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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།

4 October 1994

Generate the motivation that "In order to benefit all sentient beings, I must achieve Buddhahood, and for this reason I am listening to and practising the Lam Rim teachings."

Realising That Merely Achieving Higher Rebirth Is Not Enough

Last week we discussed the definition of the stages of path of a middling person. To begin with, remember that the main topics of the stages of the path of the small scope include taking refuge, then following the instructions associated with taking refuge - discarding the ten non-virtues and adopting the ten virtuous actions. So by following the path of the small scope one can be assured freedom from of lower rebirth, or even attaining a higher form of rebirth. But this is not enough.

The reason why it is not sufficient just to prevent lower rebirth is because we are like a criminal facing execution in 30 days. The date of that execution can be postponed, but ultimately that execution will occur. Similarly, even though we now enjoy a higher rebirth, the virtuous karma which caused us to enjoy such a high rebirth will soon run out. Then we shall be born in a lower rebirth.

It is a fact that none of us wishes for a lower rebirth. We prefer to take rebirth in the higher realms. So we have to consider both the causes to prevent lower rebirth, and the causes for higher rebirth. The cause is finding the correct refuge object. But this is not enough. Having found the correct refuge object one must then follow instructions for taking refuge.

The instructions of taking refuge are adopting the ten virtuous actions and discarding the ten non-virtuous actions. By following these instructions one can be certain of avoiding rebirth in the lower realms. Then, at the time of death there will be no reason to feel regret or fear, because one knows that after this life one shall not take rebirth in lower realms. Rather there will be a sense of joy because of anticipation of rebirth in the higher realms

If we contemplate further, we see that is it not enough to be reborn into higher rebirth. It is only a temporary relief from lower rebirth, just like the criminal who gets a temporary stay of execution. So we realise that to be permanently free of suffering we must free ourselves from cyclic existence.

Generating The Wish For A Permanent Cessation Of Suffering

What needs to be done in order to never experience suffering again? One needs to be permanently freed from the bondage of cyclic existence or samsara. Without such a

liberation from cyclic existence, that wish to never experience any future suffering, no matter how small, will not be fulfilled.

Generating The Wish To Achieve Nirvana

In order to achieve permanent state of liberation or nirvana there must be a genuine wish to achieve that state. Therefore one must consider how to cultivate that wish for liberation, for having that wish is entering into stages of path of the middling scope.

Such a wish for liberation does not arise naturally, rather it depends upon a knowledge of the reasons for wishing to achieve such liberation. According to stages of path of middling scope, there are two main teachings which act as causes and conditions to generate that wish:

- a. four noble truths¹
- b. twelve links of dependent arising²

Of course we shall cover these subjects later, but for now you should familiarise yourselves with the names of the four noble truths and the twelve links.

Definitions Of Liberation And Cyclic Existence

To begin the practice of achieving a true wish for liberation, the first thing to be known is the precise definition of 'liberation', for without that knowledge one cannot generate the wish to achieve it.

The term 'liberation' means being liberated or released or freed. There can be many things from which one can be liberated, but here liberation means freedom or release from bondage. To see this clearly, one must first understand that achieving liberation is like being tied with rope or chain to a pole, then being released. In this way karma and kleshas (mental delusions) are the chains of bondage. The contaminated aggregates, with which we are afflicted, and which cause us to be born again and again, are like the pole. Therefore liberation means being free or liberated from the bondage of contaminated aggregates.

In terms of places or realms where we take rebirth, there are

¹The four are:

Truth of suffering, truth of cause of suffering, truth of cessation of suffering, truth of path

²The twelve are:

Ignorance, karmic formations, consciousness, name and form, six sense powers, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, existence, rebirth, aging and death,

three realms³. In terms of forms of life or migrations in which we take rebirth, there are five or six⁴. If we count the god and demi-god realms as one level of godly beings there are five levels. However if we count the demi-god level separately from level of gods, there are six levels.

There are four ways in which we born into any of the three realms⁵:

1. born from mother's womb
2. born from an egg
3. born from heat and warmth
4. born miraculously

Unless one cuts the continuation of the contaminated aggregates there is no end to samsara or cyclic existence. Such a severance depends upon uprooting karma and delusions.

So achieving liberation is being liberated from unending cycle of birth due to the force of karma and mental delusions. Another view of liberation is by seeing it as freedom from the contaminated aggregates which are samsara.

In addition to this teaching you must also refer to other commentaries so that you will have a better understanding.

Just to refresh your minds, the main object of abandonment of the person of small scope is attachment to this life. Whereas attachment to future pleasure is main object of abandonment for a person of middling scope.

Thursday Night Meditations

Next week the study group practice night meditations will begin. Geshe-la has already instructed Kaye that on these nights you are to do Guru Shakyamuni Buddha meditation in conjunction with nectar purification. She can write this down and make a copy for everyone.

Visualise Guru Shakyamuni Buddha then take refuge and generate bodhichitta, then do a visualisation of nectar purification. This year for the reading part, there will be two groups - one reciting and one listening to the *Foundation Of All Excellence* prayer. As you will also take it in turns to recite *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way Of Life* you are doing something extra this year. The *Foundation Of All Excellence*

³The desire, form and formless realms

⁴The six are:

Hell, preta, animal, human, demi-god and god

⁵Geshe Dawö in his teachings on the Twelve links on 27/10/82 gave this brief summary of the four types of rebirth:

1. Taking birth from the womb: most humans are born this way.
2. Taking birth from egg: for example of the sixteen arhats two were born from crane's eggs.
3. Taking rebirth from heat and moisture: This occurs when something is born without depending on the productive seed of the parents, eg a famous king, Narlingdsu, was born in this way.
4. Taking rebirth spontaneously (miraculously): The men of the first aeon were born in this way.

All four types of rebirth occur in the human realm and the animal realm. Spontaneous alone occurs in the god realm. Spontaneous and womb occur in the preta realm. Spontaneous alone for the intermediate state being.

More detail on this can be found in *The Sutra On Entering The Womb* and also in tantra.

prayer is a condensed version of the stages of the path. It is instructed to either recite each verse twice, or after first recitation take a little time before reciting the next verse. Or you can recite the verses very slowly.

In the first recitation of the first verse contemplate that one gets rid of all negativities associated with one's guru, eg not fulfilling the guru's wishes. Then repeat the first verse, thinking that "I have purified the negativities and now I receive the blessings from the gurus which leads me to experience spiritual realisations."

Upon completing the recitation and meditations to go with the verses of the *Foundation Of All Excellence* you dissolve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha into yourself. Then once again think that you receive full blessings of guru's body, speech and mind. Sit in that state for a few minutes before reciting *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way Of Life*.

These instructions are only for study group members. For others who join the meditations we need to make an advertisement to put on the notice board. It should include a drawing of someone in meditation posture.

The Four Ways Of Rebirth

Student 1: Could Geshe-la explain more about the four ways of being born and relate that to the realms in which each occurs

Geshe-la: Hell is a miraculous birth, as is a golden rebirth. Miraculous is like being born in a lotus. They are born complete and not stage by stage. For instance a bardo being is born instantly, like a lotus it opens immediately. Miraculous birth is the best and most enjoyable one.

Being born from the womb involves suffering and pain.

Birth from heat refers to heat from the body. This can cause birth. From the scientific viewpoint the child born from a womb is also born from an egg. Not all eggs are eggs as referred to in the above four manners of rebirth.

When humans first evolved they were born miraculously and not from a womb. Some humans were born from eggs (and miraculously). It is possible in very early times some very large birds in union with humans gave rise to an egg which gave birth to a human. It may be that this is possible.

Geshe-la heard last month of twins born being from same mother but different father - one was white and the other was black. This also confirms that it is said of the composites of human body the flesh and skin mainly comes from father's side, whereas the bones and marrow comes from mother's side.

Student 2: If born in god realms are they more or less likely to study dharma?

Geshe-la: In terms of the cycle of times there can be a time when being born in godly realms you are more likely to meet dharma than in other realms. But generally one is less likely to meet dharma than in the human realm, because the human realm brings certain types of life experiences. These experiences easily bring about realisations of the truth of life eg the nature of all existence is suffering, so it is easy to generate renunciation. Whereas in godly realms, due to there being so much pleasure, it is not easy to think of dharma.