

On the Benefits of Life-Saving Practice

Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche
From a teaching given March 20, 2016

Rinpoche was very happy both to know that Lama Drimed is leading the life-saving practices every month, as he did this morning, and also that he was going to teach on the benefits of doing those practices. Rinpoche was really glad to hear that these kind of teachings were going to be given. He said:

I hope so—people should know the benefit of that kind of practice. People shouldn't just stand with their mouths open, or come and do some little recitation and throw some fish in the water. They should know really what it means and how it is beneficial.

In general, everybody wants a long life, yes? Of course, everybody wants a long life, nobody wants a short life. We want not just a long life, but a life free of illness, a long life with full possession of our faculties, with a strong and healthy body, and so forth. So, we should know—shouldn't we?—what is going to actually bring us a long life, and what is going to harm our long life or make obstacles for our long life.

I think maybe that would be an important thing for everybody to know. How many lifetimes have we suffered again and again, suffered from having a short life, suffered from being sick, suffered from being crippled, suffered from being blind, suffered in so many ways from all manner of physical and mental afflictions. Like me, look at me! I am this crippled old man. Why am I a cripple? Why does my body not work? Why does my brain not work, even two seconds? Why is it that I am old and sick and nothing functions anymore? It is because of my own negativity. If you have negativity you are going to end up like me too. Ha, ha, ha! Nothing much fun!

It is because we are always up and down, up and down. We are always so wishy-washy. We don't just focus on virtue. Sometimes we like virtue, but mostly we like non-virtue. That is how we end up sick and in pain like this. For me, I am sick and in pain and crippled, and complaining; but I am still alive. And why am I still alive? My life actually is getting to be quite long. I think I am 93 or 94 now, and probably it is because I did a lot of life-saving practice in my early life back home in my country where I grew up, which we didn't even call Tibet, but is east of what they properly call Tibet, in Golok and Kham and in other places. Wherever I went—and I traveled quite a bit, escaping from the Communists, and I traveled some in Asia and all over India—everywhere I went, I always tried to do a little bit of this life-saving practice. That, of course, I am sure has benefitted and extended my life.

I also went to the sacred cave of Maratika, which is a special sacred place of Guru Rinpoche, and a place particularly strong or powerful in longevity blessings. I prayed there with great focus and single-pointedly, and I really think that I received the blessings there from that sacred place through Guru Rinpoche's kindness, which has also has extended my life.

I have done these practices to extend my life, and I have also tried to avoid non-virtue, although I do have a nasty mouth, so maybe I have not been so successful in that. But I have tried, in general, to avoid non-virtue, and I have always tried to contribute to or do life-saving practice whenever I could. I think that these have all been beneficial, that these have all contributed to my longevity. So, if you want to have very long life—and who doesn't?—then I suggest you do this: Take advantage of your opportunities to do long life practice particularly and, in general, to engage in all practices that accumulate merit and purify negativity.

This idea of doing life-saving practice, this wasn't my idea, it wasn't the idea of this funky old man, okay? You don't have to think that is important and powerful and useful for extending life just because I say so. I am not saying that my words are important and that is why you should take it as important. All of the great lineage masters have said this, and they haven't just said it with their mouths. You all tend to say things just with your mouths and then you never put them into practice, which is why nobody can believe you. The lineage masters are not like that. They say things with their mouths, and then they put their money where their mouth is and they put them into practice, and then we can believe them because they actually see results. So all the lineage masters have also used these methods to lengthen their lives. There are so many accounts of how they have done this by doing such long life practices. So you can know from their authority, not mine, that these practices are powerful and effective.

Also when I have been in many different places, I have seen the effects of long life practice with my own eyes. One time when I was staying in Taiwan with this rich guy, the government seized him and put him in jail and there were many liars who were trying to gobble up his money, and take over his land and so forth, and especially one of his trusted lifelong servants turned out to be a spy, and all these terrible things were happening to him. But this man had always contributed to long life practices, and over the course of his life he had sponsored the release of millions and millions of fish, and probably billions of birds, all those lives that he had saved; and not only birds and fish, but also other kinds of animals, lambs and goats and so forth. Eventually his problems were resolved, and he did end up having a long life, and I think that that was primarily through the powerful force of the merit of having always done those practices.

There are many accounts in Tibet also. There is one extremely famous lama there called Mani Lama, who saved billions of animals of every kind, not just fish, but sheep and goats and yaks, so many different kinds of animals! He had a very long life. There are stories of other lamas, too. Another lama called Vajra Guru Lama, if I am remembering correctly, also had a very long life. They were not scholars, they were not rich, they were not considered great lamas in the sense of being of high position or rank, but over the course of their lives through doing this life-saving practice they saved millions and millions of sentient beings, and their own lives were long. All of the lamas say that this practice of saving life is most important, that it is incredibly powerful, that it is very important as a way to bring benefit to others. Of course, directly you are saving those beings, so that is obvious; but it is also very important as a way to bring benefit to yourself. They bring you benefit in an immediate and powerful way, for you will get long life, your mind will be sharp and clear, and your body will be strong and without sickness. The lamas say that of all different ways of accumulating merit, this is the best, this is the most powerful. If you want a long life, then there are many things that you can do, but none more powerful than saving lives and ransoming those to be killed.

Sometimes they make ceremonies and make this big deal, and one way it is a big deal, it is the creation of great merit. Even if you don't make a big ceremony, still you can save beings' lives and say a little mantra, and that also is a great accumulation of merit.

One of the main things that contribute to our short life is having brought harm to others, and particularly having killed others, whether humans or other beings in the past. If you look around the world, the habit and tradition of slaughtering animals is everywhere. You can't point to just one country or just one region of one country, and say, oh, that is where all of the animals are slaughtered. No, no. Animals are slaughtered everywhere in every country. All over eastern Tibet, all over central Tibet; and not just Tibet, all over Nepal, all over India, everywhere, many, many thousands of animals are slaughtered continuously. In some places they are even slaughtered in the names of different kinds of religions, they are sacrificed. In some places they are just slaughtered for food; but whatever the case may be, the taking of animals' lives is a widespread form of non-virtue. If you ask what is this actually creating, what is going to be the result of this widespread slaughtering of animals all over the world? It is going to bring suffering, sickness, and short life in a general way. Everybody wants a long life, but everyone is afraid of creating the virtue that is going to bring them long life. Everybody doesn't want a short life, but they love to create the causes of short life.

The real source and foundation of having a long life is to save somebody else's life, or to help somebody else, or to have compassion and loving-kindness towards others. These are the real things that are going to extend our lives. In general, our habit of negativity

is so strong that we are not really very excited about saving others' lives and bringing others benefit. In general, you would rather run out and kill somebody, especially when you are angry. When you kill something, especially something that is young and strong and healthy, you create this tremendous non-virtue. You are creating quite the opposite of the cause for longevity. You are creating the cause for your own short life.

(to be continued...)