

News

November 2020



Geshe Lobsang Dorje is now offering a weekly online teaching on the Three Principal Aspects of the Path

Due to the restrictions in Melbourne the physical centre is still closed.

The complete teaching can be watched and enjoyed on the Tara Institute YouTube channel.

I would like to begin with the traditional Tibetan greeting: 'Tashi Delek'.

As you all know, over the past six months we have not been able to receive teachings from Venerable Geshe Doga or get together to discuss the Dharma. We had hoped that the restriction would be lifted fairly quickly so we have not done anything about commencing our teaching program. However, we now understand that the lockdown will go on for a few more months or even indefinitely, so the Centre has organised this online Dharma discourse, which I have been requested to teach. I am happy to do this as I am sure that it will be of some benefit.

We have not seen each other for several months. I hope you all are well. Geshe Doga is very well and has just finished a meditation retreat. I checked with him and he said this online discourse is a good idea and very beneficial and told me to go ahead. Let me also wish you all Tashi Delek on behalf of Geshe Doga.

Many of you listening to this have been receiving the teachings from our most revered teacher Geshe Doga for over thirty years. So, you

have already gained a good solid understanding and experience of the Dharma through your learning and practice. To those people, I would say there is nothing new to learn from me, but you can consider my discourse as a refresher. I hope new students find this teaching beneficial for their study of the Dharma. With this intention, I have agreed to teach this online discourse that the Centre has organised. I will do my best to make it as clear and precise as possible.

The spread of the coronavirus has been a great global disaster, causing immense health and financial crises for so many people. I have not heard of any cases of such severe hardship in Tara Institute or among the many people associated with it, which is very good. I hope and believe that in these difficult times, those of you who have learnt the Dharma will find your knowledge very effective and useful in coping with these challenging times.

The very first teaching that the Lord Buddha gave was on the four noble truths. If we apply the logic of the four noble truths, we will find the problems we face because of the

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pandemic are nothing to worry about. The Buddha first said, 'know the truth of suffering.' So, we must recognise suffering to free ourselves from it. Next, to investigate the cause of the suffering, the Buddha taught the truth of the cause of suffering. Then, to find out whether the cause can be abandoned or not, there is the teaching on the truth of cessation, and to know how to achieve the cessation of suffering there is the teaching on the truth of the path of cessation.

Likewise, as in the order of the four noble truths, first, we need to identify the diseases and illnesses that bring suffering to ourselves and others. Then we need to understand the causes and investigate whether they be eliminated or not. In the case of the coronavirus, we know that it is transmitted from person to person so if we are not careful, we can be infected by others. If the virus can be eliminated, then we need to know how to eliminate it. As to the virus, we need to apply all the precautions such as washing our hands, wearing a mask and so on.

We can apply this teaching to all other unwanted situations. We should also apply Shantideva's advice, 'why be unhappy about something if you can change it? And if you can't change it, how will being unhappy help?' Accordingly, we need to ask ourselves whether we can change the situation we face in these challenging times. If we can then why should we worry about it for it can be changed; if we can't change it, why should we worry about that because there is no point or benefit in worrying about it.

Another problem that a lot of people find very difficult at this time is social isolation. Due to the pandemic, people have been stuck in their houses for months and months and this is taking a toll on their mental and emotional wellbeing. Many people are suffering from depression and restlessness because of the long isolation. This, I think, is mainly related to their mental perspective. Their solution is to change their thinking. They need to understand that, under the current situation, if they go out instead of staying home there is a great risk of catching the virus. If you catch the virus, you will have to go through a painful experience as well as causing unhappiness for all your loved ones.

You should also acknowledge the fact that while you are stuck at home, at least you don't have the problem of running out of food and drink. That would be serious, and in fact, there are a lot of people in other parts of the world who are facing such difficulties.

Maybe you should also consider how we normally live a very busy life. During normal weekdays you must go to work, parents must go to work and children must go to school. Sometimes we must even work at the weekend or attend to other things, which leaves very little time for ourselves and our family. However, now, we all have spare time and we all are together at the same place, in the same house. Although nobody wants this virus, we should see that it has given us a rare opportunity to spend quality time with family and loved ones. In this way, we can overcome and reduce mental and emotional suffering by orienting our mind to the correct way of thinking.

I will leave the informal talk here and now begin the teaching on *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path* by the great Je Tsongkhapa.

(You can find the teachings on the Tara Institute YouTube channel)



Q and A

with Geshe Doga

Q I was wondering if death is experienced in a gradual process or if it would be like falling asleep and suddenly waking up in another existence?

A There is a detailed description in the scriptures of how a natural death process is a gradual process. At death what is happening is that the elements within our body are beginning to withdraw. The earth, water, wind and fire elements dissolve. What happens is that the potency of each of the elements in our body begins to decrease and that this is a gradual process as all our senses completely withdraw, and then we experience the actual death. That is a gradual death process. However if it is a sudden death, such as an accident or someone is shot or even someone is very, very sick, it is said it is hard to recognize these processes. In the case of a sudden death the individual might not experience the gradual sequence of the death process. It is as if some sort of darkness occurs and then awakening in another existence. Of course what we call death in the normal western convention is the point when the breath stops. That is what I understand. However according to the Buddhist scriptures when the breath stops that is just an external sign of the wind element being withdrawn but not necessarily the actual death taking place. Thus there are great descriptions in the teachings that there is still a subtle consciousness within the body that can still remain. This is not something however, that would be obvious to outsiders. Now it seems that a lot of scientists, neurologists, psychologists and so forth are beginning to question whether there is something beyond our physical body - something we call a subtle mind.

Q Does everyone wake up in the same type of existence or are there different existences?

A Of course there can be no straightforward answer to that question because it depends on your beliefs. There are some who believe that there are two kinds of existences: an existence that is favourable and pleasant and is called heaven in some traditions and an unpleasant that is called hell. According to Buddhist beliefs, where in reincarnation, there are more

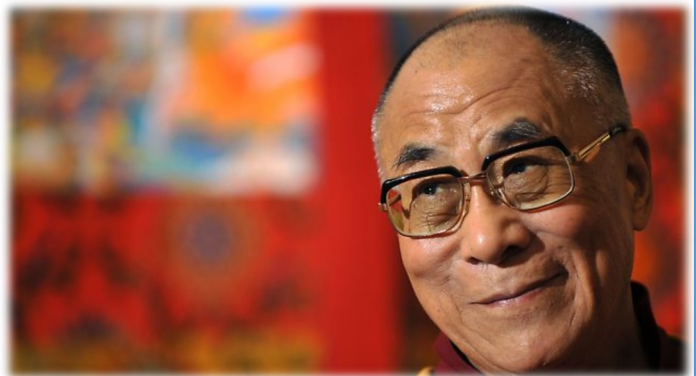
existences than just those two. There are quite a few different existences. However, what is common is that one might wake up, as you put it, to either a pleasant or an unpleasant existence. Where we are reborn, or what level of existence, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant depends on one's karma, as explained in the Buddhist tradition. If one has created positive karma it will naturally contribute to a more pleasurable existence. If one has created more negative karma in one's life then that will contribute to one waking up in an unpleasant experience. That is what will determine where we wake up or are reborn. Thus it is explained for as long as we are under the control of our karma, we ourselves don't have immediate control of where we are reborn. It is our karma that decides. Leaving aside what happens after death, one also doesn't have much control even during one's life. In my case, I never had the intention to come to a place like Australia. It was never on my list, however

I believe that it is karma that has brought me to Australia. We may have noticed that there will be times when we have dreams or plans for ourselves but somehow we end up somewhere else. We don't have much control over that. So even in one's life experience there seems to be some sort of force, which we call karma, that determines our direction. We may have certain preferences or choices but other conditions just present themselves. Sometime they may be good conditions and things work out quite well even though we didn't plan it. But on certain occasions things don't work out well and of course it was not in one's plan to face difficulties and problems. One had a plan for things to go well but beyond our control things did not work out well. One may face lots of difficulties and problems - they just seem to present themselves.

Excerpt from Oct 26, 2011 teaching

A sense of responsibility is born from compassion

In Tibet we say that many illnesses can be cured exclusively by the remedy of love and compassion. These qualities are the ultimate source of happiness, and we need them in our innermost being. Unfortunately, love and compassion have been excluded from too many areas of social interaction, for too long a time. Confined to the private sphere of the family, their public expression is deemed embarrassing or even naïve. This is tragic, for in my opinion the expression of compassion far from being a mark of idealism cut off from reality, is the most effective way to serve the interest of others as well as our own. A mind dedicated to compassion is like an overflowing reservoir: it is a constant source of energy, determination, and goodness. You could compare compassion to a seed. If you cultivate it, it makes an abundance of other excellent qualities blossom, such as forgiveness, tolerance, inner strength and confidence, allowing us to conquer fear and anxiety. The compassionate mind is like an elixir: it has the strength to turn adverse situations into beneficial circumstances. Therefore, we shouldn't limit our expression of love and compassion just to our family and friends. Nor is compassion the sole responsibility of the clergy and health care and social workers. It necessarily concerns all domains of the human community. When a conflict



arises in the field of politics, business, or religion, the altruistic approach is often the only possible solution. Sometimes the arguments used as means of reconciliation are themselves the cause of the problem. In such a case, when a solution seems impossible, both parties should remember the basic human nature they have in common. That will help them find a way out of the impasse, and in the long run everyone can reach his goal more easily. It is very likely that no one will be completely satisfied, but if both sides make concessions, at least the danger of the conflict degenerating will be defused. We all know that such compromises are the best way to solve problems. So why don't we use them more often?

Excerpt from His Holiness The Dalai Lama, "My Spiritual Autobiography"

There is a saying in Tibetan, 'Tragedy should be utilized as a source of strength. No matter what sort of difficulties, how painful the experience is, if we lose our hope, that's a real disaster.'

'When we meet real tragedy in life, we can react in two ways—either by losing hope and falling into self-destructive habits, or by using the challenge to find our inner strength.'

'IF YOU CAN CULTIVATE THE RIGHT ATTITUDE, YOUR ENEMIES ARE YOUR BEST SPIRITUAL TEACHERS BECAUSE THEIR PRESENCE PROVIDES YOU WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENHANCE AND DEVELOP PATIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING.'

'A truly compassionate attitude toward others does not change even if they behave negatively or hurt you.'

Life in Lockdown



with **Steph
McGrane**

When I think about the question of how my practice has sustained me during the Covid lockdown, the main overarching practice that springs to mind can be summed up in the word...

“GRATITUDE”

I've been grateful for the following things, in no special order:

Gratitude that I'm a resident at TI with a community of good people who have shown responsibility for their health and the health of our community. If I sit out in the courtyard there is often an opportunity for a wave or a

brief chat with others which alleviates any sense of isolation. It's felt like a very protected space to take refuge in over the past 6 months.

Gratitude for Landcox park and nature. I appreciate nature and trees more than ever after the countless walks I've taken since March. It makes me committed to become more of a climate activist in whatever small way I can in the future.

Gratitude for Lama Zopa's online Kopan teachings which brings home to me the pith instructions of the Buddha. I highly recommend you check them out if you haven't already done so.

Gratitude for all the past retreats and teachings I've attended over the past few decades, as well as the many dharma books I've read which have given me inner guidance when my negative emotions and frustrations arise uninvited. Particularly I'm grateful for the practice of mindfulness, tonglen and yoga when these negative emotions have the potential to overwhelm me.

And I'm **grateful** to live in a country that values health over economics, and where people seem to care about each other.

Nicole

quiet achiever

I first started coming to Tara Institute sometime around 1998. I enjoy karma yoga and over time have been involved in lots of different things to support our centre and Dharma teachings in general.

My main role at TI has been in the background for the last 20 years, offering personal service to Geshe Doga. What that looks like is both guided by Geshela and subject to my limitations (and now the pandemic.) In usual times, it might include driving, visiting, shopping, correspondence, admin, exercise, or health and wellbeing.



Being close to Geshela for so long has taught me deeply about interdependence and loving kindness, as well as the importance of being consistent.

I'm very conscious that the service I offer to Geshela happens both in a continuum and as part of a much greater mosaic. This means that many others over time have and continue to offer direct service.

The way I see volunteering at TI is that all expressions of karma yoga for the centre are a form of service to our teacher, each other and also to those in the wider community who are seeking solace in difficult times. Whatever we are able to offer is enormously beneficial because it keeps our centre strong and harmonious, supporting the vast vision of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa. In this way, our service becomes part of the living mandala of our teachers.

'Silence is sometimes the best answer.'

**'World peace must develop from inner peace.
Peace is not just the mere absence of violence.
Peace is, I think, the manifestation of human compassion.'**

Auspicious days in November are calculated according to the lunar calendar. On these days, the benefits of actions are greatly multiplied, so are especially good for spiritual practice.

Tuesday 10	Tibetan 25	Tsog Day	Guru Puja
Sunday 16	Tibetan 30	New Moon	Precepts
Sunday 22	Tibetan 8	Tara Day	Tara Puja
Tuesday 24	Tibetan 10	Tsog Day	Guru Puja
Monday 30	Tibetan 15	Full Moon	Precepts