ignorant.

2. The rarity of the perfect human rebirth

I can understand how the perfect human rebirth is difficult to receive by considering the way the sentient beings are distributed throughout the six samsaric realms.

The vast majority of sentient beings are in the narak. Thus the number of upper rebirths is smaller than the number of lower rebirths, and the number of perfect human rebirths is the smallest of all.

3. Analogies illustrating the difficulty of receiving the perfect human rebirth

The chance of gaining the precious perfect human rebirth is that of a blind tortoise, swimming in a vast ocean and surfacing only once each one hundred years, putting its head through a small golden ring floating somewhere on the surface.

It is more difficult than throwing grain so that it sticks to a glass wall or lands on the point of a needle.

HOW SHOULD WE MAKE OUR PERFECT HUMAN REBIRTH HIGHLY MEANINGFUL?

We should use this rebirth to free ourselves from samsara by receiving Enlightenment or by becoming a noble Bodhisattva or Arhant. At least we should be fully confident of avoiding a lower rebirth.

However, these results cannot be achieved without surmounting much hardship of body and mind. To obtain all the realisations we must purify all negativity: this is not easy, yet it is extremely worthwhile.

Most of us spend our whole life in the pursuit of temporal comfort, working hard at great cost. Consider presidents, soldiers and mercenaries, those on expeditions and scientific missions, for example, astronauts, many poor-living people and so on. They all spend and risk their lives for nothing. All their actions result in great and continual suffering in future lives. Their whole life is empty and finishes so.

Especially if we check how much suffering and its cause we have experienced since beginningless time, we can see that we are capable of giving up attachment to the momentary comforts of the temporal life, and that it is necessary and of great value for the achievement of the very precious Dharma practice, which ceases all problems.