
Study Group - “Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*”

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



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Try to generate bodhicitta motivation by thinking "I wish to achieve the state of buddhahood for the sake of all beings. For this purpose I am listening to the Lam Rim teachings and will put them into practice."

Different Types Of Karma

In the last teaching we finished the differences between karma in terms of:

- propelling and completing karma
- definite and indefinite karma and
- done and accumulated karma

Definite Karma: Three Types

Within Definite Karma, (that karma which will definitely be experienced) there are three subdivisions. These subdivisions are made in terms of the time when their results ripen:

1. karma which manifests its result in this life
2. karma which manifests its result in the life immediately after this one
3. karma which manifests its result in life after the immediate rebirth

The literal translations of these three karmas make their meaning clear. The literal meanings are:

1. Karma, the result of which can be seen. This means that this first type of karma produces its results in the same life as that in which the karma is created. The karma and its result occur in the same lifetime.
2. Karma, which produces its results in the immediate life after this one.
3. Karma, which produces its results not in the immediate life after but in any other life.

Factors Determining Powerful Karma

In general those karmas which are very powerful belong to the first type of karma - that which produces its result in this very life. They are so powerful that they produce their result very quickly.

Powerful types of karma are of two types.

- a. Those which are created out of strong thoughts.
- b. Those karmas created in relation to a very potent or special object. Our spiritual teachers are such a supreme field because they possess a great number of qualities, and because they are our source of the attainment of spiritual qualities. Our parents can also be such a special object or field because they have given us great love and kindness.

Karma is powerful in terms of thought or motivation if we

perform spiritual practice out of the strong intention to show compassion to other beings and help them. Conversely committing any negative action out of strong harmful motivation is also powerful karma.

In addition to the above factors for creating powerful karma another factor is the frequency of the action. For example with a positive action like the practice of dharma, there is such delight that we keep practising even at the cost of other enjoyments. In this case the result of our dharma practice will definitely be experienced very soon.

So it can be seen that the powerful karmas produce their result more quickly than other types of karmas.

The Order Of Ripening Of Karma

We may have accumulated various types of both virtuous and non-virtuous karma. How do we know which one of them will produce its result first? Will it be the virtuous or non-virtuous karma?

- a. The first factor which decides the ripening of the result is that heavy karma will produce its result first. If our virtuous karma is heavier than our non-virtuous karma, the virtuous karma will ripen its result first. However if the non-virtuous karma is heavier than the virtuous karma, then the non-virtuous karma will ripen first.
- b. If the amounts of virtuous and non-virtuous karma are even, the next factor to decide which ripens first is the karma with which we are most familiar. If we make effort to become used to virtuous or positive karma then it is likely that at death we shall have a virtuous mind, and therefore attain a better rebirth in the next lifetime.
- c. If both these factors are not applicable to determine the ripening there is a third factor. If the karma is equal in terms of being light or heavy and then equal in terms of being less or more familiar, then whichever karma is accumulated first will ripen first.

Integrating Knowledge Of Karma Into Daily Practice

How does learning about these things help us to develop our spiritual practice?

Knowledge about karma shows us that it is very important for us to increase our familiarity with virtuous practice and to decrease our familiarity with non-virtuous activity. We must think of our own actions of body, speech and mind. If there is a very strong habitual thought of giving harm to other beings, we should replace it with the thought of helping and benefiting other beings, for the sake of our spiritual practice.

Similarly we can look for any non-virtuous aspects to our outer actions of speech or body, such as bad manners, we should get

rid of them. At the same time we should also familiarise ourselves with good speech and bodily actions. It is said that if we make a consistent effort to familiarise ourselves with virtuous thought and action, then almost effortlessly a good rebirth will be attained in the future.

If throughout our life we practise dharma, then at the time of death time it will be quite natural to think of practising dharma. At that moment of death such thoughts, and the positive qualities that accumulate in the mind are most beneficial since at that time there is nothing else which is of use. All other things - relatives, friends, wealth - fail to help us. They are of no use at that moment.

Earlier in these teachings we studied death and impermanence. We should always try to maintain awareness of death and impermanence. Death is certain but its time is uncertain. There is no guarantee that the old and sick will die before the young. The age at which death will occur is not certain. At the time of death all things other than dharma are meaningless. This gives us a strong motivation to put the dharma into daily practice.

We must relate what we study to our own dharma practice. The dharma or refuge object always makes sense within the context of our own mind. With dharma we naturally try to increase the positive qualities and get rid of all the negativities in our own mind.

As mentioned before if we maintain a positive state of mind at the time of death, at least the immediate life after will be a good and happy rebirth. To a large extent, having such a positive state of mind at the time of death depends upon our familiarity with virtue, which depends upon how we spend our time during our lifetime. At the time of death a very good practitioner will have a very happy state of mind. Death, for such a practitioner, will be anticipated with joy. A middling practitioner, at the moment of death will have no fear or nervousness. Lastly, a very small or lesser practitioner, will not feel regret about their death.

This leads us to realise that at this moment we have a wonderful opportunity in our hands. Of course it is worthwhile to utilise this life to study dharma. However the true benefit depends on putting it into practice. To practise means to relate what we study to our daily life. For example, in the study of karma we learn of need to abandon the ten non-virtuous actions, and to adopt the ten virtuous actions. Then as in teaching tonight, we studied the way in which the ripening of the result of karma depends upon the intensity of the karma. If the positive and negative actions are not equal, the heavier action produces its result first. Our level of familiarity with positive and negative actions also influences this order of ripening.

The practice of dharma means to check our own thoughts and actions with the knowledge of dharma. Consider, for example, the first of the ten non-virtuous actions - the action of killing and its opposite, not killing. We must compare the frequency and intensity with which we have thought about and completed both actions. In this way we are using our dharma knowledge to increase familiarity with virtuous actions. So our theoretical knowledge of dharma brings some benefit and change to our actions and state of mind. Study is beneficial, but study alone cannot calm the mind.

In order to develop more virtue within, we must make every effort to increase and maintain the positive states of mind, and to undertake positive actions. At the same time we must always rejoice in the merit of our virtuous actions. This is a

great cause to multiply the virtue we have already accumulated. If we then dedicate our virtue to some great purpose, that will seal the virtue so it is never lost.

To minimise non-virtue try to prevent non-virtuous thought. Even if a non-virtuous thought arises, every effort should be made to prevent that thought from becoming a non-virtuous action.

Opposing Negative Thoughts With Positive Thoughts

Student: Many of the thoughts entering my mind are negative. Is there any way to stop these negative thoughts easily, as I find it difficult to stop the train of negative thoughts?

Geshe-la: You must think of the opposite of that negative thought. Depending on the type of habitual negative thought to which you are familiar, find out the positive thought that is its opposite. Then try to think of the conditions needed to cultivate those positive thoughts. Become familiar with that.

Shantideva said:

"There is no practice not made easier by familiarity"¹

The recognition of the opposite, positive thought, and the effort to develop familiarity with that thought, minimises the original negative thought.

Furthermore Shantideva added to the above line with:

"Because something is very difficult or hard it should not be abandoned since there is nothing that is not easier with familiarity. Just as hearing someone's name can frighten one but later on that person can be so close that without them one cannot even live."

It is the same as hearing someone's name and initially being afraid, but later on that same person can become so close that life seems impossible without them. This shows how it is possible for the mind to change from one state to another. A thought seems natural and permanent, but with effort it can be changed. Difficulty is no reason to turn away from a task. Turning back will never lead to success in any activity.

Some business people, if they give up their endeavours they face difficulties even bankruptcy however they then make even more effort and thus gain some success. This gives pleasure. Because of this pleasure they can endure more hardships, even hunger.

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