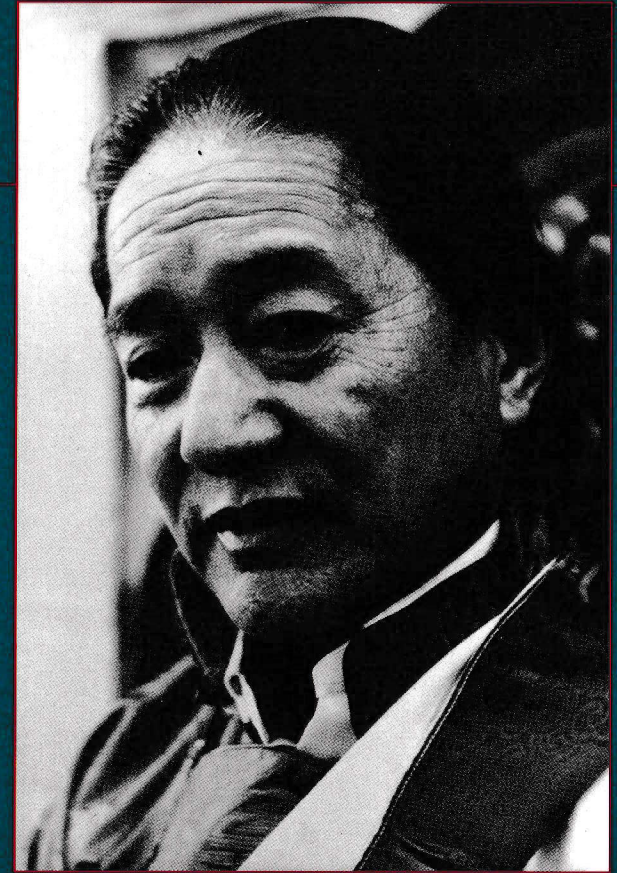


A TORCH
LIGHTING *the* WAY to FREEDOM



Complete Instructions on the Preliminary Practices

Dudjom Rinpoche, Jigdrel Yeshe Dorje

TRANSLATED BY THE PADMAKARA TRANSLATION GROUP

*Reflecting on the Difficulty of Finding
the Freedoms and Advantages*

THIS CHAPTER HAS FOUR SECTIONS: IDENTIFYING THE freedoms and advantages, the reason they are so difficult to obtain, the importance of finding them, and reflecting on the need to make full use of them.

I. IDENTIFYING THE FREEDOMS AND ADVANTAGES

The precious human body is the indispensable support for accomplishing enlightenment, and it has to have the following perfect features: the essence of the support, namely freedom, which is the opposite of the eight states of lack of opportunity; and its particular features, namely the five individual advantages, which are like ornaments, and the five circumstantial advantages which, as it were, illuminate and enhance those ornaments.

THE EIGHT STATES OF LACK OF
OPPORTUNITY

These are listed in the *Great Commentary on the Transcendent Wisdom in Eight Thousand Verses*:

The hells, hungry spirits, animals,
Barbarians, long-lived gods,
Wrong views, the absence of a Buddha,
And being dumb—these are the eight states that lack opportunity.

Those who are born in the three lower realms suffer too intensely and have too poor a physical support to have the opportunity to practice the

Dharma. The gods in the world of desire are distracted by their attachment to the pleasures of the senses and have little disillusionment, while the gods in the world of form and in the formless world are mostly perpetually high on concentration, so they too have no opportunity to practice the Dharma. There are also those who are born in worlds devoid of a Buddha, that is, in places to which no Buddha has come; those who, even though born in a world to which a Buddha has come, are barbarians in border regions where the Dharma has not spread; those who, even if born in a place to which the Dharma has spread, have wrong views and do not believe in past and future lives, in the fact that actions lead to results, or in the Three Jewels; and those who are born completely dumb* and are not intelligent enough to be able to undertake what is right and reject what is wrong.

These, then, are the eight states of lack of opportunity. Of them, the three lower realms and long-lived gods are nonhuman states, and the other four are human states in which there is no opportunity to practice the Dharma. To be free of these eight states of no opportunity constitutes freedom, as shown in the *Sutra of Precious Space*:

The Bodhisattva Akashagarbha asked: "Bhagavan, how should one view the freedoms and advantages?"

He answered: "When mind is buffeted by thoughts and thus distracted, this is 'having no leisure.' When the thoughts in the mind are stilled and it is at ease, this is 'freedom.'"

In the *Condensed Transcendent Wisdom* we read:

By eliminating the eight states of no opportunity one will always find freedom.

THE TEN ADVANTAGES

The Five Individual Advantages

To be born a human, in a central land, with all one's faculties complete,
Without a conflicting lifestyle, and with faith in the Dharma,

*"Dumb" here refers both to mental dullness and the inability to speak.

in other words,

- † in general, to have obtained a human body; and in particular:
- † to have been born in a central land in which the Dharma is propagated;
- † with all one's faculties—the five sense doors and so forth—complete, so that one is fit to understand what to adopt and what to avoid;
- † without a conflicting lifestyle, in which one would commit, for example, crimes with immediate retribution;* and
- † with faith in the Buddha, the source of everything that is virtuous, and in his excellent words, the sublime Dharma.

Since these five have come together in oneself and are favorable conditions for accomplishing the Dharma, they are referred to as individual advantages. To be free of the eight states of no opportunity and to have the five individual advantages is crucially important.

The Five Circumstantial Advantages

A Buddha has come, he taught the Dharma,
His doctrine has endured, it has a following,
And they are kind-hearted and altruistic.

In other words,

- † even though the coming of a Buddha in the world is even rarer than the flower of the *udumbara*, a Buddha has appeared in the world at this time;
- † he taught the sacred Dharma, the way to liberation;
- † his teachings have not disappeared but still endure;
- † there are also individuals who follow and practice those teachings;
- † they are able, moreover, to compassionately guide other beings.

Since these five are comprised in other streams of being and are favorable conditions for accomplishing the Dharma, they are referred to as circumstantial advantages. In the sutra we read:

"Advantage" is to know the nature of the mind, one's mind being thus endowed with the authentic truth.

*See "The Five Crimes with Immediate Retribution," page 123.

A human body like this, complete with the eighteen freedoms and advantages, is difficult to find: to obtain it is even more amazing than a blind pauper's finding the greatest of precious gems. For this reason, having obtained a precious human body after going round and round in the six realms of existence, you should be immensely joyful and make every effort to practice the sublime Dharma. A sutra that teaches the freedoms and advantages says:

Just as it is for a blind man to find a precious gem at a crossroads, so it is for beings wandering in cyclic existence and blinded by the cataract of ignorance to find a human birth—a source of tremendous joy. Strive constantly, therefore, to accomplish the excellent Dharma.

And the Great Omniscient One says:

Friends, to find the gemlike essence, the body with the freedoms and advantages,
From among the six classes of beings is extremely hard.
Like a blind man finding a treasure of jewels,
Rejoice and accomplish benefit and happiness.

II. THE WAY IN WHICH THE FREEDOMS AND ADVANTAGES ARE SO DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN

There are three parts: the difficulty of finding the freedoms and advantages in terms of their cause, the difficulty of finding them in terms of a simile, and the difficulty of finding them in numerical terms.

A. The difficulty of finding the freedoms and advantages in terms of their cause

Of all the sentient beings there are, in general few enough are humans, and this is particularly so in our world, the Land of the Jambu Tree.* More especially, those who have a human body and are spiritually inclined are so few as to be next to none. The reason for this is that those who commit negative actions, the cause of the lower realms, are very numerous,

*Tib. *dzam bu gling*, Skt. *Jambudvīpa*. See glossary, *Jambudvīpa*.

indeed infinite in number, while those who perform positive actions are extremely few. Rarer still are those who have observed sufficient discipline to act as the propelling cause for a faultless human body. This is why it is so difficult to find a human body, as the *Introduction to the Middle Way* affirms:

And high rebirth derives from discipline alone.²⁴

When one has the cause for higher rebirth, which is discipline and nothing else, and it is accompanied by an infinitely vast store of positive actions, and these are linked by pure prayers of aspiration, one will obtain the freedoms and advantages. But to accumulate so much merit is rare.²⁵ As Shantideva says,

And yet the way I act is such
That I shall not regain a human life!
And losing this, my precious human form,
My evils will be many, virtues none.

Here is now my chance for wholesome deeds,
But if I fail to practice virtue,
What will be my lot, what shall I do,
Bewildered by the sorrows of the lower realms?²⁶

B. The difficulty of finding the freedoms and advantages in terms of a simile

How difficult it is to find this human body with the freedoms and advantages is shown by the following simile, stated by the Protector Nagarjuna:

Harder, harder still than that a turtle chance upon
The opening in a yoke adrift upon the great wide sea
Is rebirth as a human after rebirth as a beast;
So heed the sacred Dharma, King, and make your life bear fruit.²⁷

and in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*:

This is why Lord Buddha has declared
That like a turtle that perchance can place
Its head within a yoke adrift upon the mighty sea,
This human birth is difficult to find!²⁸

A. Reflecting on how the freedoms and advantages constitute the support for accomplishing benefit and happiness

If you are wondering what is the point in obtaining this human body that is so hard to find, the benefits of doing so are enormous. Not only is one easily able, temporarily, to accomplish all the happiness and perfections of the higher realms, but one can also accomplish the nirvana of the lower vehicles and unsurpassable enlightenment as well. Without obtaining a human body, there is no way one can achieve any kind of happiness in cyclic existence, let alone accomplish liberation. But by starting from the most insignificant positive actions and devoting one's efforts exclusively to the sublime Dharma, one obtains the manifold perfect qualities of higher rebirth and ultimate excellence. As it says in the *Jewel Garland*,

If you constantly practice the Dharma,
 You will make the whole world
 And yourself happy,
 And this will be all to the good.
 With the Dharma you will always fall asleep happy
 And wake up happy.
 Inwardly you will be without fault, and so
 Even in your dreams you will see virtue.
 By wholeheartedly respecting your parents,
 Venerating the head of the lineage,
 Putting your wealth to good use, being patient, giving generously,
 Speaking gently, avoiding slander, and telling the truth—
 Observing these for one lifetime,
 You will reach the level of Indra
 And be Indra again and again.
 Bit by bit you will accomplish Buddhahood.

And in the *Sutra of the Arborescent Array* we read:

Child of good family, whoever has the freedoms and advantages, on him will also fall the great and abundant rain of the Buddha's teaching, and he will acquire infinite other benefits.

B. Reflecting on the superhuman qualities one will obtain

When the Buddha Shakyamuni attained the great enlightenment, the support he had was as the Lord of Mankind in our world of Jambudvīpa,

the excellent support of a body with the freedoms and advantages, and it was therefore called "better than the gods." The *Sutra of Manifest Enlightenment* explains:

He did not attain enlightenment in the realms of the gods because gods are proud of their abode and therefore do not clearly realize the truth. Having seen that only the human state has the perfect qualities of the freedoms and advantages, he departed for Kapilavastu.*

It has been taught that the ultimate goal of the Secret Mantra Vehicle³¹ too is swiftly accomplished through a human support, as we find in a tantra:

Humans who are diligent
 In this marvelous kinglike Secret Mantra Vehicle
 Will attain its accomplishment in this very life,
 Not to mention the other powers achieved through the practice.

C. Reflecting on how much one stands to gain or lose

By relying on the boat of the freedoms and advantages, now that one has it, one will cross the ocean of suffering that is cyclic existence. If one is extremely clever and expert in the means for extracting its essence—this jewel desired for the long term³²—this hard-won gain will be of immense benefit, far more than when a pauper finds a wish-fulfilling jewel. If one fails to make proper use of it,³³ one's loss will be much more disastrous than if one were to return from an island of jewels empty-handed. As Chandragomin says:

Having obtained it, one reaches the end of the ocean of birth.
 Since it helps plant the seed of supreme enlightenment, virtue,
 It is far superior in qualities to a wish-fulfilling gem.
 Who, having won the human state, would let it not bear fruit?

And in *The Way of the Bodhisattva* we find:

Take advantage of this human boat.
 Free yourself from sorrow's mighty stream!
 This vessel will be later hard to find.
 The time that you have now, you fool, is not for sleep!³⁴

* Kapilavastu was the capital city of the Shakya kingdom in which the future Buddha's parents had their palace.

So reflect on this, thinking, “What a joy it is that I have now obtained a precious human body, that I am following a sublime teacher and practicing the profound instructions. I must do my best to make full use of it.”

IV. REFLECTING ON THE NEED TO MAKE FULL USE OF THE FREEDOMS AND ADVANTAGES

There are three parts: reflecting on the need to be diligent in the Dharma by all means, reflecting on the need to guard the mind, which is the root of the Dharma, and reflecting on the good qualities of the precious human body.

A. Reflecting on the need to be diligent in the Dharma by all means

Now that all the ideal conditions coincide—you have found the freedoms and advantages that are so difficult to find and so important once found, you are not afflicted by problems of health and the like, you are not subject to others’ authority, and you have your own independence—it is important to be diligent in the methods for making full use of the freedoms and advantages. Not to make the effort would be even more foolish than a navigator going all the way to an island of precious jewels and then returning empty-handed, as the *White Lotus Sutra of Compassion* points out:

To win perfect freedom, rid of the eight states of no opportunity, is nigh impossible. Take heed, therefore, and be diligent in practicing well, lest you regret it later.

And in *The Way of the Bodhisattva* we read:

Thus, having found this moment of reprieve,
If I now fail to train myself in virtue,
What greater folly could there ever be?
How more could I betray myself?³⁵

B. Reflecting on the need to guard the mind, which is the root of the Dharma

The whole of the Dharma depends on the mind, and the mind is dependent on the precious human body. This is an interdependent relationship

of support and what is supported: the mind is the root of Dharma, and the freedoms and advantages are the support or accessory for this. For this reason one need train only in taming the mind, as Nagarjuna advises:

The vital point is tame your mind, for mind’s
The root of Dharma, so the Buddha said.³⁶

And the Great Omniscient One says:

The Dharma depends on the mind,
And that depends on the freedoms and advantages,
interdependently.

Now that the many causes and conditions have come together,
Tame your mind—that’s the main point of Dharma.

The sufferings of fear and poverty that occur throughout this life and will occur in subsequent lives are the negative consequences of using your precious human body to indulge in pointless distractions, while all the happiness and good qualities of higher rebirth and ultimate excellence come solely from not wasting the freedoms and advantages. As we read in the *Sutra of the Arborescent Array*:

Child of noble family, it has never occurred to those who wander in cyclic existence that their body ornamented with the freedoms and advantages is so difficult to find; because of their evil friends,* they continue to circle in cyclic existence and are tormented by the fire of suffering. But I, by reflecting on this supreme freedom,† have been completely liberated from existence. You too should do likewise.

C. Reflecting on the good qualities of the precious human body

By listening, reflecting, and following the practice—these constituting the excellent door of the sublime Dharma—one tames one’s mindstream, encourages others to do positive actions, and dons the great armor of liberation. To do so is what we call the “great victory banner of the Sage.”³⁷ The victory banner of the Sage does not refer simply to one’s style of dress

*Tib. *mi dge ba'i bshes gnyen*, the opposite of *dge ba'i bshes gnyen*, or spiritual friends.

†I.e., a precious human body.

In future you will be powerless to enjoy your wealth and possessions, so if, now that you are free to do so, you yourself give them away to create merit, you will benefit greatly. Even if you complete things according to the usual custom, leaving your possessions to others in your will when you die, there will be a little benefit. But other people's disagreements, as you lie there on your deathbed, over how your possessions are to be shared out will become a source of negative consequences for you. For this reason, those who have given up worldly life⁴⁵ and aspire to the Dharma should begin their practice by learning to have few desires. The masters of the past, who were both learned and accomplished, have said:

With few desires, one joins the family of sublime beings.
 With no desires at all, one actually is a sublime being.
 Always train, therefore, in having few desires.

Reflect on how, even in this life, happiness in the earlier part of one's life changes to suffering in the latter part. Recognize that it is in the nature of things that fortunes decline, youth does not last forever, friends and relations separate, and that there is nothing one can rely on. In doing so, you should develop a feeling of total disenchantment related to the impermanent nature of things. As we read in the *Sutra of Extensive Play*,

Men should know that the pleasures of the senses
 Are like the reflection of the moon in water,
 Like images in a mirror, echoes off a cliff, and optical illusions,
 Like the spectacle of a dance, and like dreams.

And the *Nirvana Sutra* says:

Where things flourish, they will decline,
 Where there is gathering, there will be parting.
 Even youth is not eternal:
 Lovely complexions are robbed by disease.
 There is nothing at all that lasts forever.

II. REFLECTING ON THE UNCERTAINTY OF WHEN ONE WILL DIE

There are three parts: since one's life span is uncertain, there is no certainty when one will die; since the causes of death are many and the causes

for living are few, there is no certainty when one will die; and since this body too is so frail, there is no certainty when one will die.

A. Since one's life span is uncertain, there is no certainty when one will die

You might think: "Of course I will die in the end, but I won't die for a while yet. What's all the hurry?" But the length of time beings live, apart from those in Uttarakuru,* is generally quite uncertain, and this is especially true in our world, where beings' life spans are extremely unpredictable. In the beginning,† their lives could last an infinite number of years; in the end it will be no longer than ten years. At present, whether one is young, old, or middle-aged, one cannot be sure when one will die. As the *Treasury of Abhidharma* puts it,

Here it is unpredictable: at the end
 Ten years, in the beginning immeasurable.

And the *Intentionally Spoken Chapters* has this to say:

From that very night
 When a person first enters the womb,
 His life is running out, it cannot be topped up;
 And there is no going back on what is past.
 In the morning, one sees many people;
 In the evening, some are no longer to be seen.
 In the evening, one sees many people;
 In the morning, some are no longer to be seen.
 Many men and women are there
 Who will die even in the prime of life,
 And one will say "They were so young!"
 But what guarantee is that for staying alive?
 Some will die inside the womb,
 Others while they are being born,
 Some just when they have begun to crawl,
 Some when they can get up and run,

* Uttarakuru, the northern continent in the Buddhist universe, where beings have definite life spans.

† I.e., at the beginning of the present kalpa.

Some when old, and some when young,
 Some are people in the prime of youth;
 One by one they will depart
 Like ripe fruit dropping from a tree.

As a result of the good deeds you performed in the past, you might live until you are sixty or seventy. But even so, it is impossible to calculate, starting from today and based on how many years have passed, how many more years you have to come. You might not even reach more than thirty or forty. These days, life expectancy has fallen under thirty years and is closer to twenty, so even if we have the time for our life to run its full course, it cannot last longer than that. At the end of a day we have breathed in and out 21,000 times. Thirty days make a month, twelve months make a year, and twelve years are termed a cycle;* and when, at the end of three cycles, it is time for us to die, it will seem as if no more than an hour has passed since we were born. Wherever we are, we see or hear of people dying suddenly. If we think about it, we are no different from them. We do not know which will come first, tomorrow or our next life, so it is important to completely cut the ties of involvement in the activities of this life. As we read in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*,

“Today, at least, I shall not die.”
 So rash to lull myself with words like these!⁴⁶

And the Great Omniscient One says:

This life is impermanent like an earthenware vase.
 One cannot be sure which will come first:
 Tomorrow or the perceptions of the next world.
 So from today onward, practice the sublime Dharma!

B. Since the causes of death are many and the causes for living are few, there is no certainty when one will die

What with all the external causes that can injure us (human beings, animals, negative forces, and the like) and dangers from the elements (fire, water, precipices, and so forth), along with the internal causes that affect the body (the 404 kinds of illness, for example), there is nothing we can rule out as a cause of death. Even if we rely on such things as food, clothes,

*A twelve-year cycle according to the Tibetan calendar system.

and medicine in the hope that they will not see you yourself, “The evil fact is in the middle of a snail.” Nagarjuna points out,

Many are the things that are
 While few are the things that
 And even they are not
 Therefore, practice!

And Padampa Sanggye

While you’re busy
 catch you
 People of Tingt!

C. Since this body is so fragile, when one will die

The force that keeps us alive
 It is as delicate as a
 candle in the wind: the
 ing alive. Our lives are
 find in the *Jewel Garland*

We live amid the
 Like a lamp set in

And in *Letter to a Friend*

With all its many
 No more than we
 How marvelous it
 To fall asleep and

This quotation gives the
 are and how extremely
 can wake up without it
 interval between breaths
 were carrying a gnat
 ing, from one minute to