

***Buddhist Conduct:
The Ten Virtuous Actions***

by

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Note:

We have italicized the technical words the first time they are used to alert the reader that they may be found in the Glossary.

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Buddhist Conduct

In the practice of Buddhism there is the view, there is meditation, and there is conduct. In this booklet we will examine the conduct of the Buddhist.

In the Tibetan system there are three main different kinds or aspects of conduct. First there are the *Pratimosksha vows* of the *hinayana* which are practiced by ordained monks and nuns; these consist of following several hundred rules. Then there is the conduct of the *bodhisattvas* who are practitioners on the *mahayana path* who have taken the vow to help all beings reach enlightenment before they themselves reach this state. Finally, there is the conduct of the *vajrayana* practitioner which is based on vows and commitments of certain practices.

Whatever type of vows one undertakes there are ten things to be avoided or given up and ten things to practice or embrace. One avoids the ten negative or unvirtuous actions because they are harmful to oneself and harmful to others. One practices the ten positive or virtuous actions because they are beneficial to oneself and beneficial to others.

These ten virtuous and unvirtuous actions are divided into three levels of conduct: those of body, those of speech and those of mind. There is what is called “the simple practices of good conduct of body, speech, and mind” and what is called “the special practices of good conduct of body, speech, and mind.” The simple practice of good conduct is when one realizes the faults of doing negative actions and simply refrains from doing these negative actions. The special practice of good conduct is when one not only refrains from doing negative actions but also practices the positive actions. In terms of simple good conduct, we abstain from the three negative actions of the body, the four negative actions of the speech, and the three negative actions of the mind.

Summary of the Ten Virtuous Actions

As a practical meditation exercise, one can take a vows to not do these for a day, three days, a week, a month, etc. Ordained individuals take all ten vows (for as long as they are ordained). If one takes a vow and keeps it, one derives the postive karma from this action. If one simply doesn't do the negative action, such as not killing and doesn't take the vow, then one doesn't derive any postive karma from it (but obviously also doesn't get any negative karma from killing).

1. Not to take a life
2. Not to take what is not given
3. Avoid Sexual Misconduct
4. Not to Decieve
5. Avoid Slander of others
6. Avoid Harsh words
7. Avoid Empty Speech
8. Avoid Greedy Thoughts
9. Not to be Malicious
10. Avoid the Wrong View

Chapter 2

The Virtuous Actions of Body

THE FIRST VIRTUOUS ACTION: *NOT TO TAKE LIFE*

The first negative action of the body is killing; one must give up the taking of life.

There have to be four factors present to make the action of killing complete and therefore a negative act. There has to be the object of the action, the intention, the actual action itself, and that action has to be completed. If these four aspects of an action aren't all present, then killing need not necessarily be a negative action.

THE OBJECT OF THE ACTION

In order for the act of killing to occur, there must be the actual object or being who will be killed. It can be any kind of living being from a small insect or a large animal. It must be a being capable of experiencing sensations and sufferings. There are religions (such as the Jains) who teach that plants have a mind and therefore they consider plants as sentient beings who should not be killed. But the Buddha taught that this is not so. When one talks about not killing, one refers only to animals of all kinds who have minds and can experience suffering; not to inanimate things such as stones or plants and so on. So, for an act of killing to be a completely negative act, the act must be directed against a true living being who has a mind.

THE INTENTION

For something to be the negative action of killing a second factor must be present: the intention. One must have the motivation to harm that being for it to fall under the category of

killing. For example, if we think, “This being is going to harm me” or “It is dangerous and therefore I wish to kill it.” one is killing out of anger and the desire to cause harm. One can also kill through the motivation of desire by thinking for example, “If I kill this being, then I will have food, clothing, pleasure and enjoyment.” One then intentionally kills that being. Or one can kill through the motivation of ignorance such as sacrificing an animal for religious reasons, thinking, “If I kill this being, then the act will be good and beneficial because this was in the scriptures.” Nevertheless, it is not a good intention because it was a killing carried out with the motivation of ignorance. If one did not realize that one is killing a being, then there is not the negative result that comes from doing an act of killing. Knowledge and intention must be there.

On rare occasions killing is done through a good motivation, in which case a negative result will not come from that action. For example, in the account of the previous life of the Buddha he was a sea captain. At that time a great fortune of jewels could be obtained by going out to sea, but it was also very dangerous and one could die. It was a risky adventure; one could return either wealthy or not at all. If one set out to sea, one needed a guide to lead the ship, a good person with experience. Buddha was such a sea captain in a previous life and his actual name was “Courage;” He led 500 merchants in a ship to obtain jewels but there was a very negative person on that ship who became very angry with everyone else. He thought that if he made a hole in the bottom of the boat, it would sink and all the merchants would die. He didn’t care if it killed him too. But Captain Courage saw this and thought, “If I kill him, then it will save the other merchants. The negative result of killing will come to me, but it doesn’t matter what happens to me. I have to save the 500 merchants and also the man from accumulating such negative karma.” With this motivation, Captain Courage hit this man on the head with an ax and he died. Because of the good motivation, this act did not lead to negative karma. He did kill one man but saved the lives of 500 people; therefore it was a good action instead of a negative one. Though the act may be an act of killing, it may not be a negative action. This is because of the motivation that was involved.

THE ACTION ITSELF

As well as having the object and the motivation, there must be the third factor of undertaking of the action of killing. This means that although one may have the intention of killing someone, one has to carry it out for it to be the negative act of killing. One has to take a sword and attack someone; or one has to get poison and give it to someone and so on. This point is actually carrying out the act of killing someone. One does not need to do this action oneself; one can make someone else do it by instructing and paying him to kill another being. When that person has done the action, one feels happy, "Oh, it is good that being is killed." Even though it is not one's own action, but only carried out according to one's instructions, it is still one's own negative action of killing because one is responsible for having made someone else do it. So, as well as the motivation to kill, there is the actual act of killing, whether done by oneself or done according to one's wishes.

THE COMPLETED ACTION

Finally, the fourth factor is called "completion." For the act of killing even though one has done the act of killing, for it to be a true act of killing, the being must die as a result of one's action. So, one might have the intention and one might carry out the action, but one could fail to actually kill the person or the person might recover through medical treatment and so on. It might happen that the victim does not die in spite of one's having done one's best to kill him. While this is obvious a negative act it does not count as a real act of killing. Also, if one has ordered someone else to kill somebody and he disobeys or fails in his job, it is not an actual act of killing. It must be clear that one's attempt is a negative action that leads to negative karma; but if one's action fails in its goal, then it does not become the very negative action of killing. All four factors must be present for it to be a true act of killing.

This means that one can avoid the act of killing by avoiding an action that has all four factors present. If one avoids these, one is practicing good conduct.

**THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:
TO SAVE OTHERS' LIVES**

There is also special good conduct, in which case one does not just avoid killing other beings, but one actually saves the lives of other beings whose lives are in danger. The special practice is to actually save the lives of other beings. It is special and superior in relation to the simple practice of good conduct. Avoiding killing and saving the lives of other beings is the first of the ten good actions.

THE REASON

Generally, killing is a very negative action. The reason for this is that sentient beings cling to their own body and life. All appearances in this world are present due to their having a life. If their life ceases, then all appearances of the world (their wealth and possessions) will be lost for them. For that reason an individual's life is very precious to him. To lose this causes great suffering and therefore killing is a serious action.

**THE SECOND VIRTUOUS ACTION:
*NOT TAKING WHAT IS NOT GIVEN***

The most precious thing for a sentient being is his or her life. Wealth and possessions are the second most important thing. Since life is very important, a human being will go through a lot of hardships and difficulties for the sake of his possessions in order to sustain his life. This is true for animals too. Although animals have no attachment to gold and jewels, they still have strong attachment to food and other things they perceive as necessary in order to sustain their lives. They fear that without those things they will not be able to live and therefore think that they must have food and other things. We see that some beings have greater attachment to things than others do. One should use the things that are one's own possessions and not take possessions from others by force or by deceiving them. If one deprives others of their possessions, it will cause suffering and harm to them. Also it causes harm to one's self because the

The Ten Virtuous Actions

result of one's actions will definitely come back to oneself. For this reason one should avoid stealing and accomplish the good action of not stealing.

There are many categories of stealing or taking what is not given. As explained in relation to not killing, there are four aspects to this action. There is the object, the motivation, the act, and the completion.

THE OBJECT

The object of the negative action of stealing is taking something which is possessed by someone else. The object must have an owner who has to have the thought that the object, "This is mine. It belongs to me and is my property." It also has to be of a certain value. If it has no value to a person and losing it makes no difference to that person, then taking it is not a negative act. Or if it is something not owned by anyone, then taking it is not negative or harmful. In the past, there were some religions in India that said that if one obtains something, it must be given to you by someone else. So they taught that if you are in an isolated valley and drink some water, that is stealing because you are taking something that is not given to you. But the Buddha said that this is not a negative action. He said it is only a negative action if you obtain something that is a possession of someone else and you take it without that person's permission.

THE INTENTION

The motivation means that one has to have the thought, "There is this thing that belongs to someone else and I am going to get it without them seeing it." Or, "I want that object, so I am going to use force to take it from him, even though he doesn't want me to have it." Or, "I want this thing, so I will deceive the owner to obtain it. I will tell him all sorts of lies and use various methods so that I can obtain the object from that person." In this last case one does not steal directly, rather through indirect means one obtains something from another person. These are the thoughts one has when the action is unvirtuous.

If the motivation is absent, it is not a harmful action resulting in negative karma. One might take something because

the two objects look very similar and one mistakenly goes off with someone else's things. This is not a negative action because the motivation was not there. Or one might think, "This belongs to my friend who is not here now. He is my very good friend and he won't mind if I take it." Taking that object is also not a negative action because there is no motivation to steal. Or one might think, "This is so insignificant and nobody really cares whether they have it or not, so it does not matter if I take it." If one has that motivation, it is not a negative action.

The motivation must be present for stealing to be a negative action. If we can abandon such thoughts, then we are accomplishing the good act of avoiding the motivation of stealing.

THE ACTION ITSELF

The third characteristic of a complete negative action is the actual application to the action itself, where one carries out the intention to steal something either by force or by deception.

As in the case of the act of killing, there are three kinds of negative acts for stealing too: stealing yourself, having somebody else steal for you, or rejoicing in hearing that somebody else steals without being personally involved or benefiting from the action in any way.

THE COMPLETED ACTION

The fourth factor is actually completing the action. One might have the motivation to steal and carry out the action, but one may fail to steal the object. If one is not able to complete what one intended to do, one does not get the full negative result from one's action. If, on the other hand, one has been able to get what one wants and one thinks, "I have robbed this object through force or deception," there is the completion of the act and one receives the negative result from the action.

If one has failed to complete the action and this thought does not arise in the mind, the result is less negative. If all factors are present, then the negative action is done. If one can avoid and give up this complete negative action, one accomplishes the simple practice of good action, in this case not stealing.

**THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:
TO GIVE TO OTHERS**

The special practice is not only to give up the act of stealing, but also to do the special action of giving to others. This can be of two kinds: pure and impure. The pure act of giving is a good action and the giving is really beneficial to the person involved. The impure act of giving seems to be a good action, but in fact it is not because it has a harmful result. For example, when one has an impure motivation; one gives something to someone but the thought one has is, "This will cause harm to the person I am giving this to." This is a negative motivation, which makes it an impure act of giving. Or the actual object given may be impure; for example, one may give a weapon or poison to someone. Such things are impure objects because through their use they will cause harm to the recipient or others. For instance, if one gives things to a person and thinks, "Due to my giving, it will be beneficial for that being's future," that thought is good. But if it results in unhappiness and suffering, the object is impure.

Also, the object one gives should be one's own possession. It may be the case that other people may also have the right to decide what should be done with an object. If you decide for yourself, "Yes, I think it is all right if I give this away," the other person who also has rights will be unhappy. That is also an improper object of generosity. For an action to be a good object of giving, the motivation has to be pure and the object has to be pure too, so that it will not harm or hurt others. This concerns inanimate objects. If it is a living being, the act should be beneficial. If all aspects are correct, then it is a special and good action of giving.

**THE THIRD VIRTUOUS ACTION:
*TO AVOID SEXUAL MISCONDUCT***

It is said that the most important thing for a living being is his life. What is then most important for human beings is their possessions. Following, what is most important for them is the companion they love. One has to avoid harming a person by harming his life; one must avoid causing them suffering by

taking their possessions. If the loved companion is made unhappy, it is not good either. Or if the companion of someone else is made to suffer, it is also not good. So one has to avoid causing others suffering and sadness through one's sexual misconduct.

The analysis is the same as for the discussed acts: there is the object of the action, which is someone who is not one's own companion. There is the motivation, which in this case is to satisfy one's own desires, of wishing to cause harm or a mental state of ignorance out of which the action is done. Third is actually carrying out the action. The fourth factor is that if the act is done with the motivation of desire, the wish to harm, or through ignorance, then one will experience the results of having committed a negative action.

Therefore one should avoid sexual misconduct. Then one's own partner will not be unhappy and worry but will have peace of mind, and other people will not have suffering, difficulties and worries. In this life one will not encounter difficulties and problems and also in the next life one will not encounter difficulties and problems as a result of one's action. Instead there will be peace and happiness.

THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:
TO TAKE THE VOW

Taking the vow not to engage in sexual misconduct is the special practice concerning sex.

THE RESULTS OF ENGAGING
IN GOOD CONDUCT OF BODY

Avoidance of the three physical negative acts of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct are classified as "discipline," or *shila* in Sanskrit which means "coolness." It is very hot in India, so coolness is considered as very pleasant there. Following correct conduct means that one has to be careful and restrain one's actions. The result is that one experiences peace; the mind becomes very relaxed and at ease. It is a very pleasant state. If one maintains correct conduct, one does not encounter difficulties and problems from engaging in negative conduct.

The Ten Virtuous Actions

Because one's mind is at peace, relaxed and open, one also feels relaxed and comfortable physically. Therefore it is called *shila* in Sanskrit, or "correct conduct." It is avoiding the three negative physical actions of killing, stealing, and adultery.

The Nine Obstructions to Liberation

(The obstructions are not discussed in the text, but are part of another system. These are the unwholesome qualities one can have and why they are negative.)

Obstruction	Fault Which Obstructs
1. Passion	Desire to leave samsara
2. Anger or aggression	Equanimity of mind
3. Pride	Seeing self as having faults.
4. Ignorance	Seeing true nature of phenomena
5. Incorrect view	Realization of nonself of self
6. Having negative behavior	Entering the genuine path.
7. Indecisive mind	Entering the correct path
8. Envy or jealousy	Helping other sentient beings.
9. Stinginess	Generosity on the path.

Chapter 3

The Virtuous Actions of Speech

THE FOURTH VIRTUOUS ACTION: *NOT TO DECEIVE*

We might think that by lying to somebody we can easily get what we want through deception. In fact, it only creates problems for oneself in this life and in future lives. The Sakya Pandita said that when a person lies, he thinks that he is deceiving somebody else, but, in fact, he isn't deceiving anybody else but himself. If you lie to others and think, "Oh, now I have deceived them," they will not trust what you say in the future when they realize that you have lied. When you later say things to others, they will not listen but they will think, "There is no point in listening to what that person says because he has lied to me before." If someone always tells the truth, others think, "I must listen to what he says because it is true, meaningful, and beneficial." If one lies, others will think, "There is no point in listening because it is meaningless and not beneficial at all. There is as much point in listening to him as to an echo."

Also, if you are going to lie, then whom do you lie to? You do not lie to someone who doesn't have any faith in you and would not believe you anyway. The person you lie to is someone who trusts you, someone who likes you, someone who thinks that what you say is the truth. That is the only person you can lie to because he or she believes in you and is actually deceived. Afterwards that person will realize that you have deceived him and this means that you will lose that person's trust. So, in the future that person will not believe what you say but will think, "I used to believe what he said, but he only lied to me. There is no point in listening." In this way, you only deceives yourself because you lose the trust of others. If you

want to accomplish something, you will not be able to do so because people will not trust what you say.

THE FOUR FACTORS

Again, the four factors that make an act negative need to be avoided:

The object of the action of lying must be a person or being who understands what you say; not an animal or stone. It has to be somebody who understands.

The motivation does not refer to saying things out of fun or to have a laugh; rather, it is the motivation of intending to deceive somebody.

The actual act is saying a lie with the motivation of deceiving somebody. If one lies out of ignorance, thinking something was true and telling this to somebody else, it is not a lie because the motivation has to be intentional.

The completion of the act is when you say something deceptive, whether the person who hears and believes what you say to be true or not. The action is done and there will be the negative effect of having lied.

So by avoiding the action of telling a lie, one performs the ordinary good action.

THE SPECIAL PRACTICE: TO TELL THE TRUTH

One must have a very clear understanding and wisdom in order to engage in the special practice of telling the truth. Generally speaking, telling the truth is very important and good. Sometimes telling the truth can cause problems and difficulties for people. In such cases, it is important not to tell the truth. If one has the good motivation and tells someone the truth, it can cause that person to become angry; it can cause a division between people or harm them. Therefore, one should not tell the truth in those situations. Instead, one should tell a lie but with the motivation to benefit and help the person you are lying to or, on the basis of that untruth being told, that it will benefit someone else or a great number of people. The situation of telling a lie with the motivation to help someone is not a

negative action. Whereas, if one tells a lie in order to deceive someone, it is a negative action. This applies to telling the truth too. If you tell the truth with a negative motivation, it will cause harm to people and is not a good action.

**THE FIFTH VIRTUOUS ACTION:
*TO AVOID SLANDER***

There may be two people who like each other and through the motivation of pride, anger, or envy one wishes to say something which will turn them against each other. This is the action of slander or divisive speech.

The object of that action is two people who are friendly with each other.

The motivation is pride, anger, or envy and the wish to turn people against each other because one thinks it will benefit oneself.

The actual action is saying something to turn people against each other.

The completion of the action is when a conflict between those persons arises.

This is an action that one should avoid. Giving up speech that turns people against each other is the simple practice.

**THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:
TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER**

Bringing people together or removing conflicts is the special practice. Two people may be in conflict and one reconciles them by saying, "This person does not mean to harm you and it will be very good if you are friends again." Bringing people together with speech is the special good action in relation to the act of slander or divisive speech.

**THE SIXTH VIRTUOUS ACTION
*TO AVOID HARSH WORDS***

The sixth negative action is to avoid using harsh or unkind words.

The object of the action of using harsh words is a person who can understand what you say.

The motivation to using harsh words is usually envy or anger.

So actually saying harsh words to others, whether true or not, whether you say it directly or infer it, is the act.

The completion of the act is when the other person hears what you say and is upset or unhappy.

The result of having said harsh words to someone is that he or she will become your enemy in the future. So one should avoid speaking harsh words, which is the simple good action.

**THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:
TO USE PLEASANT WORDS**

The special practice of this point is using pleasant and gentle words, which make other people happy.

There is an exception here. Some people may say something harsh to someone with a good motivation because gentle speech does not stop the person from negative conduct. With the motivation of helping someone not to do something negative, one must speak harshly to them. If this is done with a good motivation and if that person stops doing negative things and learns control, it is a beneficial action. If the motivation is not for one's own benefit but for the benefit of others, harsh words are beneficial.

If one has a good motivation to help and one uses harsh words but it doesn't help or affect the other person, then it is better not to use harsh words at all. But if one can actually benefit somebody by using harsh words, then it is a good action.

**THE SEVENTH VIRTUOUS ACTION:
*TO AVOID EMPTY SPEECH***

The object of empty or idle speech is somebody who can understand what you say.

The motivation is having an irresistible desire to keep on talking or to be angry, envious, or proud so that one speaks negatively about someone and praises oneself. Or through the motivation of desire one praises oneself.

The Ten Virtuous Actions

The actual activity is to actually say useless or idle words.

The completion is that the other person understands what you say, whether he accepts it or not.

If the person accepts what you say, then when it is something said through anger, it can increase that person's anger. If it is something being said through desire, it can increase that person's desire and that person's envy and so on. Even if that person doesn't accept what you say, it will increase their emotions so that it has a harmful result, which creates negative circumstances. If one can avoid this kind of talk, then it avoids creating harm and negative circumstances.

There may be something which seems like empty speech but which may not be a negative action. For example, when you meet a person and want to make them happy, you may say things that seem to be unnecessary, or in order to benefit someone you may say all sorts of things. Or somebody may feel unhappy and sad, then in order to make him happy one talks to him about all sorts of different things. This is done with a motivation to benefit the person. If one talks about "this and that" with a good motivation and it has a beneficial effect, it is not a negative action; it is a good action. Even if it is not just to benefit others but just to please them and make them happy, it is good. One of the actions of a Bodhisattva is to speak pleasantly and nicely to people, to hold a conversation with them that makes them happy. One of the activities of a Bodhisattva is the four actions to draw people into the *dharma*. The second of these is to speak pleasantly, in such a way that it makes them feel happy. Therefore, if one says whatever is necessary to please people and make them happy, then this is not a negative action; this is a good action.

To avoid the use of unnecessary speech is the simple or ordinary action.

THE SPECIAL PRACTICE: TO USE MEANINGFUL SPEECH

The special good action related to unnecessary speech is that when one speaks one doesn't say meaningless things, rather one's speech is always meaningful. So the special good action associated with this is that what one says should be meaningful.

Chapter 4

The Virtuous Actions of Mind

THE EIGHTH VIRTUOUS ACTION: TO AVOID AVARICE THOUGHTS

Avarice is the desire for things that one sees which belong to other people. One may see another person who has possessions, wealth, or even desirable qualities. They look good and attractive and one thinks, "I want to have these. They could be mine." That is the cause for this negative action of avarice.

The motivation and action of avarice are the same thing because they are both of the mind.

Increasing the negative motivation of wanting things that belong to others becomes the basis for all kinds of negative actions because this thought is expressed in one's actions and speech through anger, desire, and so on.

It causes harm and unhappiness for the person who owns the things one wants to possess. It also causes trouble for oneself. One should see that there is no real benefit in getting any of the things one desires because there is no end to satisfying desire; when one wants one thing and gets it, then one will want two and more. There is never an end to desire and as a result one performs actions that cause trouble for oneself and for other people. One should think, "Well, I am attracted to things that others have, but it won't do me any good because desire can never be satisfied and I will always want more. It will create unhappiness with this desire. Then that other person will also create difficulties for me." By realizing this, one sees that the best thing to do is to avoid avarice.

When one realizes that avarice is something wrong and gives it up, then this is the simple good action. There is also the special good action.

**THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:
TO BE CONTENT**

In the special good action is that one avoids avarice and also that one becomes content with whatever one has. If one is content with whatever one has, then one can easily accomplish whatever one wants to do. Furthermore, if one is content, one will not trouble other people.

**THE NINTH VIRTUOUS ACTION:
*NOT TO BE MALICIOUS***

The second practice of the mind is not to be malicious. For instance, in a state of anger or envy one wishes for harm to come to somebody, that they suffer and have difficulties. One wishes, "May they have problems." Either wishing to harm them oneself or having others harm them is a negative motivation, which leads to increasing harm. Because one does not have a pure motivation, other people will perceive this motivation and one's malice and they will begin dislike you, turn against you, and become your enemy. You will find that you will lose your friends and will no longer have friends to help you. This motivation is negative for oneself and for others. If one has the wish that harm come to others, it leads to the involvement with all sorts of methods by which harm can be brought to other people. This motivation always leads to a negative result, the reason why one should avoid malice.

Avarice and malice are included within desire and anger. They are negative actions. Even so, it can be the case that one has the desire to obtain wealth and possessions for the sake of benefiting other people. In that case, desire for possessions is not negative but good. In terms of harming someone, it may be someone who causes a lot of harm to other people and one has the wish to get rid of him in one way or another, to expel him to another place, have him arrested and put away or even killed. This is being done for the sake of helping a great number of people. Then the wish to harm such an individual is not a negative action.

**THE TENTH VIRTUOUS ACTION:
TO AVOID THE WRONG VIEW**

The tenth negative action to be avoided is mistaken belief or wrong view. This is when one has a mistaken opinion concerning special things, such as the *Three Jewels* (the Buddha, the dharma and the *sangha*). It may not just be about the dharma teachings, but someone may have a good motivation and give good advice, saying, “What you are doing is wrong. You shouldn’t do this and so on.” If one understands that the person has a good motivation and the advice is beneficial, then it will be beneficial to oneself. But if one thinks, “He doesn’t like me and is saying something very unpleasant to me; he is trying to make things bad for me,” it is an error and you have a mistaken perception. In this case, the good motivation of that person is wasted and his advice cannot help. In fact, it becomes a source of harm in that one has interpreted it as being something harmful for oneself. Therefore, if one is given advice, one shouldn’t just simply think, “This is bad or wrong.” One shouldn’t allow oneself to easily fall into this misconception, but one should examine it very carefully to see whether it is beneficial and said with a good motivation.

One should avoid misconceptions and mistaken beliefs.

**THE SPECIAL PRACTICE:
TO EXAMINE, AND LEARN TO UNDERSTAND**

Examining, analyzing, and understanding the truth and the real nature of things is the special practice in association with mistaken views.

CONCLUSION

In brief, there are the three negative actions of the body, the four bad actions of the speech and the three negative actions of the mind. These make the ten negative actions, and there are the three good actions of the body, the four good actions of the speech and the three good actions of the mind, which make the ten good actions. If one practices the ten negative actions, it will cause harm for others and will be harmful for oneself. Therefore

they should be avoided. Whereas, if one practices the ten positive actions, it will be beneficial for oneself and others. By practicing the ten good actions, everything will go well; one will be in harmony with others. So, if one practices in accordance with the dharma teachings, this will not run counter to one's ordinary human life and will cause no harm. In fact, in acting in harmony with the dharma, one's ordinary human life will go very well and one will cause no problems. Following the good actions and acting according to the dharma will be very beneficial. If one practices the good conduct, it is beneficial for this life and the next life.

Good conduct is called *shila* in Sanskrit means "pleasant coolness." One will not get shila through practicing bad actions. For example, in terms of killing, one may have an enemy and think, "Well, if I can kill that enemy, then things will be very pleasant. It will be very good." But if one kills the enemy, one discovers that happiness does not come. One may have killed that enemy, but he has friends and relatives who will also become one's enemy. So, one's enemies increase in number rather than diminish. If one follows a good conduct and does not kill that enemy, there is no way that the number of enemies one has will increase. Following a conduct that is in harmony with the dharma means that this life will have the pleasant coolness and will also bring a good result for one's future life. Therefore, the correct conduct is called "shila."

Of course, it is important to practice meditation and the dharma. This is important because through that we can overcome the emotional disturbances and we can obtain liberation. So the practice of dharma is very important. What is the basis of the practice of dharma? It is good conduct of our body and speech. One should therefore try to follow the correct conduct of body and speech. It is very difficult to have the complete and perfect aspects of correct conduct, but we should try to have as much correct conduct as we can for the sake of our dharma practice. That completes the teachings on the ten good actions.

Questions

Question: What is it if you save the life of one person by killing another person or if one person is threatening another person's life and is about to kill him and you intervene and kill the person to save the life of another?

Rinpoche: This depends upon the circumstances, the motivation. For example, if the person who is in danger is a relative or friend one wishes to save by killing another person, it can have a bad result. If the person in danger of being killed is somebody who can benefit many people and the one who is going to kill him is not of any benefit to anybody, then one may think, "It is much better if he dies than the other one." That motivation is good because the person whose life is in danger would help many beings. If one kills the bad person it would not be a bad action, so it depends upon the motivation.

Question: In practice, then, one would have to have the insight of a Bodhisattva to decide which way to act? I have all sorts of ideas of people who I feel would be beneficial to eliminate on the spot. I get scared, first of all for myself and secondly because I am not completely confident that my insight into the truth of the matter, of the far-reaching consequences is at all true.

Rinpoche: There is a danger involved in that one needs to have the wisdom that can see, "Well, if I get rid of this person, then it will be very beneficial. It will bring happiness to many people and prevent a great deal of harm being caused." If one could really see that this is so and got rid of that person, it would not be a bad action. But, if one thinks, "Probably this will be good if this person was killed," it is not good enough. One cannot really be sure that if one kills a general of an army that he will not be replaced by another person who will do the same things. That would be a pointless action, something without any good results. One really has to have the full wisdom to know that it is beneficial and not just the thought that it is probably beneficial.

Question: What is the karmic result of an accidental killing, for example, if someone drives a car and another person stepped out and was overrun?

Rinpoche: I don't think the bad karma would come from accidentally killing someone in a car because one does not have the intention to kill. The motivation is not there. Also, one has

not carried out an act designed to kill another person, rather one has made a mistake. Therefore, there should not be a bad result. One might be driving along and someone crosses the road. If one gets angry, shouting, “What is he doing on the road?” and hits the pedestrian, a bad result will come because there is the motivation of anger.

Question: Rinpoche, what do you think about someone asking to be killed when he is very sick?

Rinpoche: A bad result would come from that because that person is experiencing great suffering through his illness but he still hopes that he might get better and find happiness in the future. Killing him will be an act done out of ignorance; it would be killing without being aware that there is still the hope that he may become free from that suffering. Somebody may be very depressed and say, “Please kill me.” It may seem that killing this person is beneficial at that moment. But there is always the opportunity to become cured and to find happiness in the future. Even though the person had the wish, he might change his mind as you kill him, “Oh, I think I made a mistake” and then it is too late.

Question: But there are a lot of cases where people are really old; it is very certain that they have only two or three months left and there is no chance that they can recover from cancer or something else. If they ask for something to kill themselves with, what should one do?

Rinpoche: They want to die but inside everyone has attachment to life and still has hope to continue living. For example, there is a story of an old man who was very ill and felt that it would be better if he died. He led a long and good life and thought, “It would be best if I died now.” He asked for a divination to see whether he might die now. They did the divination and the answer was, “It looks like you are going to die.” When he heard that he was very upset. It would be a bad effect, like from committing suicide. This person had the knowledge of what would happen within the next few weeks and a way of avoiding that experience. With that knowledge, it would not have the bad effect like suicide.

Question: Do people who do bad actions have bad karma?”

Rinpoche: With the impure motivation, the bad action and the bad completion they will have a result that comes from the

action, a bad karma that will ripen. But it is said that there are Four Kinds of Karma:

First is the evident result of one's actions. One does a powerful and bad action and within that very lifetime the result will be experienced.

The second kind of karmic result is where the karma is not so strong and the result is experienced after rebirth. Somebody may do bad things but not experience the result in this life, but in the next lifetime he will experience much suffering.

The third kind of karmic result comes from actions which are less strong and will be experienced in a future lifetime, i.e. the result is not experienced in the life, not in the next but in any other life in the future.

The fourth kind is called "the indefinite karmic result" that comes in minor negative actions. One may experience the result some time in the future or one may not experience the result. It is uncertain.

If one has done a negative action, then the result will come in accordance with the strength of the action; a negative result from a negative action and similarly a good result in a good action.

Question: How can one purify negative karma?"

Rinpoche: Through the Four Powers of Purification:

The first power is that of repudiation, rejection of one's actions, i.e. thinking, "What I did was wrong and negative." One regrets that one has done that action, the first power of purification.

The second power is that of remedy, where one regrets and applies oneself to doing good actions in order to counteract the negative ones.

The third power is that of reliance, in which case one prays to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas for the purification of the negative actions one regrets.

The fourth power is that of not repeating the action. One thinks, "I did this negative action, regret it and I am not ever going to do it again."

Through applying those powers, one can purify the karma of a negative action which one has done.

Question: If my memory fails me not, I remember Rinpoche saying that the karmic result achieved is from a karmic trace

being left. I had always understood this to be a mental trace. There seems to be a contradiction here between the four powers of a negative action in that a mental trace can be left where the most important part seems to be the intention. Supposing I bashed somebody on the head and I think that he is dying, am glad and everything. I go home, he recovers and I do not know anything about it. From the point of view of the mental trace, that should be enough to complete the whole thing. I mean, whether he recovers or not, that's not the point from the view of the mental trace.

Rinpoche: There is a phase in which karmic results come about, called "fruitful ripening of karmic result" and then there is also what is called "the corresponding result," the result corresponding with the cause. There are two kinds, a corresponding result which is experienced and a corresponding result which continues. These mean that if, for example, one has killed somebody, in the next life one will experience various unpleasant things with the fully ripening result. A corresponding result is that one experiences a short life in the next life from having killed somebody, so various results correspond with the action. That is the corresponding result which is experienced.

The corresponding result which continues is that if one has killed in this life, the result is that in the next life one still has the tendency and will want to spontaneously kill again; or if one steals in this life, one will continue stealing in the next life. Even as a child, one will like stealing or killing. So, if one hit someone on the head and thinks he has died but he hasn't, then a strong karmic trace is not left within oneself because one thought he was dead and afterwards finds out that he wasn't. Even if one doesn't find out that he is not dead, such a strong karmic trace is not left because one might find out that he hasn't been killed and this can be known through an external power in the object itself; so it doesn't just involve the mind.

Question: In other words, ignorance is the unconscious part of the killer's mind, which perceives, although the conscious mind doesn't hear? Is that what you mean?

Rinpoche: Yes, it is like that. In terms of the eight consciousnesses, it is the sixth consciousness which thinks, "Yes, he is dead. He has been killed." But in the eighth consciousness, which is the ground consciousness, the karmic

trace or imprint of having killed someone cannot take place. “Now I get it.”

Question: If you say harsh things to somebody, how do you know that they don’t take it as an insult? Rinpoche said that you can only say harsh words if others take notice of it, but you don’t know that.” If it does any good to speak harshly to someone and you think, “If I speak harshly, it won’t do any good,” then do not do it. Or you think, “If I speak harshly, it will probably work,” then you can do it.

Question: If I have some of these negative actions, what is the karma? I have the idea that you really do not have negative karma. My feeling is opener. Normally, in doing negative actions and accumulating negative karma, there is an enjoyment of doing the act; for example, one kills and likes killing, so one carries on and does as much as one is able to. If one has regret, it means you dislike it and don’t want to do it anymore. That puts an end to it; from then on you avoid it. Because there is dislike for the action and regret, it causes a transformation in the karmic traces or latencies in oneself. Due to that, that harmfulness of the negative karma gradually diminishes.

Question: In Buddhist countries or in the monastery of Rinpoche, what does he do with somebody who is cheating, stealing or lying?

Rinpoche: There are many different monasteries and each has its own way of managing things. My view is that if somebody is stealing, it is good to meditate on patience. But if one finds that meditating on patience does not work, then it is important to find out the truth. Who really supervises truth? It is the government. So, the best thing is to hand this thing over to the police. If they work out what is right and what is wrong, then this is my view.

Question: I have two questions: If somebody lies out of fear, what would your view be? Secondly, if somebody does mischief and tells lies, how would you deal with that?”

Rinpoche: If someone acts negatively out of fear, then I think there is little harm from that. If a person is in danger, to become free from that danger he tells lies. I think there is little harm from that. The habitual lying is harmful if done with a negative motivation.

Question: I did not quite understand what you meant by wrong view.

Rinpoche: Wrong view is a negative action through the fact that it prevents a benefit from coming to oneself. There is something beneficial and because of one's mistaken view one prevents it from benefiting oneself. There may be someone who is giving us beneficial advice because we have a fault. We can have lots of problems because of that fault. Someone tells us to remove that fault, which is beneficial advice given to us. But we have to examine this advice that we received to see that it is beneficial and not make an immediate judgment, "Oh, he is just criticizing me and saying there are things wrong with me," feeling anger instead. Because one has a mistaken belief that he is not trying to benefit, the mistaken belief hinders accepting the beneficial advice. On the contrary, one thinks he is being nasty and harsh, thus misinterpreting the advice. Thus, one does not get the benefit.

Similarly, in terms of the wrong view towards the Three Jewels, they are not something that intentionally is going to harm someone. It depends upon one's own attitude whether they are beneficial for oneself or not. If one has the wrong view about them, then one prevents their good from benefiting oneself. This is why wrong view is to be avoided.

Glossary

bodhisattva An individual who has committed him or herself to the mahayana path of compassion and the practice of the six perfections to achieve Buddhahood to free all beings from samsara.

dharma This refers to the teachings of the Buddha.

hinayana The term refers to the first teachings of the Buddha which emphasized the careful examination of mind and its confusion.

klesha The emotional obscurations which are also translated as “poisons.” The three main kleshas are desire or attachment, aggression; and ignorance.

mahayana These are the teachings of the second turning of the wheel of dharma, which emphasize emptiness, compassion, the conduct of a bodhisattva.

pratimoksha vows The vows of not killing, stealing, lying, etc. which are taken by monks and nuns.

samsara Conditioned existence of ordinary life in which suffering occurs because one still possesses attachment, aggression, and ignorance.

sangha These are the companions on the path.

vajrayana There are three major traditions of Buddhism (hinayana, mahayana, vajrayana) The vajrayana is based on the tantras and emphasizes the clarity aspect of phenomena and is mainly practiced in Tibet.

A Brief Biography of Thrangu Rinpoche

Thrangu Rinpoche was born in Kham in 1933. At the age of five he was formally recognized by the Sixteenth Karmapa and the previous Situ Rinpoche as the incarnation of the great Thrangu tulku. Entering Thrangu monastery, from the ages of seven to sixteen he studied reading, writing, grammar, poetry, and astrology, memorized ritual texts, and completed two preliminary retreats. At sixteen under the direction of Khenpo Lodro Rabsel he began the study of the three vehicles of Buddhism while staying in retreat.

At twenty-three he received full ordination from the Karmapa. When he was twenty-seven Rinpoche left Tibet for India at the time of the Chinese military takeover. He was called to Rumtek, Sikkim, where the Karmapa had his seat in exile. At thirty-five he took the geshe examination before 1500 monks at Buxador monastic refugee camp in Bengal, and was awarded the degree of Geshe Lharampa. On his return to Rumtek he was named Abbot of Rumtek monastery and the Nalanda Institute for Higher Buddhist studies at Rumtek. He has been the personal teacher of the four principal Karma Kagyu tulkus: Shamar Rinpoche, Situ Rinpoche, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche and Gyaltsab Rinpoche.

Thrangu Rinpoche has traveled extensively throughout Europe, the Far East and the USA; he is the abbot of Gampo Abbey, Nova Scotia, Canada, of Thrangu House, Oxford, in the UK. In 1984 he spent several months in Tibet where he ordained over 100 monks and nuns and visited several monasteries. He has also founded the monastery, Thrangu Tashi Choling in Boudhnath, a retreat center and college at Namu Buddha, east of the Katmandu Valley, and has established a school in Boudhnath for the general education of lay children and young monks. He built Tara Abbey in Katmandu. In October of 1999 he consecrate the College at Sarnath which will accept students from the different sects of Buddhism and will be available to western students as well.

Thrangu Rinpoche has given teachings in over 25 countries and is especially known for taking complex teachings and making them accessible to Western students. Thrangu Rinpoche is a recognized master of Mahamudra meditation.

More recently, because of his vast knowledge of the Dharma, he was appointed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be the personal tutor for the recently escaped 17th Karmapa.