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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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Try to generate the motivation of bodhicitta by thinking that I sincerely wish to attain the state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and for this reason I study the Lam Rim and will do my best to put it into practice.

In other words as part of generating the right frame of mind, you develop the motivation to pursue, study and practise in order to turn your mind away from cyclic existence, and achieve that ultimate state of liberation, which is one of buddhahood that possesses all excellent qualities. The reason for wishing to attain this state, and to be rid of negative states of mind, is all for the benefit of all beings.

The Purpose And Meaning Of Dharma Practice

The purpose of following the Dharma is to transform our ways of thinking and acting into positive habits. Of course the ultimate purpose is to benefit others. The main thing that effects the attainment of both these goals is our state of mind. If the motivation is positive, then naturally you benefit others through your actions. Without such a motivation, there is no real thought of helping others, and so there will be no real benefit to others as a result of our actions.

We must constantly remind ourselves that the instructions in the Lam Rim are an effective method of bringing about a positive transformation of our actions of body, speech and mind. If the Lam Rim teachings cannot change our thoughts and actions then nothing else will do so either. A true spiritual practitioner is someone who lives their life in such a manner that all other things are secondary importance compared to Dharma. Even if we do not always fully practise the Dharma in daily life, but try to do as much as we can, it will still be very beneficial both in this life and future lives. It may be difficult to be a true spiritual practitioner, but at the very least we must not forget the benefit of Dharma both now and in the future.

The True Source Of Happiness And Suffering

Through Dharma we are basically trying to find within ourselves the cause of happiness, and solutions to various problems and difficulties we face. So the emphasis is on cleansing one's mental continuum, or in other words, ridding ourselves of negative states of

mind. It is important to know whether the continuing source of problems lies within ourselves or in the outer world. On the positive side, we need to know where the true cause of happiness lies. Do we find it within ourselves or is it to be found somewhere in the external world?

From our experience we know that there are some external conditions that can bring happiness and pleasure, but they are very impermanent and quick to change. We have hardly any control over these external conditions. So if our view of the causes of suffering and happiness is based on these external conditions, we can see that it is impossible to achieve liberation and feel independent, because we have no control over them. The Dharma shows us that the causes of happiness and suffering are within us. Through following the Lam Rim instructions and integrating them into daily practice, the inner cause of happiness becomes apparent. Then we see how we can control our life and be totally independent of external factors. Without this inner knowledge and strength our sense of happiness or unhappiness is always dependant on external circumstances. Through following the Lam Rim teachings, we can take full advantage of the enormous potential of the human mind and body. We can see there is some positive force within us that can ensure continuous happiness in this life, and which can also save us from suffering which would otherwise be caused by external factors.

With a broad and open way of thinking, we can see everybody has some complaint about their life. This is the same whether people are rich, poor, middle class or even those of us here. Socially and financially we are from different backgrounds but all of us have some complaint or problem to resolve. The difference is in how seriously that problem is perceived. Two people may have exactly the same problem. For one the problem bothers them greatly, and may even harm their mind because they think of nothing else. When confronted with a difficulty all their mind sees is that difficulty. Day after day their mind is caught in that problem. Even though the problem faced is no different from that faced by others they take it more seriously. The other person sees exactly the same problem in a different way, and so does not dwell on it. They acknowledge the problem, but also know that there are other positive factors in their

lives. The real problem is obviously not so much to do with the actual situation, but more to do with the way we look at the problem. So when we face problems it is important to remember the positive aspects of our life.

Adopting a very broad and open way of thinking helps our mind to enjoy peace and happiness. Then in the face of problems and difficulties, we are able to deal with them, find solutions, and overcome those problems. Without a calm and relaxed mind it is generally hard to think clearly.

We must try to realise that a lot of problems are unnecessarily created by our own minds. Someone once told Geshela that she felt very lonely. Geshela did not know her background well, so he asked if she had a partner. She replied that she did, and that their relationship was good and harmonious. When Geshela asked how she could have a good relationship and still feel lonely, she thought for a while and then Geshela saw her face light up. Spending just a few moments analysing your situation can help a lot. Through this you can see the reason for unhappiness is lack of contentment, rather than a lack of living conditions or friends. Through focussing on the positive living conditions, you place your problem in perspective and so overcome unnecessary mental problems.

The Causes Of Great Wealth

In the Lam Rim teachings we are engaged in studying the causes of the eight ripened qualities. We have finished the causes of being born in a high family, race or caste. Next is the cause of acquiring great wealth. The main cause of this quality is to be very generous towards others. In order to enjoy the excellence of wealth in the future one has to overcome miserliness such as not giving material goods or the Dharma to others.

We are learning the Dharma not just to gain some intellectual knowledge but to assess the relevance of the Dharma to our daily practice. We should investigate the benefits of putting it into practice in our own life. Here we are talking about the practice of generosity, which is the main cause for acquiring great wealth in the future. For this we need to understand the practice of generosity, and its benefits for both the long term and this immediate life.

Practising generosity means giving material things, spiritual knowledge or any skill we have to others. Two special fields are our parents are, because of their great kindness to us, and refuge objects since they are the source of generating qualities for ourselves. To those stricken with disease we must practise generosity because they deserve our sympathy, love and care. We should also practise generosity to those in poverty because they are very desperate for help. We should be generous to those such as our friends to show our gratitude and respect. Generosity can even take the form of providing some advice (either Dharma or otherwise) to overcome some confusion in their mind. Anything or

advice that is given freely is also the practice of generosity. For example giving without the feeling that if I give them this knowledge then I shall not be so special. In particular it should be given and should be practised regardless of whether we are asked for assistance.

Today we celebrate the anniversary of the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma. After attaining nirvana, Buddha sat in meditative equipoise for forty-nine days. The god Brahma descended and offered a thousand spoked Dharma-wheel requesting Lord Buddha to turn the wheel of Dharma at Varanasi. Today is the anniversary of this occasion.

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

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