
Study Group - "Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*"

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།

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Cultivate motivation by thinking that the wish to achieve the state of Buddhahood is for the benefit of all beings and it is for this reason that one is now studying this Lam Rim. We have now finished studying the ten non virtuous actions.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said,

Just as a tiny spot of fire can burn mountains, and just as a drop of water can fill huge containers, so a tiny non-virtuous action can have a huge result.

We should never overlook a non-virtuous act because it appears to be very minor. Rather an effort should be made to accumulate virtuous acts. Think of the benefit of completing small amounts even a mala of Chenrezig six syllable mantra per day which is not a very difficult task. By doing that over the years imagine how many mantras or benefits we accumulate from that daily small action or practice. In the same way, the whole reason for studying and memorising the ten non-virtuous actions is to encourage the accumulation of as many virtuous acts as possible, and to avoid non-virtuous actions, no matter how small each may be.

It is best to follow the example of the early masters. We can recall the very renowned Geshe Chengawa who revised his daily practise with a simple habit. Every time he accumulated merit or did something wholesome, he marked his wall with a white line, but when he committed a negative act he used black chalk. He even put these marks on the wall of his room during his time of retreat. One day Geshe Potowa walked into the room, and surprised to see all the mess asked Geshe Chengawa about the significance of those lines. Geshe Chengawa replied that they were to remind him of his black and white acts and thoughts. Likewise another master kept this habit of counting virtuous and non-virtuous acts by using black and white stones.

Whatever we learn about dharma should be integrated into practice. The main practice is to maximise virtuous acts and minimise non-virtuous acts. It is an important part of spiritual progress to measure progress by reviewing the past. Each evening we should reflect on the actions of the whole day. If there is more virtue, there will be delight. This delight will even increase the virtue since this is the rejoicing in virtue. If there is more non-virtue then we should feel regret about that. Of course it is no good just feeling regret. At the same time the non-virtue should be purified. In addition one should resolve not to repeat that behaviour. Even a short time spent in this manner can purify an enormous amount of negativities. In a short time enormous positive actions can also be accumulated.

The teaching should always be applied to one's own personal growth. Atisha from his Thought Transformation text the Bodhisattvamaniavali said,

Hide one's own virtues but proclaim one's own faults.
Proclaim the virtues of others but do not seek their faults.

What is significant about this advice is that it helps to subdue our pride and remove our faults.

The very renowned master Dromtonpa said "do not look to others who are not tamed or controlled but look at oneself who is not controlled". The implication is that there is no point on always commenting on the behaviour of others saying " he or she has a very angry or greedy nature". Rather the focus should be on oneself. Focus inward and see whether your own mind has been fully subdued or not. Whenever the mind is filled with various unnecessary thoughts or concepts, it cannot ever rest properly. By turning inward one is able to see the inner faults. There is personal benefit in working on those faults and removing them. There is no benefit in looking outside and judging others.

422.122.121.2: The Factors That Determine The Weight Of The Karma¹

The next major heading for the study of karma is knowing the factors that determine the weight of the karma.

There are six factors which determine whether karma will be heavy or light:

422.122.121.21: First Factor: Nature Of The Action²

The nature of the action. Of the ten non-virtuous actions the first three are of body, and the next four are of speech. If we follow the order of the listing from beginning to end the nature of the karma becomes lighter. Compare stealing which is next after killing. Killing is heavier than stealing. Comparing sexual misconduct to stealing, sexual misconduct is lighter. This order depends upon the amount of pain or suffering that one brings to others as a consequence of the actions. Life is most important for everyone. When life is threatened you think "Take anything you like but save my life". This shows how life is treasured for any being therefore the non-virtuous act of killing is a very heavy non-virtue compared with those that follow.

As to the three non-virtuous acts of mind, the first in the normal order of listing is lighter than the next. That is the weight increases through the order of the listing. This is opposite to the order of non-virtuous actions of speech and body.

¹Liberation.. p450 The title used in the text is " The differences that make for heavy or light karma

²Liberation.. p451 The title used in the text is "Heavy by nature."

422.122.121.22: Second Factor: The Thought Behind The Action³

The thought behind the action. If the thought behind abusive or harsh speech is dominated by strong anger then the karma of that action becomes very heavy. If the motivation or thought behind an action has a strong influence from afflicted emotions, then the strength of that thought adds to the weight of the action.

422.122.121.23: Third Factor: The Deed⁴

The deed. This is the manner in which we perform that action. With killing for instance, you might deliberately cause pain by delaying the killing or by torturing. Because of the manner of killing that action becomes very heavy.

422.122.121.24: Fourth Factor: Basis⁵

The basis of the object. This is the object to which the action is directed. It is said that if any non-virtuous act is committed towards one's teacher, towards the sangha, towards parents or towards bodhisattvas and so forth, then this is regarded as heavy karma.

422.122.121.25: Fifth Factor: Repetition⁶

Doing it all the time. Idle gossip, though very minor compared to the others, can become very large or very heavy karma because we do it continuously.

422.122.121.26: Sixth Factor: Lack Of Application Of An Antidote⁷

Not applying any remedy. This is the lack of application of a remedy. It is said that if we create negative actions and if we don't regret that action, and if we do the same thing continuously then our actions becomes very heavy. If someone commits a non-virtuous action then feels regret and later applies some remedy, that non-virtuous action is not as heavy as someone who creates that action and does not apply any remedy.

End of discourse:

Geshe Doga thanked the group for completing the test which clearly showed all have done study and are making progress. He suggested that we have copies of the Lam Rim prayer available to all included in the prayer book, and he offered to sponsor those pages.

Heart Sutra Etymology

The Heart Sutra is so named by analogy with the heart as the most important organ in the body. This condensed sutra is like the heart essence of all other sutras. It is the essence of Perfection of Wisdom Sutra. The main subject in the Heart Sutra is the profound view of emptiness. This profound view of emptiness and the wisdom which realises that view is regarded as the essence, or like the heart of all the teachings of the

conquerors, just as the heart is the main organ of the human body. In some commentaries to the Heart Sutra the mantra of the Heart Sutra begins with "Om gate gate etc", however it is not necessary to say this "Om".

Vulture Peak in Rajgir

In response to a question about Vulture Peak. This is the place where Buddha turned the second wheel of the dharma. When people go to that place, which is very remote and small, it can become very crowded with forty to fifty people. Historically it is recorded in the sutras that when Buddha gave the second discourse there were over two thousand people, but it is believed there were far more than this. There were supposed to be countless listeners for the second turning of the wheel of the dharma. So from this one can impute the Buddhas miraculous powers. It is right to say even if it is a very small area, and the time comes for Buddha to give a discourse, then this place could fit all living beings whose minds have ripened to receive these teachings. Because the direct disciples at that discourse were ready for that discourse then because the time had ripened the discourse would naturally have happened. This discourse took place hundreds of years ago and places go through changes.

When Buddha gave his discourses many of his disciples were already in a high state having supernatural powers. Therefore the size of the place is not important for them to come to that discourse. Recall the episode in Buddha's time, where a princess⁸ of a central place called Magadha left her country for a very remote place when she got married. She decided to invite Buddha and his followers for a feast. People laughed because in those days there was no means of transport and it was at very short notice. How were they going to get there? She said "It is not your concern. Just prepare offerings". At the right time she offered prayers and praise to Buddha by stating, "You the protector of all beings, the destroyer of all evil and the knower of all phenomena. Please come here with all your followers." Immediately after, they all arrived by virtue of the miraculous power that Buddha and students could show at that time. They arrived all in different ways demonstrating miraculous powers. They surprised all the others. In this way⁹ in ceremonies in early times gathering offerings of sticks, those people who pick sticks have the power to fly in the sky and so forth. Don't ask one by one if have power rather they show that sticks. We have to understand early events in light of such miraculous powers possessed by Buddha and his many followers.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

The original typescript is prepared from Alan Molloy's original transcript, which has been checked against Damien Busby's notes. Adair Bunnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.

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³Liberation.. p451 The title used in the text is "Heavy because of the intention."

⁴Liberation.. p451 The title used in the text is "Heavy because of the deed."

⁵Liberation.. p451 The title used in the text is "Heavy because of the basis."

⁶Liberation.. p451 The title used in the text is "Heavy because of always being done."

⁷Liberation.. p451 The title used in the text is "Heavy because no antidote has been applied."

⁸ See footnote seventeen page 767 "Liberation in the palm"

⁹ Editor: this seems to state that in Buddha's time his followers had the ability to fly due to the power of these "sticks" which were offered in ceremonies. This needs to be further clarified with Geshe-la.