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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྣམས་གྲོ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།

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To generate the right motivation think: 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I shall attain the full state of enlightenment or Buddhahood, and it is for this reason that I study the stages of the path and put it into practice.'

422.2: The Stages Of The Path Shared By The Person Of Middle Scope¹

སྐྱེས་བུ་འབྲིང་དང་ཐུན་མོང་བའི་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་
'པར་སློབ་སྦྱང་བ།

We now begin teaching on the stages of the path shared by persons of middle scope. A spiritual person of middle scope is defined in Atisha's 'Lamp of the Path' as one who has turned his back on the pleasures of cyclic existence, abandoned evil or unwholesome actions, and who seeks personal peace and happiness.²

The Three Characteristics Of The Person Of Middle Scope

This verse indicates the three characteristics of a person of the middle scope with respect to their:

1. motivation
2. deeds
3. aim or the result being sought.

1. By contemplating the suffering that pervades cyclic existence, ranging from the peak of cyclic existence to the hell realm called 'boundless suffering', a person of the

¹Liberation.. p473 The title used in the text is "Training your mind in the stages of the path shared with the Medium Scope."

²Richard Sherbourne's translation of verses three to five from the *Lamp Of The Path* is:

(Small scope)

One who by every means he finds,
seeks but the pleasure of samsara,
and cares but for himself alone, that one
is known as the inferior person.

(Medium scope)

One who puts life's pleasures behind
and turns himself from deeds of sin,
yet cares only about his own peace,
that person should be called a mediocre.

(Great scope)

One who truly seeks a complete end
to the entire suffering of others because
their suffering belongs to his own (conscious) stream,
that person is a superior.

middle scope realises that no true happiness exists in cyclic existence. Whether it be a rebirth as the Chakravartin being, or as the Universal king such as Indra or Brahma, or even in the form of a dream, cyclic existence offers no true happiness to the person of middle scope. So in terms of motivation we see that the middle scope person is totally detached from the pleasures of cyclic existence.

2. With this understanding, the middle scope person makes every effort to avoid the negative non-virtuous actions from the three doors of body speech and mind.

3. In terms of the aim or fruit, the special characteristic of the person of middle scope is that for their own sake they seek ultimate peace and happiness from the cessation of suffering.

Anyone who possesses all these characteristics or qualifications in terms of motivation, deeds and aim becomes a true follower of the lesser vehicle or Hinayana.

Difference Between Hinayana And Mahayana

In the literal sense, that is in terms of an etymological meaning, a person is called a person of middle scope because they are superior to a person of small scope. They are lower than a person of great scope because they do not have the superior intention which takes on the burden of the welfare of all other beings.

A person of great scope following the great vehicle of Mahayana also follows the stages of the path of the small and middle scope, but does not follow the *actual* path of the small or middle scope, rather such a person of the Mahayana follows a path which is *shared* with persons of small or middle scope.

Put another way the followers of the lesser vehicle or Hinayana, follow the *actual* stages of the small or middle scope path whereas the persons of the great vehicle of Mahayana *share* these same paths with them while differing in their goals. So there is a difference between the *actual* path followed by those of the small scope or the middle scope of the Hinayana vehicle and the path *shared* with followers of the Mahayana vehicle.

In Atisha's *Lamp of the Path* the definitions given are the definitions of the *actual* paths of the small, middle and great scopes. Whereas in the Lam Rim teachings the stages of the path presented is not the actual one, but is the one *shared* with the person of small and middle scope as well. Technically we say those entered into the path of small scope have entered into the *actual* path of Hinayana and

those actually entering into the path of middle scope are also entering into the *actual* lesser vehicle path. The Mahayana practitioner does not enter into the actual path of the small or middle scope since those are paths of the lesser vehicle.

We distinguish between the Hinayana and Mahayana vehicles in terms of motivation, deeds, the fruit or goal that is sought and for which purpose that goal is sought. The difference between Hinayana and Mahayana is known in terms of these four.

In the case of the actual path of middle scope, the path is of the Hinayana or lesser vehicle because:

- the motivation or intention of the follower of that path is limited to renunciation of cyclic existence
- the deeds are not the same as the deeds of the Mahayana path
- the goal or fruit sought by the middle scope person is self liberation
- that goal is sought for their own benefit

For all these reasons it is an inferior path compared to the Mahayana path.

Next week you should discuss (as your compulsory discussion) the quotation from Atisha's 'Lamp to the Path', regarding the definition of a person of the middle scope.

Last time Geshe-la said that the number of people sitting the exam has dropped. This was not meant as a complaint to those not doing the written test. What is most important is that you participate in teachings, discussions and the test night. The most important thing is that you put in an effort to develop your knowledge and practice. Even those who do not wish to do the written test should come on that night to do their own meditation.

The Actual Antidote To Attachment For Cyclic Existence

Student: Of the meditations in middle scope which is the actual antidote to attachment to samsara or cyclic existence?

Geshe-la: This topic will come later. The two major subjects are the four noble truths and the twelve links of interdependent origination.

There are plenty of meditational subjects to overcome attachment to cyclic existence. To make a list, in some texts you can subdivide within the lesser vehicle into different levels, for example:

- middle-small scope person
- middle-middle scope person
- middle-great scope person

The main qualification of a middle scope person is the genuine wish for liberation for one's own benefit. If, out of this wish one were to follow the practices of avoiding the ten non-virtuous actions, this is the middle-small scope person.

If out of the same motivation of renunciation you follow the practice of meditating on the four noble truths each of

which breaks into different aspects³, e.g. suffering impermanence, impurity etc., these all overcome attachment to cyclic existence. This is a middle-middle scope person.

If from this same motivation of renunciation you engage in meditation on the twelve links in terms of the engaging and reversing order of the twelve links, this is a middle-great scope person.

If you engage the entire path in this way, it is the three fold training⁴.

To be specific the meditation to overcome attachment to samsara falls within contemplation of the Truth of Suffering which includes:

- Impermanence
- Misery
- Emptiness
- Selflessness

This meditation falls specifically under the category of meditation on the aspects of impermanence and misery as a characteristic of Truth of Suffering.

Attachment is generated by seeing its object e.g. the body, as being clean and as an object of pleasure or enjoyment. If we contemplate the object as being unclean etc., this also remedies attachment.

Specific Meditations To Overcome Attachment

The more specific meditation would be the one as explained in the Lam Rim teachings in which you mentally imagine the object of attachment, e.g. the body of another person or one's own body. Then imagine that the right hand half of the body is flowing with blood and pus, and the other left half of the body is filled with maggots and other things. In front there is just naked flesh which is rotten and smelly. As one creates such imaginations very strongly in our mind it counters attachment to that body.

Another method is in the Abhidharma text, which suggests that we think of a bone in the centre of our forehead. It is very white in colour and is in shape of half the size of a one cent piece. Focus the mind on it. Then enlarge that bone to encompass the upper half of your body, then all your body, then the nearby ground, then the entire ground. When you have done that then you can dissolve or contract that visualisation. Do this by first contracting the visualisation of the entire ground, which is in the form of bone, to the soles of your feet, then focus on that for a while. Then enlarge it as before, then contract it to the heart in the upper half of your body. Then from the heart of your body contract it to the small size of bone in the centre of your forehead, then maintain your concentration on that in meditational equipoise. At that stage there is not much desire or hatred.

³Liberation.. p476 There are four aspects to each of the four noble truths making sixteen in total:

Truth of suffering: impermanence, suffering, emptiness, selflessness

Truth of source of suffering: cause, source, contributory cause, intense production

Truth of cessation: cessation, peace, splendour, definite outcome

Truth of path: path, correctness, accomplishing, definite deliverance

⁴Higher morality, Higher concentration, Higher wisdom