

Reasons to Practice Dharma

Here is why we need to practice Dharma besides doing ordinary work:

Even non-believers in reincarnation and karma need to practice Dharma because they want happiness and do not want suffering. To have happiness in life you have to change your mind, casting away negative thoughts, attachment to this life – clinging to the 'I', clinging to the body, clinging to possessions, to friends and family – the delusion which harms oneself, which harms others, which makes you suffer, which makes others suffer. Cast that away and establish a healthy, positive and happy mind, virtuous thoughts.

For example, you want to have a long-lasting happy relationship with your husband or your wife. That's one thing. Usually, you have lots of worries that the husband or wife might lose their love for you and leave you. So there you need to practice patience. If you are full of anger you think bad thoughts, then anger arises and then you fight. You are not happy with him or her, then that manifestation comes and the other person sees that you are angry, and then their mind is not happy. Then you fight with words that hurt the other's heart and also affects their mind, makes their mind upset or angry.

Then come the actions of the body like frowning at him or her, or throwing things, beating or even killing – the biggest danger – or breaking arms or legs or even maybe the nose!

Maybe you get angry because of a very small thing – such as the bread or tea being cold – and say some words and finally end up in a court case, spending millions of dollars all for nothing; not for virtue or helping somebody, it doesn't get used for that.

In America, in the Aptos house, one day I went to the sea with the house monks and nuns. We were sitting on a bench, using the table for eating and drinking. A car drove by and then came back. The driver told us she was so happy because she had built the bench after her husband died to help people. So, for example, that wasted money could have been used to help in such a way.

The delusion anger is so unbelievable. If you are not careful with your anger or other delusions, such as the jealous mind, they can cause huge unnecessary expenses in your life. Maybe you can't even pay the other person or the court fees because you don't have the money.

Just one delusion – anger or jealousy or another – makes life so miserable, and then causes the other person to separate, to end the relationship. Then you are depressed

and everything is dark for you. Regardless of how much sunshine or light there is, your mind is dark.

It's good to know what makes life so difficult, the puzzle of how much suffering is caused by one delusion. One attachment creates such an unbelievable experience, so much difficulty just from one delusion. It's good to know that.

However much you gain in business, from ten dollars you might make \$100, from \$100 you make \$1,000, from \$1,000 you make \$10,000, from \$10,000 to a million, to billions and zillions, there is no end. I have seen in the world many billionaires go to prison because of their unsatisfied minds. You want more and more and so you do something illegal. Then, a person in your company becomes angry with you and reveals all the illegalities and you go to prison. Then you become famous in a different way, in suffering.

Even if you are a non-believer you need to have a satisfied mind, contentment. You need to practice having a satisfied mind and contentment: that is renunciation. As much as possible have less attachment, then life becomes happy. A simple life is a happy life; happiness comes from within. That is Dharma, contentment and a satisfied mind; renunciation of attachment brings peace from within.

As I mentioned about relationships, you need to practice patience. It's most important to keep the mind in happiness. With patience and tolerance, you can enjoy life with your partner. You don't find the partner harming you, disturbing you because you are practicing patience. This brings incredible peace and happiness. Patience is Dharma, and contentment and satisfied mind are Dharma, pure Dharma.

Historically, many times, due to not practicing patience, an influential and powerful person became extremely threatening, killing many millions of people, like Mao Tse Tung, Hitler or Stalin. This one person of influence and power didn't practice patience, so millions of people suffered and were killed.

On the other hand, a person practicing good heart and patience brings happiness to millions and millions of people, like Shakyamuni Buddha and great compassionate people from different religions, such as St. Francis and Mother Teresa.

So this is just a drop. If you want happiness and do not want suffering you have to practice Dharma, even non-believers. Therefore, you need someone to teach you and so you can see the need for Dharma centers. We need as many centers as possible, to offer the education and practice that are necessary for happiness. That is the function of the center; not only teaching Dharma, but also healing and so many things, for example, social service.

So the best answer is to learn Dharma – and to meditate – especially how to develop wisdom and compassion towards other sentient beings. Therefore, we need a place where there is a teacher, the Dharma and facilities to practice.

The center is able to offer these facilities to everyone, as much as it can do. We each have full responsibility to free all sentient beings from suffering and bring them to full enlightenment. Therefore, we need to achieve full enlightenment and so we need to practice Dharma. Now we can see how important the Dharma center is. We should know how fortunate and lucky we are having different Dharma centers with teachers.

We can rejoice so much because the center is able to be of benefit to many sentient beings and the teaching of the Buddha.

Colophon: Advice given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche on the occasion of a center's 10th anniversary; Scribe Ven.Trisha, Kopan Monastery, Nepal; 4 November 2011. Edited by Claire Isitt, March 2012.