

## Extra Advice Regarding Practices After The Tsunami Disaster - Karma and the Power of Refuge

All the hundreds of fisherman who drowned in the tsunami lived all their lives on fish. If you kill one fish, because karma is expandable, you will be born in the same place as the fish, and be killed five or more hundred lifetimes for each fish you killed. These people lived their whole lives at the beach and this is what they lived on, so can you imagine the negative karma? It's very hard to imagine. There was not one single thought of confessing, no regret, because they saw it as good, and they probably rejoiced because tourists come from all over the world: "Oh, we are so fortunate, so lucky to be living here, able to fish!"

If they had met Dharma, of course, it could have been purified but that didn't happen. In one teaching, a geshe, talking about the benefits of liberating animals, says we will be killed five hundred lifetimes for killing one creature. That also depends on how heavily you killed – it could even be one thousand lifetimes because karma is expandable. So killing one fish is much worse than what happened, dying in the flood. That is nothing compared to one negative karma of killing, for that person.

Most of these – of course there are the hell realms but, probably, according to the stories in the lam-rim, they would be born in the same place, in the same water where they caught the fish. The lam-rim gives examples to show that nothing is definite in samsara, like the story of the enemy and friend: the father, who used to catch fish in the pond behind the house, died and was reborn as a fish in that pond; the mother, his wife, was attached to the home so was born as a dog in the son's family; the son's enemy, who was attached to the son's wife, died and was reborn as their child. When Sharipu came to the door for alms, he saw the son holding the baby, who was his enemy, eating the fish, which was his father, the dog chewing the fish bones and the son beating the dog with a stick. Sharipu said, "The son is eating his father's flesh, beating his mother and carrying his enemy on his lap – I laugh at samsaric existence."

According to that and other stories, those people would be born many lifetimes, again and again in the same water or river. During their lives, every day how many fish they caught – cannot imagine. So if you think of the negative karma of killing each fish, what happened this time to each person means nothing. Hundreds of thousands of lifetimes of suffering from one negative karma is much more unbearable. It's possible, also, that many will be reborn as spirits.

When I was in Tibet, one Kagyu Lama I spoke to, from Thak.lung, Ma.trul Rinpoche's monastery, was extremely worried because, after the invasion by mainland China and all the torture, and destruction of monasteries, many Tibetan people had died with much anger, and had been reborn as spirits; the spirit population was greatly increased. That Lama suggested a powerful lama could come from India to offer burning pujas to purify the spirits. I guess he meant to subdue them so they wouldn't keep creating negative karma of giving harm to others, and to liberate them from that suffering. He also expressed great concern that if Tibetan independence did not happen while the old generation is still alive, it might be delayed as the young people might miss the opportunity; things could change. The Lama gave me a relic of Buddha Kashyapa's tooth.

There is some difference as that was anger, whereas the people in the tsunami would have died with much fear. Still, many would be reborn as spirits due to karma.

The worst thing is if the epidemic disease starts, there is a great possibility, after burying them in the ground, there will be pollution and many people will get sick as it could spread to the cities. Astrologically, butchers or prostitutes or others whose lives involve heavy negative karma, especially diseased ones, first you burn, then you bury, otherwise there is danger.

I think the *sur* practice might be beneficial as there will be many in the intermediate state, those who haven't taken birth immediately.

Tibetans usually go to pray over dead people. As Buddhists, one can recite anything, such as Heart Sutra, or refuge prayer. Refuge looks simple, but it is the foundation of other subsequent meditations, relying on Buddha.

It is very sad if the survivors, families or relief organisers don't do something for those who died. Those who believe in Tibetan Buddhism, even if they don't know anything else, would recite OM MANI PADME HUM. This is the most precious wish-fulfilling mantra cherished by all the buddhas, past, present and future. You recite OM MANI PADME HUM and blow over the body. That purifies or reduces the negative karma and helps for a higher rebirth, so even that has incredible benefit. Requesting to Chenrezig with whole-hearted reliance and then reciting OM MANI PADME HUM for all those people who died, has incredible benefit. It is said in the teachings that even seeing the letters of OM MANI PADME HUM purifies the five unending negative karmas and so no question about the ten non-virtuous actions.

So it is very sad that those people who are around the bodies, the family and so forth, don't know this. Even chanting as many malas as one can of OM MANI PADME HUM with strong reliance on Chenrezig, then blowing on water after each round, then spilling the water over the body is incredible purification, reducing their negative karma.

Also one can do a meditation, blessing the water with Chenrezig: visualise Chenrezig above the water, nectar flowing from the mantra at Chenrezig's heart, into the water. At the end make a strong request to Chenrezig, then Chenrezig absorbs into the water. This is very powerful to purify all their negative karma and for them to actualise the path of Chenrezig's qualities, as you pour the water over the body.

When Geshe Lama Konchog was in Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, many people came whenever there was a ceremony blessing the people, so Geshela would bless the water in the vase and go through the line sprinkling the water with a branch onto the people. Afterwards we heard some of those people were healed from sicknesses.

Whatever sophisticated practices and pujas there are, such as the tantric practice of transferring consciousness, *po.wa*, their very foundation is Refuge, reliance on Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. It is the most important, the basis of all other practices. If, as a Buddhist, you know nothing except the prayer of taking refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and, totally relying on

Buddha, you recite this to purify and save living or deceased beings from the lower realms, it has incredible power and benefit for them.

Because Buddha has omniscient mind, knowing everything, Buddha can see your request, knows your mind and your needs, sees all the suffering and knows the methods to liberate. Not only that, Buddha has perfect power to reveal the exact method according to the karma, level of mind and character of each sentient being. More than that, Buddha has compassion for every living being, without discriminating whether they believe in Buddha or not. As is mentioned in the text, if somebody is offering ointment to Buddha's right arm, and somebody else is cutting pieces of flesh from the left arm, Buddha's compassion is equal to both. Therefore, Buddha *definitely* guides and, of course, no question if the person has total faith.

If you look in the Refuge section of Liberation in the Palm, you will see various stories about the power of Refuge. There is one story about a group of business people on an ocean-bound ship. They came across a huge sea animal. When the animal opened his mouth all the water was pouring into it. Just as their ship was about to be drawn into the mouth the passengers recited the prayer of reliance on Buddha, Dharma and Sangha so loudly that the animal's mouth immediately closed and they were saved. The animal passed away at that moment. Their refuge had two benefits: it saved their lives and, secondly, by having heard the prayer just before it passed away, the animal was reborn in a deva realm.

There is another story of some relatives of arhat Kangpo who were on a boat with some merchants when *nagas* caused the waves to become so big they threatened to disintegrate the boat. The people took strong refuge in arhat Kangpo and were saved.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama's youngest brother, Ngari Rinpoche, told me that when he was doing military training in the Indian Army, the first time he parachuted he was really afraid, so he took refuge in His Holiness and then jumped. No danger happened, and Rinpoche said, "From that time, I have had total faith in His Holiness."

Some time recently, an Argentinian student, Jangchub Palmo, was in Argentina, which is a very dangerous place, full of violence, theft and killing. I suggested wearing the Diamond Cutter Sutra, the teaching on Prajnaparamita, which she did. While she was walking on the road, a car pulled up with two people who intended to rob her. When they were about to attack her, just one moment away, she thought, "Nothing will happen, I have the Diamond Cutter Sutra," and they just went away.

Again, more recently, she was feeling very scared to be there and asked me again for some protection. I gave her the Diamond Cutter Sutra in Tibetan and she carried the English translation of the Sutra of Golden Light. She was there nearly a month, in parks and mountains and on the roads, and she says that nobody could see her. She collected nine suitcases of herbs and was worried about taking so much, but when she went through the airport nobody checked them at all. She was also carrying a machine that Security wanted to scan, but she gave some reason not to, and they just let her go, very easily. This was unusual, especially considering the level of security after September 11<sup>th</sup>. This shows the power of faith, her reliance on those texts, the Holy Dharma, based on her good heart.

Quite some time ago, one Tibetan who had no intellectual knowledge of Dharma at all, Appu Ho, came to Lhasa from Kham, and went to see the Shakyamuni Buddha statue, the Lhasa Jowo that was blessed by Buddha himself. He was afraid his shoes would get stolen from outside so he put his shoes in front of the statue and asked the Buddha, "Please look after my shoes while I'm going around." The statue answered "Yes." Later, the caretaker saw the shoes and wanted to move them but the statue told him to leave them there.

This story became very famous all over Lhasa. It showed the power of Appu Ho's faith; even though he had no intellectual knowledge, he had full trust when he spoke to the Buddha statue as a person.

### ***The Power of Refuge***

Three Chinese *upasikas* (Buddhists living in the five precepts) had bought airline tickets but since then had been feeling very uncomfortable about the impending flight. So they visited the Potala, Chenrezig's holy place, in China, to make prayers (the text describes this holy site as unbelievable, amazing, not as popular with tourists as Manjushri Mountain is, and quite primitive. The temple is said to be very old.) After they made strong requesting prayers to Chenrezig the uncomfortable feeling disappeared.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1990, they took the flight. During the flight, an announcement was made that the plane was damaged. The three *upasikas* then made one-pointed requests to Chenrezig and Amitabha Buddha. After some time, the fuel was almost finished and the plane made an emergency landing at White Cloud airport in Gangdul, China. The plane landed very quickly and somehow there was an accident. About one fathom behind the three *upasikas*, the plane broke in half and all three managed to escape from the plane. As soon as they were outside, the plane exploded into a conflagration of flames.

All except 10 of the other 100 passengers on the plane died, and those 10 were all seriously injured, with missing limbs etc. The three *upasikas* escaped with not the slightest injury. When the plane was checked later, everything in it was burned to ashes except three Dharma texts that the *upasikas* had been carrying. The texts were completely undamaged.

There was nobody there that day who was not amazed at the inconceivable power of the Holy Dharma.

In the *Arya Sangata Sutra*, Buddha tells Mengyi De:

“Listen, when a person dies with a devoted mind to the tathagatas, if that person says "I prostrate to the Buddha," Mengyi De, by that virtue the person will experience happiness in the 33 deva realm, for 60 eons, and will remember all the lives until 80 eons. From life to life that person will be free from all pain and worry.”

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Regarding this disaster in India and the other countries, I expect people are complaining that there was no early warning system. However, basically, the answer is that karma ripened, what was created in the past to have earthquakes and waves and to experience such a disaster, that which came from impure mind, wrong concepts, negative thoughts and the negative actions thus motivated. Therefore, it came from each person's mind and is to do with appearance. This is not a pleasant appearance, it is unpleasant – a terrifying appearance. Like a dream appearance, which can be pleasant or a terrifying nightmare, comes from the mind, a product of imprints. One is very enjoyable, one a very terrifying appearance; both are creation of mind, of what in Western psychology is called the sub-consciousness. However, they come from imprints; one might be a positive imprint, one might be negative. Of course, those hallucinated appearances we see in dreams do not exist even in name, do not exist even conventionally. The self is doing various activities, of action and object, in the dream.

Similarly this terrifying appearance came from mind, from the negative imprint left by past karma, experienced because it wasn't purified completely before, nor even reduced. That is why it was so heavy. If it had been purified or reduced, the danger would have been much less.

What happened that day also had a long evolution, from this or a past life, from whenever the karma was created for it to happen, but talking about the immediate appearance and effect, how that came from the mind, might help to understand the longer evolution of that terrifying appearance.

For example, even if you normally see a person as very beautiful, when you are angry you see the person as very ugly, undesirable, a totally opposite view – you don't like them, you hate that person. You dislike that view. That generates a thought to harm, to hurt that unpleasant view. You think more and more about the way that person treats you, in thought and behaviour, their way of looking, with pride or anger; their way of speaking, unpleasant or disrespectful.

You put a negative interpretation on it as hurtful, bad, because it hurts your own self-cherishing thought that expects everyone, including that person, to say only nice things to you, to love you, be attached to you, to give you only praise and respect. It's the same as the eight worldly dharmas, the attachment clinging to this life, clinging to receiving only nice things. The other person's way of thinking, talking and looking disturbs your self-cherishing, the attachment, and by following these you label it "bad" or "harmful."

Of course, that person's attitude, their harsh or provocative speech or way of looking at you doesn't harm your bodhicitta, doesn't harm your altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment, doesn't harm your loving kindness and doesn't harm your compassion. It can only develop your compassion and loving kindness, if you think how this sentient being is suffering so much, totally trapped in hallucinations of true existence and permanence, and piles of other hallucinations, because of so many piles of wrong concepts and superstitious thoughts. If you look at it with a different view it makes you develop more loving kindness and compassion. Then you see they are only engaging in negative karma with their mind, speech and body.

Besides the totally disturbed mind of that person having no peace and happiness now, in this life, they have to experience the consequential suffering results of all their negative actions, in this

life and especially in future lives, over many hundreds or thousands of lifetimes, experiencing so many years in one life because karma is expandable, like a person who is deformed or seriously sick their whole life. That person never is free from problems; always their life situation is very heavy.

Thinking of the kindness of that person, how all your past, present and future happiness comes from them, looking at the person in this way causes you to generate loving kindness, compassion and bodhicitta. With bodhicitta you achieve all the realisations: the Mahayana path of merit, the Mahayana preparation path, the Mahayana path of seeing, the Mahayana path of meditation, the Mahayana path of no-more learning. You achieve all the unimaginable qualities of those paths, complete the paths of method and wisdom, and as a result achieve the two kayas, dharmakaya and rupakaya. You are able to achieve the qualities of Buddha, like limitless sky. Then you are able to do perfect work for sentient beings. Able to reveal to them the methods exactly suited to their karma and mental characteristics, able to bring them to liberation, which is free forever from the ocean of samsaric suffering and its cause, delusions and karma. Not only that, by revealing to them the Mahayana path they will be able to cease even the subtle defilements and reach full enlightenment, cessation of all mistakes of the mind and completion of all realisations.

So you are able to offer liberation and great liberation, full enlightenment, ultimate benefit like limitless sky to numberless sentient beings. That comes from you achieving enlightenment, completing the Mahayana path, including achieving liberation from samsara, all of which came from actualising bodhicitta, and that came from the root, great compassion. Great compassion was generated on the existence of this person who has such a suffering nature, evil attitude, delusional way of thinking that has no valid reason, fully engaged in negative karma and who has to experience all those unimaginable suffering results – the end of which is difficult to see.

Here, you see the person as most precious, most kind, most wish-fulfilling, giving you all these realisations and ultimate happiness, including day-to-day peace of mind, by your generating loving kindness and compassion to that person. Peace of mind, happy mind. That person becomes an object of appreciation, unbelievably kind, the most precious, important object in your life. Because of them, you are able to transform your life from black to white, for the better, able to achieve greater and greater happiness, fulfilment, satisfaction, which doesn't happen and of which only the opposite happens if you generate anger and negative thoughts towards that person.

With such an attitude, thinking of that person as most precious, offering even a very small service to that person becomes so important and makes you unbelievably happy. You become so happy to be able to help them in the tiniest way. Whatever help you can give them becomes a source of incredible joy and happiness in your life. Even if you had to be born and suffer in hell to benefit that sentient being it would become the greatest happiness of your life, the most satisfying. You would bear any hardships for that person.

If this way of thinking of the kindness of sentient beings is a bit difficult to understand or feel, training the mind in patience – the positive, happy mind – towards that person, will make your life better. Then anger will arise less and less, and last a shorter and shorter time until, after some time, no anger will arise towards any sentient being. Even if every human being and animal,

every bird, dog, cat, horse, goat, fish and mosquito, criticizes you in one voice, get angry with you, beat you or kill you, whatever possible harm they give you, there will be no anger at all, it will be impossible for anger to arise, there is only a happy mind, peace. As there is no anger towards them, they don't receive harm from you, so numberless sentient beings receive peace and happiness from you. The absence of harm itself is peace; so all the sentient beings receive peace and happiness from you for ever, no harm.

To make the understanding more clear: when your mind is in the practice of patience like this, there is so much peace and happiness not only in your life but in the lives of your friends, husband, wife, children and parents. Whoever lives with you has so much peace and happiness even if they don't practice patience towards you.

Think of the happiness your family receives from you, then think of your neighbours, then the area, the city, country, the whole world, then all living beings in all universes. Of course, that is talking about life to life; as there is mental continuity you are able to stop harm and bring much peace and happiness to all living beings in other universes.

Even historically in this world, because one person didn't practice good heart and patience, so many millions suffered torture and death, without counting all the animals and insects living on the ground, in the forest or in the water.

This is simply to understand how, starting from your companion who lives with you, to all living beings in all universes, all the happiness and peace they receive from you depends on your good heart, your mind living in this quality: patience. Thinking this way makes one realise the responsibility one has for all living beings' peace and happiness, and the limitless skies of benefit of your, one person's practice of patience.

All this peace and happiness that not only you experience but are able to offer numberless sentient beings, the human beings and animals in this world as well as numberless other living beings, is by the kindness of that person who is angry with you, their speech criticising you, their body showing disrespect. Whatever unpleasant behaviour that person shows you is solely their kindness. So you can see how this person is most precious, the most important practical teacher of mind-training, in this instance, particularly of patience.

Of course, only by completing the practice of patience can you achieve full enlightenment, the great liberation, cessation of all gross and subtle mistakes of the mind and completion of all the realisations. With this happy, positive mind of patience everything is ok. You are not upset with that person, you see that person as nice, kind and most precious. Your body is also relaxed, the blood circulation, everything, is relaxed. You can enjoy food, whether it is very simple or an expensive meal, even just drinking water. You can sleep well because the mind is relaxed and very comfortable. Even if your house is very simple you are very happy, you enjoy it. You enjoy wherever you are. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentioned, with a good heart, even if you are living in a grass hut with only water to drink, there is happiness, life enjoyment.

Anger also harms the body, interferes with the blood circulation, causing heart attack and other heart problems as well as many other things. One doctor in Delhi advises not to put negative

labels on other people because those negative labels cause you to get angry and that causes heart problems, like heart attacks, by affecting the blood circulation.

With anger, you can't enjoy even a thousand-dollar meal, can't sleep, your anger is reflected in nightmares of violence and anger. No matter how many five, ten or 20-star hotels you live in, you can't enjoy life, even if you live in a jewelled palace with gold doors and diamond walls and diamond toilets. Even if you are flying in the sky like a bird, like flies, you won't find happiness. Everything around you is negative with anger. Same when you are depressed, everything around is dark, you can't enjoy it, everything is depressing.

This is the conclusion of how things appear. Here, everything appears unpleasant because your attitude is negative, emotional thought, full of anger. When your mind is unhappy, everything appears as disturbing, even the sky, clouds, trees, animals and people. The minute your mind transforms into patience, everything, your whole world becomes very positive. You feel happy with whatever appears to you.

So there are two explanations.

In the life, how things appear depends on how you think of the object, what label you put.

Then, terrifying appearances such as this one have also a long evolution, from past karma. Anything that is pleasant in your view, which gives a pleasant feeling, happiness, when it meets your senses, came from the long evolution of good karma.

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I wish that all the affected countries have enough people to offer service in taking care of all those people, or that many people come from outside to organise and help, together with the people of that country. That they receive help quickly and efficiently and cover as many people as possible, not only rescuing the present survivors with medicine, water, food, clothing and so on but, more or less at the same time, planning future communities. That they not only make temporary shelters but build houses for the homeless and factories where they can work. That those outside countries should then buy their products so the people have a permanent source of livelihood.

Again, the conclusion is education of a good heart. There are so many wars and catastrophes of the elements of water, wind, as in tornadoes, and earthquakes; like this time when so many people have died in India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand etc., each day finding more and more people died than they originally expected. And so many sicknesses – not only AIDS, which mostly happens through blood transfusions and sex, but cancer, which you can never foretell, are happening more and more in the countries and cities of this world, in one's own family.

All these are the result of negative attitude and actions, all this came from the mind, whether one believes in reincarnation and karma or not. All these persuade us that life is very short and death can happen at any time. Therefore, every day don't waste this precious human life that gives every opportunity to develop the mind, to bring happiness and peace to one's own family,

companions, neighbours in one's town or city, country and the world. With which you can cause temporal and ultimate happiness, up to full enlightenment, peerless happiness to all living beings. Live with a positive mind and good heart to benefit others continuously, and in your actions help others in every single way you can.

Whether you have a traditional religion or not, most important is this: not to cause harm and to give happiness to humans, animals, insects and other living beings. Your engaging every day in every single act of kindness, whether large-scale or small, helps. It fulfils other beings' happiness, whether by means of a small comfort or some big success. Every single one of your acts of kindness towards others becomes a wish-fulfilling cause of others' happiness, so it becomes the best cause for your own wishes to be fulfilled. The consequences are that all your wishes get fulfilled; temporal and ultimate happiness, anything you want to achieve will succeed.

When you live life this way, you don't create the cause to experience disasters such as this, so you don't experience them, you experience the opposite: peace and enjoyment. It brings you so much satisfaction in your life and so much peace and happiness to the world.

*Colophon: Advice given at Kachoe Dechen Ling, 31 Dec 2004. Scribe Ven.Thubten Labdron*