

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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



## ལྷན་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུང་ས།

2 August 1994

Let us first generate the correct motivation by thinking that I wish to achieve the state of Buddhahood for the sake of all living beings, and for this reason I am studying (and will wholeheartedly practise) the Lam Rim.

We have finished the first two of the three main headings relating to the law of karma. These three headings are:

### 422.122.1: The General Explanation Concerning The Law Of Karma

ལས་འབྲས་སྐྱེར་བསམ་པ།

### 422.122.2: The Specifics Of Karma

བྱི་བྲག་དུ་བསམ་པ།

### 422.122.3: Having Contemplated The Law Of Karma, What Needs To Be Adopted And What Needs To Be Abandoned<sup>1</sup>

བསམས་ནས་འཇུག་ལྷོག་བྱ་ཚུལ།

The third heading concerns what is to be adopted and what to be rejected as a result of contemplation of the law of karma. Under this heading there are two subheadings:

#### 422.122.31 The General<sup>2</sup>

སྦྱིར་བསྟན་པ།

#### 422.122.32 The Specific<sup>3</sup>

ཁྱད་པར་དུ་སྟོབས་བཞིས་སྦྱོང་བའི་ཚུལ།

Under both headings we learn the value of adopting positive karma, and rejecting negative karma.

#### 422.122.31: The General

སྦྱིར་བསྟན་པ།

The main point of this section is that we must make an effort to

create positive karma and to abandon negative karma. In spite of our virtuous efforts, through the various doors of delusions such as ignorance and lack of mindfulness, we create negative karma instead of creating positive karma. What then should we do? Under the next subheading of specific the text shows the four forces of remedy, which are to be applied in order to purify those negative karmas which we have created.

### The Four Doors Of Downfall

Geshe-la gave details about the four door of delusions or downfalls, so here they are just listed. They are:

1. Door of not knowing
2. Door of lack of conscientiousness
3. Door of non-faithfulness
4. Door of a great number of mental delusions.

All the negative karmas we create are created through one or more of these four doors, so each door should be kept closed in order to prevent or minimise such negative karma. It is important to overcome the door of not knowing. Creating negative karmas out of ignorance, or unintentionally, still creates negative karma, and will bring a negative result.

To properly practise the law of karma we have to distinguish between meditation time and post-meditation time. For each time there are different things to do in order to make good progress. During meditation time we fully utilise our concentration and wisdom to familiarise ourselves with the concepts of karma, its divisions, the consequences and all the details of the subject to gain insight into the topic. But during post-meditation time, when one is not doing formal meditation, the most important thing is to practice mindfulness and alertness. One of the very best and well known practitioners who is a source of inspiration is Geshe Baen Gung-gyal who was very thorough in his spiritual practice. In order to remind himself and keep a record of how he was going in his practice he carried two kinds of pebbles, black and white. With the white pebbles he kept count of the positive white karma and with the black pebbles he counted the black negative karma. At the end of the day he counted the pebbles. If there more white pebbles he rejoiced in his deeds of the day and said to himself; “Geshe has done very well today.” But if he found more black pebbles, he regretted his own negative deeds and thought of purifying them.

Spiritual practitioners are like those in business. Think of the calculations that are necessary to monitor the state of a business: the income, expenses, interest to be paid, money to be borrowed and so on. The sign of a healthy business is a profit. Similarly a spiritual practitioner needs to consider the most effective way to make quick and great progress in the path. So you can see how important it is to do as Geshe Baen did, and

<sup>1</sup>Liberation page 464 The title used in the text is "After thinking about those things, the way to modify your actions."

<sup>2</sup>Liberation page 464 The title used in the text is "The general teaching."

<sup>3</sup>Liberation page 464 The title used in the text is "In particular, how to purify oneself with the four powers."

---

be mindful of our daily actions. If our actions are positive we multiply the merit of that action by rejoicing in it, so making a great profit in spiritual terms. If it is negative we feel regret, and so are deterred from doing the same thing again.

However there is no point in feeling guilty and living one's whole life with fear and worry. This is of no benefit and quite unnecessary. Therefore it is said that if one has committed a negative action one should purify it.

One sutra says that the one dharma which can close the door of lower, bad rebirths is to check or examine one's mental continuum. This sutra indicates that we should always be very thoughtful and watchful of our mind and deeds. The advantage of this is that we see our own faults and qualities and so we have a good opportunity for self development. If we wait for others to point out our strengths or weaknesses, we won't make much progress because it will seem that others are always pointing out our faults, and this may become a cause for anger on our part.

Shantideva from *Bodhisattva Charyavatara*:

Suffering arises from negative karma therefore think how to definitely be released from non-virtue or negative karma.

Day and night it is appropriate to just think and contemplate on this.<sup>4</sup>

Here the word "this" refers to the law of karma or cause and effect. As we have already discussed, if we constantly remind ourselves of the truth of this law of karma; when we constantly think of causes and results of positive and negative actions; we are naturally inspired to increase positive karma and decrease negative karma.

Why is it that when we contemplate the law of karma we are naturally inspired to create positive karma and overcome negative karma? It is because our fundamental wish is to be happy (which is the result of positive karma), and to be free of suffering (which is the result of negative karma).

Practice of the law of karma is also essential to make further progress. It is said that even realisation of the concept of ultimate reality, (which in Buddhism is emptiness) depends on a full understanding of the concept of karma. To realise emptiness involves investigating the truth in a very deep sense. If we investigate this deep truth with a lack realisation of the concept of karma, we are drawn to the conclusion that nothing exists. This is nihilism. One of the unique qualities of Lama Tsong Khapa's teaching is by following them, such nihilism can be overcome since the concepts of karma and emptiness are presented as complementary and not contradictory.

#### **Faith In The Law Of Karma As The Root Of All Virtue**

Furthermore a direct quotation from Shantideva in *Bodhisattva Charyavatara* says:

"It is said the root of all virtues is power."

When the *Bodhisattva Charyavatara* says "It is said" Shantideva is quoting the words of a sutra. The meaning of the word "power" (described here as the root of all virtue), refers to faith or conviction.

After the above two lines from *Bodhisattva Charyavatara*, the next line says "Always meditate on the ripened result".

As said before this line indicates faith or conviction in virtue or dharma. But what is meant by "faith or conviction"? Positive karma results in a positive result such as the ripened result, an

environmental result, or results similar to the cause. Negative karma has the same types of result - ripened, environmental and results similar to the cause. Faith or conviction means to be fully convinced of the fact that this is the way cause and effect are experienced. To be specific, the result of killing has a ripened result, an environmental result and results similar to the cause. If, with faith and conviction, we are always aware of the cause and effect of the action of killing, we will try to prevent that action, because of the undesirable results. On the positive side, by thinking of positive results of actions such as refraining from killing, because of faith in the law of cause and effect, and knowledge of the result, we are encouraged to complete that positive action.

This is the way to practise the law of karma in daily life, in terms of what to adopt and what to reject. If following this practice is contrary to what one wants to do, and one does some negative actions, then one should apply the four forces of purification.

By being always mindful, alert and conscientious, one will be always able to prevent immediate negative actions and purify any minor negative actions that may have created. By following this practice of the law of karma and of purification one can be completely rid of negative actions. For example in Angulimala's story, he committed negative actions but then purified them.

A story in relation to purifying negative karma concerns a monk named Dharma Senna. As a rule, in early times, the community of sangha would banish a monk who broke a certain moral code. This monk Dharma Senna broke such a moral code so was banished from the community. In the meantime he lived in a very peaceful, tranquil, quiet place. He did intense purification practice and meditation. In this way he completely purified his transgressions. He went back to the community but they would not accept him. One day all the monks had to cross the river Ganga. He followed them but they would not let him join them in the same boat. However utilising his meditative power he flew to the other side of the river. This surprised the other monks so they begged forgiveness.

The Kadampa master Dromtonpa, who was a close spiritual son to the glorious Atisha, said:

There is no obscuration or sinful negative karma which cannot be purified. The reason is that the one who creates the negative karma and the one who purifies it are the same person. Just as a potter, with a hand wheel, can make as many pots as he wishes, so too he can break all those pots in a moment.

This strongly indicates that just as one creates the negative actions one also has the ability or potential to purify that action.

This example is used by Kadampa Geshes because it is very clear. The potter's wheel is likened to the wheel of existence. In this wheel of life, living beings always create various negative actions and thoughts. Just as the potter can immediately destroy pots, a living being by the power of the four forces of purification can purify all negative karmas.

---

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

---

© Tara Institute

---

<sup>4</sup> Liberation... p464 This quote is found in full.