



Dharma in Daily Life
by
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The subject I was requested to talk about here is 'the practice of dharma in daily life', in everyday life. This title comes up so many times, and at the beginning it didn't make much sense to me because if you don't practice dharma in your day to day life then where do you practice? You have to practice dharma in your everyday life. Our everyday life is everything that we have got; we don't have another life that is not our everyday life. So if you practice dharma you have to practice it in everyday life. As I mentioned, previously when I was requested to talk on this subject, both in Asia and Occidental centres and communities, it really didn't make sense to me, but then slowly I came to understand what people really mean when requesting me to talk on this subject. I think for many people religion becomes some sort of an extra thing, dharma becomes an extra thing, therefore it is something like 'I practice dharma' or 'I don't practice dharma'. So it is, as far as I am concerned, a very basic misunderstanding of what dharma is all about. Even if you don't believe in anything; that is what you believe. Even if you don't practice anything; that is what you practice. Therefore no one can say "I am a pure and genuine non-believer" or "I am a pure and genuine non-practitioner". That is impossible. But somehow our sophistication as a human being becomes a very strange thing; it also makes us a little stupid because we have so many titles, distinctions and descriptions, in that way we are very confused because we make everything unnecessarily confusing. So instead of dismissing such a subject, I will try to explain it.

First of all I think it is very important to define what practice is, what dharma is, what everyday is and what life is. Then join all of that together with 'of' and 'in'. Then, 'practice *of* dharma *in* everyday life'.

So what is life? Life by definition, according to Lord Buddha's teaching, is a very simple thing; you are alive, I am alive. It is not something that is a mystery. It is not something that we have to go to different places to find out about—who is going to places and who is listening to words and trying to find out what life is, is the life itself. You are alive, I am alive. But right now I am alive in this Tibetan-born and Indian-grown body and you are alive in that body of yours. Young, old, middle-aged, kids, monks, nuns, layman, laywoman, you are alive in that physical body.

Then when the inevitable comes and you have to leave your physical body behind, then you

are still alive but not in that body. The body is dead but the mind is alive and it continues. Mind can never die. Even if we temporarily become unconscious, for example, medically unconscious in a coma or something, mind is still alive. I haven't been in a coma myself so I don't know exactly how you are supposed to feel but it must be similar to what happens every night when I go to sleep. The stage in between when I am lying down and having a dream must be something like a coma. I am alive here, but in the next life I might be born as a mosquito or a dog or a god or an asura or in hell or as a man or as a woman, then at that time I will be alive that way. So life is not a mystery. Therefore I am presuming that now I have defined 'life'.

Now I will try to define dharma. Dharma is a Sanskrit word, in Tibetan it is translated as *cho*. Everything is dharma—everything that you can see, everything that you can hear, everything that you can talk about, everything that you can perceive, everything is dharma. This tree is dharma, the grass is dharma, everything is dharma. Now practicing dharma has to be understood as relating to everything and performing everything correctly. That has to be understood as practicing dharma. For example, I don't want to be cheated therefore I should not cheat others. Also, I don't like to be hurt therefore I should not hurt others. What belongs to me should not be taken by others, therefore what belongs to others should not be taken by me. Practicing dharma means your body, your speech, your mind, and other peoples' body, speech and mind, the environment in which we live in, the kind of things we have to do like eating, drinking, walking, getting up, sitting down etc to make our life functional, everything. If you don't eat you have no energy, and if you don't get up and sit down and walk around then all your muscles will die, then you won't be able to move, your legs will not hold your body up. If I decide not to move my right hand for three months then I will not be able to use my right hand, I won't be able to lift anything. I won't be able to move it. Then I would have to go to therapy and do exercise to make it work. Even if I am not sick and nothing is wrong, if I decide to tie my right hand to a stick and not move it at all for three months it will lose, if not a hundred percent capacity, it will lose a huge amount of capacity of what it can do simply right now. This way, doing all of the necessary things we do, but doing them as correctly as possible—practicing dharma means to live correctly, meaningfully.

Now here, morality and rules and all of these things come up. Morality and rules are so many and of so many kinds but they are very much related to, based on and derived from the conditions in which life is functioning; according to that condition. For example, if your community, race or tribe was living in a desert, in thousands of miles of desert, then there would be those kinds of rules and morality. Or, if you were living in a tropical, wet, humid forest then there would be rules and morality according to those kinds of conditions. Then if you were living in a grassland area where there were no trees, no desert but thousands and thousands of miles of hills, valleys and plains, then there would be those kinds of rules. Also if you were in a small tribe or a small group in one place with another a few hundred miles away,

then those kinds of morality and those kinds of rules. But if you were amongst millions of people in one place, then those kinds of rules and morality. So it depends on where the morality, rules and laws, the do's and don'ts, derive; and when and how. That is based on what it does to one another.

For example, if you have a community who don't have individual belongings—ten families living together and everything belongs to everyone, and everybody shares everything—then there will be that kind of morality, those kinds of rules. But if there are ten families and each one owns its own things and belongings, then there will be that kind of morality. So the entire dharma, whether it is Buddhism or not—I can speak for Buddhism one hundred percent but I cannot speak for other religions one hundred percent—I believe there isn't really any difference between Buddhism and other religions in as far as how it was derived. For example, Prince Siddhartha was a human being then he became Buddha Shakyamuni. Then also with other religions, whoever says they saw a god who told them something, it was a human being who saw the god; whether behind a tree, behind a rock, or from a cave, or from a cloud, or through light or in a dream, wherever or however way it happened, it happened to a human being. A human being who said that there is god and god spoke to him or her, and a human being who attained enlightenment. In this way the definition of dharma, the practice of dharma is very simple.

Now, for example with Buddhism, as you know there are three major aspects of Buddhism: Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. Some people like to call it Theravada and Mahayana, with Mahayana divided into Sutrayana and Tantrayana.¹ It doesn't matter, whichever way suits them they can describe it that way, but actually it is Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. Then the Theravada's rules, law or discipline, the Mahayana's discipline, and the Vajrayana's discipline, are all for the same thing, but they are slightly different from one another. The Theravada's discipline is more focused on body and speech, the Mahayana discipline is more focused on motivation, and the Vajrayana's discipline is more focused on body, speech and mind, all three, especially the mind; not only the motivation but mind itself, the life itself. I believe that all other religions also have rules, laws and disciplines that have everything to do with body, speech and mind, because all we have got is body, speech, and mind. So to practice the dharma means to do it correctly.

Now what is correct and what is not correct? Of course if you go into all the details it can become very complicated. Sometimes it becomes complicated because the real reason for it is forgotten, then we say that the lineage was broken. When the lineage is broken then the lineage does not continue anymore. Then it simply becomes a rule or some kind of culture and tradition—you are not supposed to do this, you are not supposed to do that, you are supposed to do it this way, and you are supposed to do it that way. But when the lineage is not broken then the meaning and reasons are very clear. Buddha says don't kill, don't steal, don't lie,

don't slander etc and all this is very clear. Why? Do you want to be killed? No, therefore don't kill. Do you like your things, things that are precious to you, to be taken away from you by somebody without them having been given? If somebody just comes and takes your things away do you like it? No, therefore don't steal. Also, what if somebody told you a lie and cheated you but you believed what that person said, then later you found out that it was not true but there were huge consequences as a result of you believing that person. But that person does not care what happens to you, they just wanted you to believe what they were saying so that they could get what they want. That's wrong, therefore don't lie. Also don't slander, because if you have a good friend and you have a good understanding with them and then somebody comes and says something to your friend on your behalf, or says something to you on your friend's behalf, so that then you have a total misunderstanding about your friend or they have a total misunderstanding about you, and then you lose your friend and your friend becomes your enemy. We have a saying, "the worst enemies are ex-friends." Somebody you don't know really cannot become a very serious enemy. But somebody who is very close to you and your friend can become a very serious enemy. This way it is not right, you like to have your friends as your friends, therefore don't slander.

So the practice of dharma means following this. Then if we go a little bit deeper than that, in the Vajrayana teachings, Lord Buddha manifested the dharma which enlightens us, that all of us are perfect. You are perfect, I am perfect, everybody is perfect, just like Prince Siddhartha, like him in essence. But in our manifestation we are not, each one of us has our unfair share of problems and shortcomings. Why I say unfair is because our potential is perfect, therefore any imperfection is unfair, but we all have them and we can't blame anybody because we are responsible. We have created our shortcomings, we have accumulated our habits, therefore we are responsible for what we are right now. We are the fruit of our own doing. Everything that we have, that we are and that we manifest, both the positive and the negative aspect, nobody else is responsible for that except us, we are responsible. For example, if I did not cheat somebody in my past life then there is no cause and condition for me being cheated. Also if I did not hurt somebody in the past then there is no cause and condition for me being hurt. So everything is a result of our own doing. For example, if I planted a seed for a weed and not a seed for a rose in my garden then I can't complain if in my garden instead of a beautiful rose growing a weed is growing. Also I can't complain if my stomach is aching if I have eaten food that is not fit to be eaten. Similarly I can't complain if my feet are frozen because I walked on ice without shoes. So that is the definition of practicing dharma correctly.

Now the incorrect practice of dharma—Lord Buddha taught how not to practice dharma incorrectly and how to practice dharma correctly. The dharma has many levels, we call it *jikten chu cho*, worldly dharma; also we call it *jikten ney depe chu*, free and above the worldly dharma, to be free from the worldly dharma. In worldly dharma what do we do? We become the slave of our greed, our hatred, our jealousy, our mistrust, our doubt, and our fear, we

become the slave of them, and because of that we do all kinds of things. Because of fear we go after our enemy thinking that if we get our enemy then it will be finished, but that is not the end, that is the beginning. If I throw a rock into the air it has to fall down; how far I throw it doesn't matter, sooner or later it has to fall down. Also if I throw a flower into the sky, into the air, it will fall down. But I cannot expect a beautiful flower to fall on me by throwing a big stone up in the air. So worldly dharma brings worldly results, and worldly results is to be a servant of one's ego, a servant of one's greed, a servant of one's anger and a servant of one's jealousy. The appetite for those defilements is unfulfillable. For example, I guarantee you, if any one of you become the king of planet Earth today, within one week, at the most, you will find countless things to complain about. I don't think even one week, that is the maximum.

Each one of you have different capacities in life and if you wish to be content you are perfectly okay as you are right now. The birds that live in the trees do not have anything, no social security, no bank accounts, nothing, but they are okay. We are supposed to be more intelligent, more superior and more civilised, therefore we have to be okay. Each one of us is perfectly okay as we are right now, but worldly dharma does not think so. Therefore we are working like ants and bees, and we live by this and we die by this. We live by serving our master the ego, greed, hatred and jealousy, and we die by serving our master the ego, the self, jealousy, anger and greed. There is an old universal saying which is, 'he who lives by the sword shall die by the sword'. So, 'who lives by greed dies by greed; who lives by anger dies by anger; who lives by jealousy dies by jealousy'; and there is no end to this, it will go on and on, the endless circles of samsara. Prince Siddhartha taught that that was and is absolutely unnecessary, therefore he decided to practice the profound dharma, to be free from worldly dharma. So we decide not to be the slave of our ego, the slave of our greed and the slave of our jealousy. Prince Siddhartha decided not to be that, therefore he left everything, because everything was serving him in no other way than to enslave him. Everything was enslaving him and nothing was giving him anything.

Also there is nothing everlasting, everything is impermanent. For example, if you think of the world a hundred years ago, think of the world today, and think of the world a hundred years from now, it was totally different, it is totally different, and it will be totally different. That is the nature of samsara, that is the nature of worldly dharma, everything is impermanent. Also everyone here, none of us will be here one hundred years from now. One hundred years is a long time, maybe even fifty years from now most of us will not be in this world, in this form, in this body. But all the things that everybody is doing, they have to keep on doing. It is like a house you have to keep on maintaining; there is no such thing as having maintained your house so that you don't have to maintain it anymore. Or, I have eaten now so I don't have to eat again. You have to eat again tomorrow and you have to eat again the day after tomorrow; that is the worldly dharma. Prince Siddhartha realised this and at the same time he realised his ultimate potential had no such limitation, therefore, through his cultivation and through his

practice of following the profound dharma, not worldly dharma, he became enlightened, he became free.

Enlightenment means limitless freedom and liberation, which is always the primordial essence of each one of us at all times. Those of us who are here, if we really look into each one of us, some of us are more free than others, but in different things. I am not free in some things but I am freer in other things than some of you. Some of you are freer in some things than me and less free in some things than me. In the same way for all of you, each one of you has more limitations in certain things and less limitation in other things. Buddha by definition is, when you fully mature your limitless potential and you have no limitation whatsoever anymore. But that can only be possible when you are free from self, ego, attachment, anger, jealousy, and pride. When you are free from all of these dualistic perceptions, not only in perception but in reality and truth, then you have no limitation. You can never be limitless when you have limitations, you have to be limitless in order to have no limitation, and in your primordial essence that is the case, but in your relative manifestation it is not. Of course you can be a manifestation of a Buddha manifesting as an unenlightened sentient being to help all of us, that could be possible; but I have no way of knowing that because I am not omniscient, I am simply a follower of Buddha. So since I don't know exactly what your manifestation is, then I presume that you are an unenlightened sentient being just like me, therefore I have to presume and believe that you are not yet free from all the limitations. But some limitations, yes you are free of.

This way I have defined life, defined the practice of dharma and defined everyday life. Now to make a simple conclusion for the whole thing, I am a Buddhist and some of you might be Hindu, Christian, Muslim, or Jewish, but the essence of every sentient being, no matter what they label themselves, is the same. The essence of every sentient being is primordial wisdom—*tathagatagarbha*, Buddha nature. That is there in everyone. The ironic thing about this is that we can even see the proof of the limitlessness of our essence in its negative manifestation. When we don't realise that we are limitless then we become limited, we call ourselves 'I'. Once we have 'I' it is inevitable that everybody becomes others, and with that separation then 'I like', 'I don't like', 'I want', 'I don't want', 'I have', 'I don't have', all these things are natural. If I don't have something then I can't lose anything, but if I have something then I can lose it. If there is no duality then there isn't something that 'I want' and 'I couldn't get' or, somebody's got it then I am jealous. If there is no duality then that wouldn't be there, it wouldn't happen.

So in this way, even from the negative manifestation of ignorance we see how impossible our greed is. Some of us are a little bit tired in life so we just say "I am not going to get it anyway, so let's forget about it." But if chance and opportunities come then it is tempting, therefore our greed is ready to awaken, the sleeping giant, the sleeping monster, is ready to awake. If we do not keep our greed in check it wants everything; not one, not two, not three, everything. If

we don't discipline our greed and instead try to fulfil our greed, the appetite of our greed is impossible to fulfil, its appetite is limitless. For example, if you become the king of Earth today, tomorrow you will want to look for something else to conquer. And if everybody listens to you, whatever you ask, everybody does their best, but if you don't check your greed then their best is not good enough—somebody's best is not as good as another's best.

This way it is impossible to fulfil our greed. Even if you can get tasty and fresh, genuine grapes in the middle of a desert where nothing grows within ten thousand miles, or you can get ice in your orange juice where the natural temperature is fifty degrees Celsius, still it is not good enough. Nothing is good enough. You can go around the world in twenty-four hours but still it is not fast enough. We can talk to our friends on the other side of the world, write a letter to them, let them correct it, then I correct it and they correct it again—together we can write a letter faster than our hands can write it—then send it to ten thousand friends in five seconds, but still that is not fast enough.

Greed has no limitation. This shows very clearly the essence of that greed. Where does that greed come from? The positive side of that greed is our primordial essence, which when not realised becomes greed. Our primordial essence is limitless, therefore its shadow, not recognising it becomes greed. That is why greed has no limitation. So if we ask whether primordial wisdom is limitless or not, ironically we can see it through the proof of the impossible appetite of greed.

In this way the practice of dharma in everyday life means that we do our best not to become the slave of our ignorance, not to become the slave of our anger, not to become the slave of our greed, not to become the slave of our jealousy etc, and we improve little by little. Of course, if possible we can do it faster than little by little, but honestly and steadily, slowly we improve so that by the end of this life we will be able to say to ourselves "I improved by at least one percent, therefore my next life will be one percent more mature, one percent more free, and one percent more enlightened." Then I think we have achieved quite a big and meaningful liberation, a meaningful achievement. Of course less than one percent is also okay. Why I say this is because up until today we have been in samsara for countless lifetimes—this life is not the beginning and this life is not the end. Today cannot be the first day and today cannot be the last day. Yesterday was there, today is here and there will be tomorrow. Similarly you cannot have this life without a past life and you cannot have this life without a next life. Saying there is no past life is like saying there was no yesterday, and saying there is no karma is like saying rice does not grow from seeds that are planted by a farmer. This is not complicated, it is very simple; everything is a result of causes and conditions, everything. In this way I think this simple subject, the practice of dharma in everyday life, we can now relate to it and understand it as common sense, and common sense for common good. It is not anything complicated or anything difficult.

Is it difficult for you to be good to yourself? If you are good to yourself then you are good to everybody. If you do good things to benefit others it is good for you. If you do harmful actions against others it is bad for you. That is a fact. So in order to be good to yourself you have to be good to others, in order to be truthful to yourself you have to be truthful to others, and in order to be kind to yourself you have to be kind to others. You cannot be kind to yourself by being cruel to others and you cannot be honest to yourself by being dishonest to others. So this is very simple common sense. There are so many levels of course. For example, if you are a yogi—a yogi means one who gives up everything and lives under a tree or in a cave or something. There is nothing special about trees or caves, something, but not really that much because you don't have to build a tree or a cave, it is there; it is a simple domain. Anyway, if you are a yogi that means you want to attain more than one percent of liberation and realization in this life. If you want to become a Buddha in this life then you give up everything because you can't become a Buddha in this life if you are doing anything else.

For example, I am a monk. I build monasteries, I support monks and nuns, I teach dharma, here I am talking to you and I am doing all of this. But am I going to be a Buddha in this life? No way. If I improve one percent in this life I will be very happy because then in one hundred lives I am going to be a Buddha, and of those one hundred lives each life will be better by one percent, and I am very happy in this life. Although just like everybody else I have lots of problems and shortcomings, but still I am very happy in this life. So if I can be Buddha in one hundred lives and each life is one percent better than the last, what more can I ask?

This way I am talking about a yogi that by definition means one who wants and wishes to attain Buddhahood in this life. Whether one makes it or not, one is putting effort towards it, so that is a very serious level of practicing dharma in everyday life. But then from there down to my kind of level—I wish to improve by one percent in this life—that is the minimum expectation for me. But then people can also have a lesser expectation, 1/1,000,000 percent. That means in one million lives you will be Buddha, and each life is one millionth better. That's not bad—one million lives and each life one millionth better is not bad.

I sincerely hope that I have covered the subject, practicing dharma in everyday life, in a very simple fashion, and I hope your request for me to talk on this subject is satisfactory. If you have some questions then I am more than happy to answer them.

Questions

Question: Just one hundred years ago there were one and a half billion people on Earth, now in just one hundred years it has quadrupled to six billion, and in a few years it will double. It is crazy, we are destroying it like rats. What can we do with dharma to help? Of course man has

to survive but we have to control what we do.

Rinpoche: I would first like to make a simple suggestion. There should be monasteries and nunneries with millions of monks and nuns. That is wishful thinking.

But I really don't worry very much because if everybody really lived according to the profound dharma instead of the worldly dharma then it would change, because you will know what is right and what is wrong and you will not do the wrong thing. Precious things are very few but not so precious things are many. Isn't that so? For example, diamonds are rare but rocks are plentiful. So if we do our best to live a meaningful positive and compassionate life, I'm not talking about you and me but the entire humanity, then there wouldn't be this problem. It is a sign of some kind of degeneration, things are out of balance. When things are in good balance, if everybody is honest and kind to each other, if everybody thought about others—not necessarily more than themselves, but in a similar way that they think about themselves—then all these problems would be taken care of. I'm not saying the population will drop but there will be something positive happen and there wouldn't be this problem.

But of course overpopulation or under population, this world has so many problems. For example, epidemics; there are so many epidemics that we know of and others that I don't think we know about, and they can wipe out the human race by half instead of overpopulation. This way these things are the karmic results of everybody. In one hundred years the population has gone from one billion to six billion, the same thing can happen in reverse in twenty years or in just a couple of days. If a huge meteorite hit us maybe there would only be ten thousand human beings left. So these things are the result of our own and everybody's karma, and we have to do good things and right things for good things and right things to happen. If we do bad things and wrong things and expect good things and right things to happen, they will not happen. If you fill your pot with water it will be filled with water and if you fill your pot with milk it will be filled with milk. But if you fill your pot with water and expect it to be filled with milk, it will never happen. So I understand this concern, it's not only you but with many people, but there are many reasons for this and you have to be omniscient to know. But one very simple reason things are out of balance is because we are doing things out of balance, it means that. We will not be out of balance if we are not out of balance.

Question: Where are all the extra human beings coming from?

Rinpoche: Human beings are one of the six realms, animals are one of the six realms, gods are one of the six realms, asuras are one of the six realms, hells are one of the six realms and hungry ghosts, pretas, are one of the six realms. The human population increasing on Earth does not mean that for every human being who dies there are three human beings born on Earth. Your past life can be from a god, it can be from an animal, it can be from an asura or it

can be from a human. This space is filled with universes; our own universe, our own galaxy has one hundred million solar systems, which are filled with sentient beings. So, many of these sentient beings are born on Earth in this hundred years as human beings, that's what it means. It's very simple; you can come from another universe or another galaxy, like that.

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