

Reflections on this precious human life

Appreciating our great good fortune, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

From the teachings of Gampopa

As we have this opportunity for practice, by Ajahn Pasanno, from *An Experiential Relationship with the Four Noble Truths*

From beginningless time until now

Appreciating this perfect human rebirth, by Nick Ribush

The Essence of Dharma Practice

From Motivation I from *Steps on the Path to Enlightenment, Volume 3*, by Geshe Sopa

The Song of Taking Advantage of the Human Body Which is Difficult to Find, By Karma Chagme

From I live in this world

These fortunate circumstances

From *Recognizing Our Great Good Fortune*, from *Vivid Awareness*, by Thrangu Rinpoche

These Greatly Fortunate Conditions - A Selection from Spiritual Urgency-Samvega in Theravada Buddhism, by Dr. Ari Ubeysekara

Taking advantage of our good fortune here

Islands, and the Bridge

Each moment of this fortunate human life,

and,

Notes from This Perfect Human Rebirth, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Our activities as humans are the pivot, from The Way to Buddhahood, by
the Venerable Yin-Shun

You should develop the habit of creating virtue, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Selected verses by Lama Je Tsong Khapa

From A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, Chapter Seven, On
Enthusiasm

Four poems

Clashing cymbals

Awake

Hey fortunate one! {A song}

Be a light in the gathering light

Consider how precious every aspect of our situation is: we have encountered the Dharma and are able to receive teachings. The opportunities presented by the teacher and the blessings of the lineage are very special. They have not happened accidentally, nor have they come about by themselves. There are many causes and conditions contributing to this unique occasion.

Everything has come together in such a beautiful way. We have many good reasons to feel grateful and appreciative, to fully enjoy the total wealth of our situation and bring blessings to others. This understanding empowers us, inspiring trust and devotion.

- Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

I have obtained a precious human body,
entered the gateway of the precious teachings,

received the precious Dharma,
met a precious, genuine teacher,
and been given precious instructions.

I now have the freedom to practice.
All these auspicious conditions have come together...

- From the teachings of Gampopa

As we have this opportunity for practice, and for coming into contact with the teachings on the Four Noble Truths, the teachings of the Lord Buddha, we can recollect how fortunate we are, and really think about how to use these teachings and the opportunity for practicing the teachings to our best advantage, not letting time just slip past.

Again, I'm thinking of the image the Buddha uses of the blind turtle who pokes his head up once every hundred years, you know, what are the chances of it poking its head through a ring floating ring out on the ocean? It's like this. This taking human birth is not a given - it's not that often that we get the chance to take human birth. It's not that often that there is a Buddha's teaching that we have access to, and are able to hear, and able to practice.

When we reflect on this, we're incredibly fortunate... (laughs) We're turtles who have managed to poke our heads up, finally, and managed to hit the jackpot, and we should use this opportunity well, we should use this opportunity skillfully.

- Ajahn Pasanno, from *An Experiential Relationship with the Four Noble Truths*

From beginningless time until now, all sentient beings and I have been uncontrollably experiencing the many general sufferings of samsara, and especially the sufferings of the three lower realms...

It is difficult to even begin to grasp the depths and extent of our suffering, but this is something we must try to do...

This is a story that is still being written

At this time, I have these greatly fortunate conditions, which are truly difficult to find, and, once found, are so valuable

This is an opportunity to cultivate the path of liberation, for myself and for all others, and I have faith that my teacher, and the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha have the ability to guide us to freedom.

Therefore, I will go for refuge to my teachers and to these Three Jewels, and I will practice and accomplish these most excellent and precious teachings

What I have not yet understood, I will understand

What I have not yet realized, I will realize

What I have not yet healed, I will heal

An Awakened One has appeared in this world.
He has taught the way to freedom,
and generations of his followers to this day have realized his teachings.

Homage!

I take refuge in following the way of the Buddha, the Light of the World,
the True Guide, the Great Compassionate Teacher,

From this point forward,
I will learn, practice, and realize his Sacred Dharma
{and in this way I take refuge in all the Liberating Teachings},

and I take refuge in the Noble Sangha,
the Accomplished Spiritual Community,
the Great Assembly of Saints and Bodhisattvas

Learning the Teachings, meditating,
and carrying the practice into everyday life
gives rise to benefits without limit.

Em Ah Ho!
How wondrous!

May all share in these blessings!

Appreciating this perfect human rebirth

We need to appreciate is how rare and precious this perfect human rebirth that we have gained really is. How it's so difficult to find a human rebirth and amongst human rebirths, how difficult it is to find one that gives us every opportunity to practice Dharma to the full. The teachings on the perfect human rebirth allow us to really appreciate what it is that we have and to rejoice at the precious opportunity we have.

It's as if we've won the greatest of all lotteries, because *this life is worth infinitely more than the collected wealth of this entire universe...*

Now, once we've got to this state of feeling deeply the preciousness of this perfect human rebirth, how wonderful it is, and we generate the determination to make it as useful as possible, to make every moment as useful as possible.

- Nick Ribush

The Essence of Dharma Practice

is to relinquish harmful actions,
and to cultivate positive, beneficial actions

to free our minds from all suffering and its causes forever

and from great love and compassion,
to accomplish each of the stages of liberation
and enlightened understanding and activity,
and to help bring all others to these very same states.

From Motivation I, from Steps on the Path to Enlightenment, Volume 3, The Way of the Bodhisattva, by Geshe Sopa, revised

The kind of existence we have right now is the most excellent and powerful type of life. According to Buddhism, most sentient beings do not have a life like this... But we have a wonderful situation: we have physical and mental abilities, wealth, teachers, teachings, and other environmental conditions conducive for practice.

{let us pause and appreciate this...}

From a spiritual point of view this is the most difficult type of life to attain... Because a human life of leisure and fortune gives us the opportunity to achieve a religious goal, it is not something to waste, or think of casually;

We have everything we need, both external and internal, to make progress in achieving our spiritual goals. Even if we do not achieve our final goal, we can accomplish a great deal in this life.

Often we do not use our time well because we do not appreciate the positive conditions that we have now. This life is like a wish-granting jewel. How should we make use of it? While we can aim to use it to benefit ourselves, we can go beyond that, and aim to use it to benefit all sentient beings.

The Song of Taking Advantage of the Human Body Which is Difficult to Find, By Karma Chagme

Kyemaho!

There are many aeons, but it is rare that the sacred teachings flourish.

There are many realms. but it is rare that a buddha appears.

Although a buddha appears, it is rare that he teaches, and even more rare that the teaching will remain.

Among the six kinds of beings, it is rare to obtain a human form.

Among the four continents. it is rare to be born on the Jambu continent.

Within the Jambu continent, it is rare that the sacred Dharma flourishes.

Although one is born here, it is rare to have all one's senses intact.

Although one may have all one's senses, it is rare to have any thought of the perfect Dharma.

Although one wishes to practice, it is rare to find a qualified teacher.

Even though one may meet a teacher, it is rare to receive instructions on practice.

Even though one may receive them, it is rare to be ripened through the empowerments.

Although these two may come together, it is rare to recognize one's essential nature.

All these rarities you have now obtained.

This is not an easy thing - it is the result of many aspirations from former lives.

So now, turn your back on samsara.

If you are unable to do that, you will certainly be nothing more than someone returning empty-handed from an island of precious jewels.

There is only the slightest possibility that such conditions will come together in the future.

In particular, the Secret Mantra. the unexcelled Vajrayana, Will not be taught by the thousand buddhas beginning with Maitreya, So there is no other hope of receiving it.

You have now obtained this precious human form. which is difficult to find.

If you don't make use of this, it will be abandoned and discarded in no time, Only to be eaten by birds and dogs or cremated by fire.

So, take advantage of this now, otherwise it is worse than pointless.

Purely keep the vows and commitments you have taken.

Keep the one-day precepts on the new moon, full moon and on the eighth day, etc.

To make use of your hands, make one hundred prostrations every day.

To make use of your feet, circumambulate holy objects.

To make use of your tongue, exert yourself in chanting and in recitation of the six syllables.

To make use of your possessions, be diligent in gathering the accumulations.

To make use of your mind, train in wisdom and compassion.

*You should make use of this illusory body which you have temporarily borrowed from the four elements,
And if necessary, be able to sacrifice it.*

*Then, like a traveler who is well-equipped with pack-animals and provisions,
When traveling on, you will have no misery.*

From I live in this world

Every day, all around,
there are people wasting precious time,

not seeing what they have,
not taking advantage of the great opportunities they have
for all of our sake,
while they still can...

These fortunate circumstances
are so difficult to obtain,
and are so easily lost

All our unfinished work will have to be continued
at some time in the future,
and Lord have mercy,
we will surely carry these causes with us,
until they are resolved

But a Supreme Teacher has shown us all the Path to freedom,
and it that has been followed successfully
by our incomparably kind, Noble Spiritual Friends

May I follow the sacred teachings,
and in this very life
May I bring all of my aims,
for myself and all others,
to completion

Recognizing Our Great Good Fortune, from Vivid Awareness, by Thrangu Rinpoche

Sometimes we set the foundation for our Dharma practice by generating weariness with the world...

Sometimes when we practice, we do not worry about developing world-weariness. Instead, we have joy and excitement. We think about how fortunate we are to be able to practice. Now that we have this good fortune, it is important to practice.

These are two different methods of inspiring ourselves to practice, one through world-weariness and the other through joy and excitement. The method we should use now is to generate joy and excitement. This is not merely a question of feeling joy and excitement within our minds. We need to contemplate how extremely fortunate we are to be able to practice the Dharma in this world now...

The different types of wonderful Dharma teachings have all appeared in this world... We have this great fortune...

At present, we have all the favorable conditions we need to practice.

We should remember {and celebrate} this great good fortune.

These Greatly Fortunate Conditions

A Selection from Spiritual Urgency- *Samvega* in Theravada Buddhism

By Dr. Ari Ubeysekara

According to Buddhist teaching, it is extremely rare that one is born as a human being, and it is also rare to be born when a Buddha's teaching is still available in the world.

In the Chiggala sutta of the Samyutta Nikaya, the Buddha gives a simile of a blind turtle who lives on the ocean bed and surfaces once every hundred years. A yoke floats on the vast ocean being blown here and there by the wind. The chances of the turtle surfacing at just the right time and in just the right place to be able to put its head through the yoke must be extremely rare.

It's likewise remarkable and auspicious that one obtains the human state. It is also incredible, wondrous and rare that a Tathagata, worthy and rightly self-awakened, arises in the world; and it is extraordinary that a doctrine and discipline expounded by a Tathagata remains, and is available.

This Treasured moment

As stated by the Buddha in the above discourse using the simile of a blind turtle, it is extremely rare for one to be born as a human being. In the Nakha Sikha sutta of the Samyutta Nikaya, the Buddha picked up some soil with one fingernail and asked the monks what was greater, the soil beneath his nail or all the soil of the great earth.

Using this simile the Buddha then stated that those who will be reborn as human beings are similar to the soil beneath his nail, while the vast majority will be reborn in realms of deprivation. It is like this, he said. *And still rarer is the appearance of a Buddha in the world.*

There have been some eons in the history of the world when there have been no Awakened Ones at all. So, even if one is born as a human being, if it happens during a time period when there is no True Guide, or if His teaching is not available, it would be very difficult to be liberated from the endless cycle of birth and death, and samsaric suffering.

We may even be born as a human being when the Buddha's doctrine is available, but, if we are born in a region of the world, or in conditions where we have no access to the teaching, we would be unable to take advantage of it.

Please keep this in mind.

Verse 182 of the Dhammapada is a timely reminder of the rarity of these conditions coming together: the appearance of a Buddha, and our birth as a human:

*Rare it is to gain birth as a human being
Difficult is life in this world
Hard it is to hear the sublime Truth
Rare is the appearance of an Enlightened One...*

Taking advantage of our good fortune here

If we don't recognize the causes that create positive conditions, we may waste the opportunity we have now to bring about good conditions in the future.

In Buddhism, to illustrate what they call 'the exhaustion of merit', they speak of 'long-lived gods'. These are beings on a higher plane of existence than the human realms. They have much longer lives than people on earth, and their enjoyments are on another level as well. After a long time though, the merit that caused their rebirth in one of these higher realms runs out, and they become aware that they are going to fall from their high status. Their friends and companions leave them, their garlands wilt, and they suffer deep remorse.

One can imagine people here on earth in a similar way wasting their resources just partying, spending their money, and exhausting themselves chasing pleasure. Such a life is little better than that of an animal.

If they had thought through their actions, they could have enjoyed the positive results of their actions and their lives much more, but their time and energy and resources ran out. Friends and companions leave them too, and they become filled with regret and fear for what awaits them.

It's taught that in the human realm, positive karma can also be lessened or wiped out by a person engaging in very negative, harmful actions. This would be like going on a spending spree, or a binge drinking, or destroying one's own home, one that has taken generations to build up.

I think each of our lives can be compared to that of a farmer who grows crops to take to market. With their earnings, if they are wise, a farmer would re-invest in seed and care of the land. This way, they will enjoy the fruit of their labor, and sow the causes for the next cycle of the harvest.

Both they and their families can then be assured of living well for a long time, on account of that foresight.

There are farmers also, I'm sure, who don't handle their lives and season's good fortune nearly as well. These are the ones who take their crops to market, and once having received some payment, forget about next year, and their commitments to anything other than short sighted pleasure.

They may spend carelessly. They could become alcoholics, or another kind of addict; they may gamble their earnings away, and end up with nothing to show for it. Their family and friends may leave them too, and, when they awaken to the facts, and that their fortune has run out, much like the long lived gods, they will also be filled with regret and fear.

Going from happiness to happiness, from joy to joy is possible, but those with positive conditions who don't recognize this are surely headed for a bitter fall.

There are those of us whose lives now are like someone in a paradise; or, we may have gathered the causes recently or over much time to enjoy great wealth and leisure. If we know how to take care of our good fortune, then these kinds of wonderful conditions can continue to support us, and our family for a long time to come.

And what are the causes of healthy, positive conditions? Simply, they are ethics, and generosity. If we enjoy the fruits of generosity, then we should certainly continue being generous, even when we are enjoying this advantage; If we have acquired learning, and health, and want them to continue in the future, then we should take care of these, remembering what produced these results.

People naturally respect and appreciate someone who is honest, gentle, patient, and generous. Because of the subtle interdependence of all that lives, taking care of others is taking care of ourselves.

Thinking of the needs and wishes of others, and responding to them uplifts everyone. This is very much the opposite of ignorance, callous indifference, and indulging ourselves endlessly. It is living an awake and responsible life, as much as we can.

From within the cycle of births in the six realms of samsara, heaven or a pure land can sound like the best we can do, but it's only when we hear of another possibility that the hidden flaws of seeking respite in the upper realms becomes clear.

We may conceive of a paradise or pure land, without any connection to this greater life we all share. What this conception of fulfillment leaves out is our divine status here, which includes our responsibility to one another. It is a small kind of satisfaction that is so often held up as the ideal, but the truth is we are capable of so much more than simply material gains and pleasure.

Ultimately, we are all capable of liberation from dissatisfaction, fear, and the feeling of being incomplete wherever we are. Wherever we are in life, we all have the potential to be kind and helpful to one another, in the most truly meaningful ways. We are all capable of love, with wisdom.

Let us all strive for the peace and wholeness that goes beyond all of the realms of samsara. Let us see every positive condition in its true light. These are the result of many wholesome causes coming together for us, of the labors of our kind family and kin, and the gifts from our teachers and spiritual ancestors, and our own efforts.

Let us appreciate, protect and maintain these precious sources of our benefit; let us help them to continue, for our own sake, for the sake of all our dear family, and all generations.

Islands, and the Bridge

Islands in a raging flood - Ethics, Meditation, and Wisdom

The nature of a raging flood is that it is extremely dangerous. You can see other people losing their lives to it, as well as houses, cars, and buildings being swept away. You can lose your own life to it.

The nature of an island in a raging flood is that it is a temporary place of safety, on the way to the far shore, which is the only real freedom from danger in this situation.

The islands I'm thinking of here, in this case, are a temporary refuge. They were created by causes and conditions, and they can be overrun, such that, where there was an island, or a refuge before, what was gained can be lost again.

This is how it is with ethics and meditation, on the way to complete freedom from suffering. They are so precious for the safety and refuge they provide, but by themselves, they are not enough to keep us from falling back into suffering, perhaps swiftly, and without warning.

If we don't know this, we may tarry, or rest longer than we should with these greatly fortunate conditions. *We should know when our work of finding safety is not yet complete. That can only come about from wisdom, and we should make our way there fully, as quickly as we can.*

Then when it comes to wisdom, we need more than just an intellectual understanding of it, which can be compared to just reading about what freedom or safety are like, or just seeing a map of how to get there.

We even need more than a brief or longer lasting experience, which can be likened to stepping foot on dry land for however long, but not staying

there, and returning yet again to a previous position, either on some temporary safe haven, or again being lost to the terrible currents.

Only full realization keeps a person from ever falling back again into suffering. The call such a person an Arahant, or a Noble One.

May we all attain such a state

And may those who find freedom first, and become established there

help all others without exception to this lasting safety and peace

A bridge across the raging flood of samsara

Sometimes getting free from suffering is described as 'crossing the stream', but this can be gravely misleading. The situation is much worse than such a mild description. It should be clearly understood - samsara is much more like tsunami, or a raging flood of suffering experiences, unpredictable, and terrible.

Even when we rest comfortably for a while, either in ethics, or in meditation, we should not for a moment believe that this alone is our goal. If we fall asleep in that way, we may lose whatever we have gained.

When crossing this flood, as when we reach an island, we go from one place to the next, and from where we were previously, to perfect freedom.

We may think though that once we have practiced ethics, we no longer need it as much; or because we are practicing meditation, we may neglect those very ethics that support this very meditation, and fall again.

Or, we may think that now that we are practicing that part of our journey that has as its focus liberating insight - wisdom itself, we no longer need ethics and meditation, and again we may fall.

An even better analogy for crossing to freedom then would be *a bridge*, that is strong in the beginning, and in the middle, and in the end - all three.

The Dharma is a just such a bridge, to cross the flood of samsara, and it is made of ethics, meditation, and wisdom

On this bridge, the first part, the middle, and the end are equally important, at all times, until we reach our destination, which is emancipation.

We should maintain each of these, until we are fully liberated, and then help others across.

*Each moment of this fortunate human life is
more precious than skies of wish fulfilling
jewels.*

- Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Notes from *This Perfect Human Rebirth*, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

A real cause for excitement and happiness is simply having this human body. If we could truly understand even a tiny part of its value, we would have a million times more reason for jumping in the air and shouting for joy the way soccer fans do.

Every day- every second- we should have a huge feeling of joy in our hearts that we have this precious possession that gives us the opportunity to do whatever we want. With it, we can achieve anything we want, to benefit ourselves and to benefit others.

The Dharma is whatever leads us away from suffering and toward happiness; it is whatever destroys the root of suffering- delusion and karma. It is the path we all must take, whether we consider ourselves Buddhist or not. Only by renouncing the causes of suffering, such as attachment, and developing compassion and a correct understanding of the nature of reality can we truly liberate ourselves. This is the new experience we should strive for...

Right now, with this precious human body, we have the perfect conditions to see beyond this external confusion- we can understand what suffering is and how to overcome it and what true happiness is and how to attain it... We have the Dharma.

{The teachings were given by the Buddha, and they have continued, and were realized and taught through the generations, right up to our own teachers, who have cared for and encouraged us so well...}

Isn't it amazing?

We should appreciate how it is only in this human form- *and only when we have all the unique conditions that we currently have*- that we can go beyond mundane concerns and become truly happy by practicing the Teachings. That is why this time is so precious.

We can choose to study about the cause of happiness; we can choose to learn to use our mind as a tool to create that happiness by learning how to meditate.

We can listen to great teachers and we have the intelligence to understand their message; we have the literacy to read Dharma books {and now audio and video teachings as well}; we have the wisdom to see the truth in them and the intelligence to start to live our life according to the Dharma...

We have the capacity to create the causes for perfect happiness and completely eliminate all the seeds of suffering, and help others to do the same...

{This is liberating, deep Buddhist psychology}

It is also extremely important to clearly see how the mind is beginningless. Then reincarnation becomes a reality to us, and with that comes the understanding of how the imprints of actions we did in previous lives are ripening on our mindstream right now, causing happiness or misery, and how what we are doing now will have consequences not just in this life, but in countless future lives. Seeing this, suddenly our world becomes huge. Everything becomes much more significant.

The key point here is that

It is this perfect human rebirth that allows us to do perfect work for {ourselves and for} all other beings. All we need is the determination.

Our activities as humans are the pivot of ascent and descent

Ascending and descending {through various existences} is primarily due to the good or bad karma done as a human being.

The human ability to practice meditation, with the possible consequence of being born in a heavenly realm, is good karma; Becoming a monastic, keeping the precepts, practicing self cultivation, ending birth and death, becoming a buddha - these are possible only for humans.

With regard to ascent or descent throughout the six realms, good or evil human conduct is the central pivot from which all movements up or down are initiated. Because of this, one should be very careful not to lose the human form...

*One should be happy that one is a human now, because the opportunity to be free from birth and death and to become a buddha has arrived!

* * *

Everyone wants to have happiness - no one wants to fall into evil destinies. Everyone wants to be born as humans, or in a heavenly realm, however, one will not be born human or in a heaven simply as a result of one's wishes. All the joyful rewards are the results of the accumulation of good karma.

Therefore, have right views with firm belief in karmic results, reject suffering and seek happiness, and now matter what the situation is now, cultivate good karma diligently.

- From The Way to Buddhahood, by the Venerable Yin-Shun

You Should Develop the Habit of Creating Virtue, from the teachings of Lama Zopa Rinpoche

We should get the habit of virtue. Here [virtue is] perfectly following the guru, seeing the guru as a buddha with devotion, in the mind, and following the advice, perfectly following it; renunciation, bodhichitta, right view... We should become habituated to these, and the six paramitas, including patience. We should develop the habit of having patience.

Those who practice patience become habituated to it more and more...

There are many things you can get habituated to... {both positive and negative}

*And this is not talking about just this life- it's talking about future lives as well. What we do also affects the future. You have to know that... You have to have that awareness all the time {and be conscientious, and diligent}

Every day, every hour, every minute, every second you can {cultivate the causes to} achieve higher rebirth, in the human or heavenly realms; you can rely on Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and protect karma, renounce nonvirtue, practice virtue, like the five precepts for lay people...

Then with the renunciation of samsara, with that mind you can cultivate the causes to achieve complete freedom from samsara and achieve nirvana. You can do that with the renunciation that arises by seeing there is no lasting happiness in samsara...

Then after that, on the basis of compassion for sentient beings, you can generate bodhichitta, and cultivate the causes to achieve enlightenment, the total cessation of obscurations and the completion of realizations...

Selected verses by Lama Je Tsong Khapa

From The Foundation of All Good Qualities

By understanding that the precious freedom of this rebirth is found only once, is greatly meaningful and difficult to find again, May I generate the mind that unceasingly, day and night, aims to realize its purpose.

This life is as impermanent as a water bubble - how quickly it decays and death comes! And after death, just like a shadow follows the body, the results of black and white karma follow.

Finding firm and definite conviction in this, May I always be careful to abandon even the slightest negativities and to accomplish all virtuous deeds.

Seeking samsaric pleasures is the door to all suffering. They are uncertain and cannot be relied on. Recognizing these shortcomings, May I generate the strong wish for the bliss of liberation.

From The Three Principle Aspects of the Path

3.

Without the definite intention to gain liberation,
there is no way to pacify the attraction to the pleasures of samsara.
By craving, beings are continuously bound.
Therefore, from the very beginning, seek liberation
{the happiness beyond samsara}

4.

Freedom and endowments are hard to find
This life is fleeting, its length is uncertain, and there is no time to waste
Gaining familiarity with this counters the attachment to this life's
pleasures;

And thinking again and again
about the nature of karma,
and about the sufferings of unenlightened existence,
counters the attachment to all future samsaric lives

5.

When, by having trained in that way,
there is no arising, even for a moment,
any attraction to worldly pleasures,
and, day and night, continuously,
the intuitive desire to seek liberation arises,
then you have truly generated the mind of renunciation,
the wish to be free

From Lines of Experience, Verses 10 through 13

10.

This human existence with its freedoms and opportunities
is more precious than a wish-granting jewel.
Obtained just this once, it is difficult to acquire and is easily lost;

Considering how one's own death can happen at any time,
and realizing that all worldly activities are as chaff,
you must try to realize its purpose at all times, day and night.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.
You who also seek liberation,
please cultivate yourself in the same way.

11.

After death,
there is no guarantee that you will not be reborn
in one of the three unfortunate realms,
but it is certain that taking refuge in the Three Jewels,
and practicing according to the teachings
has the power to protect you from them.

For this reason,
your taking of refuge should be extremely solid,
and you should completely follow what this entails,
without ever letting your commitments weaken.

Moreover, understand this:
your success in Taking Refuge
depends on your considering thoroughly

which are the positive or the negative karmic actions
together with their results
and then living according to the guidelines
of what is to be adopted or rejected.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.
You who also seek liberation,
please cultivate yourself in the same way.

12.

*The fullest strides of progress in actualizing the supreme paths
will not come about unless you have attained the working basis
of an ideal human body that is complete with qualities.

Therefore, you must cultivate the virtuous actions
that are the causes of a human birth.

Furthermore,
since it is essential to purify negative karma
and to remove your obstacles,
you should cherish continually devoting yourself
to applying the complete set of four opponent powers
that can accomplish this.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.
You who also seek liberation,
please cultivate yourself in the same way.

13.

If you do not make an effort
to think about the nature of suffering,
you will not develop a keen interest to work for liberation.

If you do not consider its evolution,
you will not know the means
for cutting the root of this vicious circle.

Therefore,
you should cherish the renunciation of samsaric existence,
by knowing which factors bind you to its wheel.

I, the yogi, have practiced just that.
You who also seek liberation,
please cultivate yourself in the same way.

From 'A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life', by Shantideva,
Chapter seven, Enthusiasm, revised

Having patience I should develop enthusiasm,
for Awakening will dwell only in those who exert themselves.
Just as there is no movement without wind,
so merit, positive, creative energy, does not occur without enthusiasm.

What is enthusiasm? It is finding joy in what is wholesome.
Its opposing factors are explained
as laziness, attraction to what is harmful,
and putting oneself down.

Because of attachment to the pleasurable taste of idleness,
because of craving for sleep,
and because of having no disillusion with the miseries of cyclic
existence,
laziness grows very strong.

Enmeshed in the snare of disturbing emotions,
I have entered samsara,
this round of birth and death.
Why am I still not aware that we all live in the mouth of the lord of death?

Do I not see that death is all around? -
Whoever remains soundly asleep
surely behaves like an animal with a butcher.

When there is no escape,
and day and night, death takes first this one, and then that one,
How can I enjoy eating?,
and likewise how can I enjoy sleep?

As long as death is approaching for me,
I will cultivate virtue,
for if I wait until I am dying to put a stop to laziness,
what would be the use of it then?

When this has not been done, when this is being done,
and when this is only half finished,
suddenly the lord of death comes,
and everyday, with alarm, people think, "Oh no, I am done for! "

Their faces flowing with tears,
their eyes red and swollen with sorrow,
relatives finally lose hope,
and they behold the vision of the messengers of death.

If they have done many wrong actions, as death approaches,
they will be tormented by the memory of their evils.
What virtue can be done when in such a delirious state?

If even in this life a person is gripped with fear
how can we even begin to speak of the miseries that will follow for them,
that are the result of unwholesome acts?

How can I remain at ease like this
if have committed actions that result in even more suffering,
and not yet purified and released them?

Much harm befalls those with little forbearance,
and those who want results without making any effort.
When death comes,
they cry out like gods falling from their high state.

Rely upon this human life while you still can,
and free yourself from all suffering!
As it is hard to find a form like this one,
this is no time for sleep, you fool!

Having turned from the joy of the Dhamma,
a boundless source of delight -
why am I distracted by the causes for pain?,
and why do I enjoy what are merely frivolous amusements?

Without indulging in despair over my state,
I should gather the causes for enthusiasm,
and again take control of myself.
Then, by seeing the equality between self and others,
I should practice well.

I should never entertain such thoughts as,
"How shall I ever awaken?"
for the Tathagatas who speak only what is true have said,

"If they develop the strength of their exertion,
even those who are flies, mosquitoes, bees and insects
will win the unsurpassable Awakening
which is so hard to find."

So, if I do not forsake the Bodhisattvas' way of life,
why should someone like myself,
who has been born in the human race,
and met accomplished teachers,
not attain Awakening and liberation,
since I am able to clearly recognize
what is beneficial and what brings harm?

It should be a cause for alarm for me
that I may have to give away my arms and legs many more times,
for lifetimes to come even,
if I am not able to discriminate between what is heavy and what is light,
and if I am reduced to fear through my own confusion;

For over countless aeons
I have gone through so much suffering,
but I have not fully awakened.

Yet the suffering
involved in my awakening will have a limit -
It is like the suffering of having an incision made
in order to remove and destroy greater pain.

Just as doctors eliminate illness
with unpleasant medical treatments,
in order to overcome manifold sufferings
I should be able to put up with some small discomfort.

But be assured, the Supreme Physician does not employ
common medical treatments such as are found here -
instead, with an extremely gentle technique, he teaches,
and inspires us to practice,
and in this way he remedies all the greatest ills.

At the beginning, the Guide of the World encourages
the giving of such things as food.
Later, when accustomed to this,
one may progressively even start to give away one's own body.

At such a time, when my mind is developed
what hardship would there be
when it came to giving away everything?

Having forsaken all evil there would be no suffering for me,
and due to wisdom there would be no lack of joy;

As their bodies are happy due to their merits,
and their minds are happy due to their wisdom,
even if they remained in cyclic existence for the sake
of others,
why would the Compassionate Ones ever be upset? -
and I aim to be one of them.

Due to the strength of his Awakening Mind,
the Bodhisattva consumes his previous evils
and harvests oceans of merit,
hence he is said to excel the solitary realizers.

Having generated an Awakening Mind,
that dispels all discouragement and weariness,
and goes from joy to joy,
who would ever lapse into despondency?

The supports when working for the sake of living beings
are aspiration, steadfastness, joy, and rest.

Aspiration is developed through the powerful determination
to avoid the suffering that could be experienced by oneself, or by others,
and by contemplating the great benefits of such an aspiration.

Thus in order to increase my enthusiasm
I should strive to abandon its opposing forces,
and gather the supporting conditions,
of aspiration, self-confidence, joy, and rest,
practice in earnest, and to become increasingly strong in self-control.

I aim to overcome the boundless faults of myself and others,
and in order to destroy each of these faults,
I may have to strive until an ocean of aeons is exhausted;

but if within myself I do not perceive
even a fraction of the perseverance required to exhaust these faults,
such hope would be baseless.

Likewise I aim to realize many excellent qualities for myself and others,
and in order to attain each of these qualities,
I may have to develop them until an ocean of aeons is exhausted,
but I have yet to produce these excellences to the full!

How strange and unfortunate it would be then to completely squander this
birth!

I have not made sufficient offerings to the Lord Buddhas,
or given the pleasure of great festivals,
or performed enough actions for the teachings;

I have yet not done enough to fulfill the wishes of the poor,
I have not granted fearlessness to the frightened as I would wish,
and I have not so far given every happiness to those who are weak.

Both now and in previous lives
such inability has arisen for me
because I have not had the aspiration to fully realize the Dharma,
and then followed that with really practicing the teachings.

How could I not see this as the most meaningful thing I could do with my
life -
to have the aspiration for right action,
and then to practice, and accomplish its result?

*The Mighty One himself has said
that aspiration is the root of every facet of virtue;
Its root is constant acquaintance
with the ripening-effects of actions.*

Physical pain, mental unhappiness,
all the various kinds of fear,
as well as separation from what is desired -
all these arise from an unwholesome way of life;

By committing evil actions,
although they wish for happiness,
wherever they go they will be overcome
by the suffering that results

However, by engaging in wholesome actions
motivated by positive aspiration in the mind,
wherever a person goes they will receive the fruit of that merit.

As a result of virtue,
they will abide in the presence of the Conquerors.

The choice is up to each individual:
Non-virtue results in suffering,
and right action, in peace.

Therefore I should aspire for virtue,
and, with great respect, acquaint myself with it.

Having undertaken the wholesome,
I should then proceed to acquaint myself with
self-confidence.

First of all, I should examine well what is to be done
to see whether I can pursue it or cannot undertake it.
If I am unable, it is best to leave it for now,
but once I have started I must not withdraw.

If I do, this habit will continue in other lives,
evil and misery will increase,
and other actions at the time of their fruition
will be weak and will not be accomplished.

Self-confidence should be applied to wholesome actions,
to the overcoming of afflictive emotions,
and any doubt about my ability to accomplish this.

Thinking, "*I alone shall do it,*"
is complete self-confidence.

*Powerless, their minds disturbed,
people in this world are unable to benefit themselves
therefore I shall do this for them,
since, unlike me, these beings are incapable.

Even if others are doing inferior tasks now,
Why should I do nothing?

I do not do these tasks out of vanity -
it would be best for me to have no such arrogance.

When crows encounter a dying snake,
they act as though they were eagles.
Likewise, if my self-confidence is weak
I will strut around,
and be hurt by even the slightest insult, or downfall.

How can those who,
because of their faint-heartedness have given up trying,
ever find liberation? - Know this:
*Even the greatest obstacle will not overcome one with self-confidence,
who is going from strength to strength.*

Therefore with a steady mind, I shall overcome all faults,
for if I am defeated by a fault
my wish to vanquish the three realms
will become nothing more than words

*I will conquer everything
and nothing at all shall conquer me!*

I, a son of the Lion-like Conqueror,
Should remain self-confident in this way.

Whoever has petty arrogance is destroyed by it:
He is easily disturbed, and is lacking in self-confidence.

Those with self-confidence do not succumb to the
power of this enemy.

Inflated with pride, a person falls to the lower realms.
It destroys the joyous festival of being human.

Coarse people, puffed up, conceited,
tell me, what could be more pathetic than this?

But whoever seizes self-confidence in order to definitely conquer
the enemy called pride,
he alone emerges the victorious hero,
and becomes a Noble One,
fulfilling the wishes of the world.

If I find myself amidst a crowd of disturbing conceptions
I shall endure them all in a thousand ways,
like a lion among foxes
I will not be affected by any disturbing host.

Just as men will guard their eyes when in great danger,
in the same way, I shall never be swayed by delusion,
even at times of great strife.

It would be better to have my head cut off,
than ever bowing down -
In all situations I will do nothing other than what is fit.

Just like those who yearn for the fruits of play,
a Bodhisattva is attracted to whatever task he may do.
He never has enough, it only brings him joy.

Although people work in order to be happy,
it is uncertain whether or not they will find it;
but how can those whose work itself is joy
ever attain anything other than happiness?

If common people never have enough sensual objects,
that are the cause of so much misery,
then why should any person with clear understanding
ever feel that they have enough merit,
which ripens only in happiness and peace?

Thus, in order to complete this task,
I will venture into it
just as one tormented by the midday sun
plunges into a cool, refreshing lake.

When my strength declines,
I should leave whatever I am doing
in order to be able to continue with it later.
Having done something well, I should put it aside
with the wish to accomplish what will follow.

Just as an old warrior approaches
The swords of an enemy upon the battlefield,
in the same way I will avoid delusion,
and skillfully bind the enemy.

If someone dropped his sword during a battle,
he would immediately pick it up out of fear.
In the same way, if I lose mindfulness
I will quickly retrieve it, to prevent suffering.

Like this,
I will keep unwholesomeness from permeating my mind,
and instead continually cultivate what is positive, and beneficial.

It's said that those who want to practice being aware
of what should be avoided and what should be done,
should be as attentive as a someone carrying a jar full of mustard oil
who is being careful not to spill even one drop.

And just as one would swiftly stand up if a snake came into their lap,
in the very same way, if any sleep or laziness at all occur in me,
I should immediately turn them back.

Each time I do something unwholesome
I should criticize myself,
and then contemplate for a long time
in order to keep it from happening again.

In all situations I will have mindfulness -

With this positive motivation to continue on the Path as a cause
I will wholeheartedly aspire to meet Noble Ones,
and to accomplish their teachings.

In order to have strength for everything,
before undertaking any action
I should clarify my intention, and the way to proceed,
and then joyfully rise to the task.

Just as the wind blowing back and forth
controls the movement of a piece of light cotton,
so shall I be controlled by joy,
and in this way I will accomplish everything.

Clashing Cymbals

Awaken, Compassion!

How is it you are still asleep,
when so many need what you have to give?

Don't you hear those walking through the bitter cold desert,
in search of rest?

There are children who need clean water,
and there are those that are hungry *now*

There are those who need medicine
and can't afford it

There are those who need a friend *now*

Absent joy and hope,
there are so many who mute their senses...

Visit the hospital wards, and the waiting rooms,
the homeless shelters,
and prisons and the half way houses

Listen!

Hear the burning, the hunger,
the desperate cries
of the refugee,
of the addict,
of the friendless,

of those with a parent,
a child,
or a loved one in need

hear the cries of animals,
and of this earth

Hear how it is,
and then awaken with all you've got

You only have a short time on this earth,
and this is the hour to give what you have

See how it is now
and how many men and women carry with them
the cause of their own, and others' harm,
because of their not knowing how to live,
because of their not knowing what will bring peace,
and what misery

Every day here, every hour,
see how it is
how our own family is captive -
their minds are as those having
a nightmare in paradise

Who will help them wake up, if not you,
oh compassion?

Hey you!, Yes you -
Don't say your own ability is too little -
We must all do what we can now
and aim to become more capable
This is the only work of meaning
in a place and time such as this

I call out to you
and I call out to all those who can help -

How can anyone be even the least bit indifferent,
seeing loss,
seeing mothers and fathers separated from their children?

seeing fear and sadness,
hunger,
isolation,
brutality,
degradation,
addictions,
crass commercial distractions,
seeing false idols worshipped

People hunger for meaning,
for connection,
for something more than this

Are these not desperate times for many?

It seems that few hear the cries of others at all,
but *you*, oh compassion,
you are at least partly awake in me now

Rouse yourself fully!
Our family,
our loved ones, and this world
need you!

Awake

Tens of thousands of bright flowers, uplifting to see,
fragrant and delightful

A fresh wind moves through my whole body,
a bracing cold wind
cutting through everything,
invigorating

Crisp, brilliant morning sunlight reaching everywhere,
so clear and joyful

The sound of trumpets and clashing cymbals,

the recollection of my greatly compassionate teachers,

and their powerful exhortations,

hearing the cries of the world

these awaken my own compassion,
my own feeling of responsibility

Knowing the preciousness of this time,
dedicating myself and re-dedicating myself,
renewing my vows,
and practicing

Hey fortunate one! {A song}

Hey fortunate one!

You're alive

You've made it this far - to this day, this hour,
and as long as you are here,
why don't you make the best use of your time?

See how it is just now:

You have this human life,
with your senses intact,
in a place that is relatively at peace -
and long may it be so;

You're not oppressed by any illness,
or overwhelmed by delusions at this time,
no, not today, not this hour,
and long may it be so -

Compared to yourself in the past,
and to so many others in this world right now,
it's amazing, just how fortunate you are!

Think about it...

With these conditions coming together just so,
for this brief time, you have this remarkably precious opportunity -

This very day, this very hour,
you've got the very ground
where all that is excellent can grow,
for yourself, and your loved ones, and community,
and for future generations

Hey!,

and not *only* that,
in this life you have met amazing, noble teachers who were learned,
and who themselves accomplished the teachings...
Now, just think about that!...

How wonderful, and how rare!

and not *only* that,
you've been able to practice and gain some result,
such that your faith is based at least in part on experience,
and that can lead you.

This is something great.

You've heard teachings on benefitting yourself in this lifetime,
and in the future,
on complete liberation from every form of suffering,
and on enlightenment -
now, just think about *that*,

and, you didn't die last night,
with your work for self and others unfinished
That would have been tragic, such a great loss!

And so tell me, fortunate one,
How are you going to live today?

Think about how it is just now, today,
that *so many* in this world don't even have the barest necessities,
of food, shelter, and medicine

and so many have no guide,

and so they are lost and confused,
harming themselves and others, endlessly

In this world, a very few have heard teachings,
on higher rebirth, liberation,
the bodhisattva vow, and wisdom teachings,
and among those, many can't make sense of them -
it's as though those teachings were spoken in a lost language

or else,
they can't convert their understanding into an effective practice
to ease their suffering,
and bring freedom to themselves and their families

What a loss! Truly, what a loss,
to have come just this far, and then to go no further

*So tell me, fortunate one! -
how will you live today, this hour?*

You have methods to accomplish the aims
of yourself and others,
who are all so worthy of your love and care -
All of them!
All of them, I tell you!

Have mercy!
Let your heart be open,
and your mind be clear

Realize this Path,
and share all of this good you have,
with all who are in need,
in whatever form it needs to take for them

Aim to give to others as much as you can,
of light and peace,
health and strength,
and inspiration making the way clear,
for now and for the future...

Be a light in the gathering light

is there no one now
who can use the strength you have to give?
who might walk with us another mile
because of that leftover food on your plate?

you don't need to be a hero
chest puffed
flashing glances
you can be broken yourself
it doesn't matter
a look across the gulf can save them,
and last for decades
that someone met them on time,
this goes on in countless ways

be a light, in the gathering light
be a prayer in the ruins

be the pulse quickening
the warm breath,
be that grace handed off in celebration
in confirmation that we still have
the ground of peace with us

and its not forgotten
no its not forgotten
that all this music is waiting

some simple things, they are not talked about
they go mostly unnoticed
but those gifts we give in secret
they are the lasting power