

Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"  
 A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga  
 Translated by Samdup Tsering



ཕྱི་ལོ་འཛིན་སྐྱོད་ལོ་ལོ་ལོ་བཅས་ཀྱི་སྐོར་

23 August 1994

For your motivation try to cultivate bodhicitta, which is the genuine wish to achieve Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

422.122.32 The Four Powers Of Purification<sup>1</sup>

བྱིན་པ་དུ་སྐྱོབ་སྤེལ་བཞི་སྤྱོད་པའི་ཚུལ།

In preceding teachings we listed and described the ten virtuous actions, the ten non-virtuous actions, and their corresponding results. We also learnt how to put these teachings on karma into practice. The next topic is how to purify negativities by applying the four forces of purification.

This topic is also essential because even if we engage in practising virtuous actions we may still commit negative acts. Instead of ignoring such negative actions, something should be done to purify them. This is done by applying the four forces of purification.

In one sutra it says:

Oh Bodhisattva Mahasattvas, if these four dharmas or qualities are present, then the negativities which are created and accumulated can be fully suppressed.

These four dharmas, or forces of purification<sup>2</sup> are:

- the force of regret

རྣམ་པར་སྤྱོད་འབྱུང་པའི་སྐྱོབ་སྤེལ།

- the force of remedy

གཉེན་པོ་ཀྱང་དུ་སྤྱོད་པའི་སྐྱོབ་སྤེལ།

- the force of base or object

ཉེས་པ་ལས་སྦྱོར་ལོ་ལོ་ལོ་པའི་སྐྱོབ་སྤེལ།

- the force of resolution.

རྟེན་གྱི་སྐྱོབ་སྤེལ།

1. The Force Of Regret

རྣམ་པར་སྤྱོད་འབྱུང་པའི་སྐྱོབ་སྤེལ།

The force of regret means to feel, as strongly as possible, regret regret for any negativities that one has created since beginningless time.

Understanding The Results Of Negative Actions

In order to feel regret about negative actions, you need to have an understanding of the results of those actions. The three types of results of any negative action have been previously discussed<sup>3</sup>. They are very undesirable and frightening. The unfailing truth of the law of karma is that positive actions produce happiness and negative actions produce suffering. With a firm conviction in this unfailing truth, one knows that unless a given negative action is purified by the four forces of purification, some form of suffering is inevitable. Similarly the result of a virtuous action is definitely happiness, unless the positive karma is harmed or destroyed by anger. If one meditates on the results of the different forms of negative actions which one has created, not only will there be regret for those negative actions, but also one will be more mindful and cautious of the need to avoid repeating the same action again. Therefore feeling regret helps to avoid the repetition of negative actions in the future. Also, simply feeling regret for negative actions purifies half of their results.

Methods Of Generating Regret

It is said that we should view negative actions as a kind of poison. Another analogy is viewing them in the same way as you would view a venomous snake in front of you.

Imagine that you are one of three people who have been poisoned. The first is already dead and the second is currently undergoing excruciating pain and near to death. You know that sooner or later you will face the same experience. It is easy to see why you would want to do something to remove that poison before it is too late.

In reality we see people undergoing continuous pain and suffering, and the main cause is their negative actions. One may not fully recall having created the cause to experience such suffering and pain. It might have created in this present life and definitely in past lifetimes. Compared to the many other lives which we have assumed in past, this present life is supposed to be a very fortunate one, enjoying better conditions and more freedom. Yet we have still created much negativity in order to fulfil our desires and wishes.

<sup>1</sup>Liberation page 467 The title used in the text is "In particular, how to purify oneself with the four powers."

<sup>2</sup> There is also a more detailed discussion in Liberation pages 219-220

<sup>3</sup> Study Group 26 October 1993

If we are able to create negative actions while we enjoy this best form of life and conditions, there is no question that we created negative actions in the past when we did not enjoy such a fortunate form of life. When we create negative actions therefore, we can apply the remedy of regret as a means of purifying the negative actions.

## 2. The Force Of Remedy

### གཉིན་པོ་ཀུན་ཏུ་སྤྱོད་པའི་སྒྲོབ་སྒྲུབ།

Generally speaking any virtuous action we do counteracts the non-virtuous ones we commit. However the remedy here is very specifically talking about the practice which is specifically done to purify negativities.

In Shantideva's text *The Condensed Precepts* six types of remedies are mentioned<sup>4</sup>

1. Reciting profound scriptures
  2. Meditating on emptiness
  3. Chanting mantras
  4. Constructing statues
  5. Making offerings
  6. Saying the names of buddhas and bodhisattvas.
1. An example of reciting profound scriptures is reciting the *Heart Sutra*, in order to memorise the words of that scripture. This also means to remember the meaning of the words of the Heart Sutra.
  2. An example of meditating on emptiness is meditating on the emptiness which is non-inherent existence. This can be practised within the context of the non-inherent existence of the person, who is the subject or the creator of the action; and the non-inherent existence of the action; and the non-inherent existence of the object, upon whom or which the action is performed.
  3. Chanting or reciting mantras such as the one hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva, and the mantras of various deities.
  4. Constructing or building statues also includes the restoration of old statues. In terms of purifying negativities the practice becomes more powerful, if one builds or renovates statues while specifically thinking of purifying ones negativities, and with firm faith in the holy objects.
  5. Making offerings of any worthwhile thing to the holy body, speech and mind.

### All Holy Images To Be Treated As The Actual Holy Body Speech And Mind

If you have an altar at home you should make offerings to whatever statue or image of the Buddha you have, imagining those images are real Buddhas or real Taras. Therefore any offerings, prostrations or other practice made to those objects, will receive true blessings from all the Buddhas and Taras. So it is not necessary to visit a distant temple or make offerings to holy objects. Any holy objects you have at home should be the real Buddhas and Taras for you. It all depends upon faith. With faith you receive blessings from all Buddhas. Without faith you cannot receive blessings from the Buddhas.

<sup>4</sup>"Liberation..." p220

The very purpose of blessing holy images in a ritual is to also transform that image to represent the true Buddha or whatever that image represents. In the process of the blessing, the image is filled with various mantras in different parts of it. Each different part represents different qualities of that image. When it is fully blessed all those qualities are fully invoked.

These images should always be regarded as real Buddhas for one's practice and offerings. For example, if done with faith, even offering a small flower represents an offering to all the real Buddhas.

6. Saying the names of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. For this saying the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas of Confession is said to be the most effective, and it is also recommended to say the names of the Eight Medicine Buddhas. As a means to purify negativities we can recite the text of the Thirty-five Buddhas of Confession, and if feasible, at the same time perform prostrations as a post-meditation (or in-between session) practice. Lama Tsong Khapa used the same Thirty-five Buddhas of Confession practice and prostrations for his retreat. Following this same practice enables us to receive blessings from the gurus and buddhas very quickly.

### A Brief Description Of The Thirty Five Buddhas Practice<sup>5</sup>

The Lord Buddha is visualised seated on a lion throne. From his heart thirty-five rays of light shine forth. On each tip are the Thirty-five Buddhas of confession. One then thinks that all the other sentient beings surround one, and join in the prayers and prostrations. If one wishes to elaborate a bit, the rays of light from Buddha's heart radiate to every atom or particle which exists. On the tip of each ray of light is the assembly of the Thirty-five Buddhas, and oneself surrounded by all sentient beings. Therefore there are millions of sentient beings joining in saying the prayers and performing the prostrations.

At the beginning of the practice of the Thirty-five Buddhas of confession you must remember to feel fear of the results of your negativities, have genuine faith in the qualities of the buddhas, and have love and compassion for all other beings. In generating the motivation for engaging in the Thirty-five Buddhas practice you should first cultivate Bodhicitta, the wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Then think "In order to fulfil this ultimate wish for enlightenment I take refuge in the three jewels and I make prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas in order to purify my negativities". Then begin the prayers and prostrations.

At the end of the practice a mandala is offered. Then you can dissolve the Thirty-five Buddhas in either of two ways:

1. dissolve the thirty-five buddhas into yourself. The way of dissolving the buddhas into oneself is to either:
  - 1.1. dissolve the surrounding buddhas into the Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, who in turn dissolves into you as a way of receiving the blessings, or:
  - 1.2. dissolve all thirty-five buddhas simultaneously into yourself.
2. rather than dissolve the buddhas into oneself they can be dissolved into emptiness.

<sup>5</sup> See *Liberation...* page 221 and pp775-8. Other useful references about the Thirty-five Buddhas of confession are "The nine preliminaries (commentaries and practice texts)" by Kangyurwa Khenzur Lozang Thubten Rinpoche and translated by Dawa Dhondrup pages 196 to 203. Also Geshe Doga gave a commentary to the Thirty-five Buddhas of confession over four nights in January to February 1992.

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The Thirty-five Buddhas practice constitutes all four opponent forces of purification. Whatever purification practice we do should include the four forces.

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

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*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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