

How to Free Ourselves from the Eight Worldly Affairs by His Eminence Nubpa Rinpoche

In distinguishing between evil and virtue, the Buddha has taught us: “Shun all evils, accumulate all virtues, and purify one’s mind—this is the teaching of all the Buddhas.” It means that when it comes to a virtuous act, we do it vigorously; whereas an evil act, we have to try our best to abandon it. But how can we determine whether it is virtuous or evil? What is the basis for that? It is fundamentally determined by our state of mind at the time.

Regarding this, Lord Jigten Sumgön illustrated with a parable: “If a tree is medicinal, starting from its roots, it is medicine. As its roots are medicine, its stem is also medicine and so are the leaves. Through the growing process of roots, stem and leaves, they are all medicine that can cure diseases. If the tree is poisonous, it is poison already from its roots, then the stem and leaves are also poison.”

When we now talk about virtue or evil, where does the root lie? It lies in our mind. The way we distinguish if something is virtuous or evil, is the state of our mind at the time. Thus, when we talk about virtuous versus evil, it is not determined by the outward appearance. Sometimes an action looks very nice outwardly as if it were virtuous; however, if the actor had attachment, hatred or ignorance in his/her mind at the time, it is impossible to say that it is a righteous, pure virtuous act. Hence, when we talk about virtuous versus evil, it is mainly determined by the state of our mind.

Among all states of mind, the kindest and most supreme is the mind of bodhicitta (the desire to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings). Thus, if we perform an action with bodhicitta, the action's all three phases—beginning, middle and end—would bring about the fruit of peace and happiness. Just like Shantideva said in Bodhisattva’s Way of Life: “One who embraces bodhicitta, no matter when and where one is, one would enjoy peace and happiness.” Thus, bodhicitta will harvest us the fruit of peace and happiness both temporarily and ultimately. Hence, no matter which deed we perform, it is most important to do it with the mind of bodhicitta.

Normally, people would like to engage in the eight worldly affairs (gain/loss, pleasure/pain, fame/disgrace, praise/blame). Because we think that we have a very long life to live. To live this long life, we have to make lots of preparations—to gain reputation, to win praise and respect from others—just for this life. All these are based on our belief that we still have a long life to live. Thus, we like to pursue the eight worldly affairs.

Instead, we have to turn our mind from the eight worldly affairs, back towards the Dharma. The best way to do that is to meditate on this life’s impermanence. Through observing how everything is impermanent, we will understand that our life can actually end any time. Impermanence has two categories according to the Dharma—gross and subtle impermanence.

The so-called gross impermanence refers to impermanence due to succession—our lives are in succession and the world is in succession. Gross impermanence is divided into two types: impermanence of the outer world and of the inner sentient beings. Impermanence of the outer world can be observed through the changing of the four seasons—spring, summer, fall and winter. All phenomena in this world are subject to changes of the four stages—arising, abiding, deterioration and extinction. Inner sentient beings go through similar stages of birth, aging and death. All these tell us that all phenomena are impermanent. This kind of impermanence is observable, and belongs to the gross impermanence.

Subtle impermanence refers to momentary changes. It is impossible for us who have not yet realized emptiness to observe this kind of subtle changes. Since we believe that we can live up to 100 years, some even have wishful thinking that they can live up to 1000 years, we think that we still have many years left to live, so we have to make preparation for this life. Thus, we like to pursue the eight worldly affairs. Based on that, we are attached to everything in this world, craving for gain, fame and prestige. Therefore, in order to really get rid of the bondage of the eight worldly affairs, we should right now focus on our life and meditate on its impermanence.

Source: Oral teaching by H.E. Nubpa Rinpoche (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBSiJILhblc>) and translated from Chinese to English by Ratnashri Meditation Center.