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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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Try to create the right frame of mind, in order to generate the thought that to benefit all sentient beings I shall attain the complete state of enlightenment, and it is for this reason that I listen to and practise the profound Dharma.

Results Arising From Our Practice Of The Small Scope

Having finished the stages of the path shared by persons of the small scope we now begin stages of the path shared by persons of the middle scope. As a whole, the entire stages of the path is designed to lead one to the ultimate state of complete enlightenment or buddhahood. This progress on the path is a gradual process. In the stages of the path shared by persons of small scope, we learnt how to overcome a strong grasping at this life and broaden the scope of the mind to consider the goal of future lives.

By following the stages of the path of the small scope, one overcomes grasping at this life and this has the immediate benefit of helping to overcome the main source of mental unhappiness and confusion even within this lifetime. Therefore this practice of stages of the path is very beneficial. The stages of the small path is like medicine or an instrument which can pacify this grasping at this life.

It is said that an indication of one's progress in the stages of small scope is that there is some feeling or confidence that one will not have a lower rebirth in future lives. It is most important that we integrate our learning into our daily life and not just study about these stages of the path.

The Benefits Of Spiritual Teachings - To Bring Peace To The Mind

In following the Dharma or spiritual teachings, we must know in what way it is of benefit, compared to other kinds of benefits that we seek.

Essentially the Dharma or spiritual teaching is all about our way of thinking, so we must always relate the spiritual teachings to our mind. Therefore the spiritual teachings on the stages of the path must be related to one's own mind.

A person of small scope gives the message that they are seriously pursuing any means which can overcome

grasping at this life. Such a person sees grasping at this life as very negative, and a source of unhappiness both in this life and the life beyond. Everything he or she learns from the path is to be utilised as a remedy to grasping at this life.

So even as a follower of stages of the path of the small scope, the focus is on overcoming faults or negativities in one's mind. The focus is not on outer appearance. If the outer appearance is of a celibate monk or nun but inwardly there is a strong grasping at this life and sensual objects, such a person is no different from other ordinary beings. Whereas an outwardly ordinary person may inwardly be always very thoughtful, inward looking, aware of their mental continuum, remaining calm and peaceful and always maintaining their spiritual practice. Irrespective of their outer appearance such a person is a superior practitioner, and is enriched with great inner peace and happiness.

Whatever part of the teaching you follow the essential purpose is to utilise it, so as to develop positive qualities in the mind and to bring more peace and happiness into the mind. So whenever we confront some emotional or internal difficulties we must remember what the teachings say. What they say is that there is no point in feeling very discouraged, depressed, frustrated and unhappy, to the point internally that even a slight outer noise can generate anger. Under such circumstances one must be very careful. It is best to utilise the technique, or teaching, of dharma to see that the cause of the problem is within the mind, then utilise the knowledge of dharma to deal with that.

In this way you can overcome, and make use of the dharma to bring so much peace and happiness to the mind. Inner happiness in the mind is what we need, not external possessions such as food, drink, clothing and so on which we already have.

Having a very strong sense of ego, (which is a deep down thought of I) does not help if the mind is not happy, peaceful and stable. In this way it is said, if we integrate dharma into our daily practice, then like snow bathed in sunshine, all our inner problems and difficulties will disappear. Dharma is very effective in getting rid of internal problems.

The Causes Of Harmony In Relationships

We find that knowledge of the dharma, for instance about the law of karma, the practice of patience or tolerance are all able to prevent unnecessary misery in daily life situations. We should also regard this teaching of dharma as a means of finding happiness and satisfaction in life, in the same way that we put a great deal of effort into accumulating wealth, or pursuing other activities which bring some happiness or satisfaction. The fact that material wealth and other external things have failed to provide the satisfaction we expected or hoped, turns our mind towards dharma.

We have been learning about the meaning of dharma but we must remember to get the benefit out of that dharma. We first turned our mind to dharma because the external means of finding happiness or resolving our problems was ineffective.

However if we do not think of Dharma in real life situations, we do not try to see daily problems through the perspective of Dharma, our knowledge of Dharma is of little use in this life. A clear indication of how we are not practising the Dharma is how easily we lose control and become angry even with our close friends. Our mind is very narrow in thinking working only on face value. If what is in front of us is attractive, even if it is minor or small in value, and someone interferes with it, or tries to take it, we become angry. If we do not obtain such small things we become very frustrated and unhappy. We are not even prepared to sacrifice minor possessions to achieve happiness. So you can see how our mind is very narrow in scope because even though we have so many good things, we become unhappy if missing one small thing.

Our vision must be far sighted and our mind must be broad. Then, in real situations, we can see that the reason for unhappiness up to now is because of narrow-minded thinking. As a result of that, it becomes apparent that all the immediate causes of the problems are created by this narrow way of thinking. When a friend causes a slight problem, the mind becomes very focused on that problem, and in this way conjures up this whole situation into a major problem so bringing disharmony into the relationship.

Some of the major problems we face in life initially happened due to a very minor or small cause which grew to become very serious - not because of the actual situation itself but rather because of the mind. So a disharmonious environment with surrounding people is created with the result that one suffers.

From the spiritual point of view the realistic way of seeing the situation is to firstly recognise that one needs a friend. Without a friend life is not easy, but living with a friend in disharmony is also a very unhappy situation.

Therefore we must think about what can be done do to bring about harmony and sustain that harmony in one's

relationships with others. One of the factors necessary to bring harmony in relationships is patience. One cannot always be the winner. Without patience it only takes a minor conflict to bring disharmony in relationships; minor things said by a friend can upset the mind a great deal.

Therefore realising that friendship and harmony are important; realising that one wants to be a good person with tolerance and so forth, the way to fulfil all those wishes is the teaching of Dharma (such as the law of cause and effect). These teachings are very relevant in daily life situations.

The Benefits Of Tolerance

Through the spiritual training we are trying to master ourselves, to protect our happiness in life and specifically our mental happiness. For this we must study and also put that study into practice. In order to protect our mental peace and happiness we must show patience and tolerance towards those unfavourable situations which we confront in life. For example when somebody says something nasty, we should immediately remember 'I must tolerate that'. The reason for showing tolerance is that otherwise you will lose your temper. Even if you were happy and peaceful before, then losing your temper means that you will not have that peace now.

Rather than losing your temper, if you relax yourself and calm down your mind, then whatever the situation, the mind will not be affected. This is the benefit of patience in protecting or safeguarding one's inner peace or happiness. You may not be fully successful in protecting your peace, but if you try hard, then next time you may be able to show tolerance. If you consistently try hard to show patience in such unfavourable situations, then after one or two more uncomfortable situations you will become more and more adept at tolerance and become a master over the practice of patience.

So we have used all our time on general topics rather than the specifics.

Now recite the Twenty One Taras prayer thinking:

May all sentient beings be free of all their unwanted things and may they fulfil all their desirable things.

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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