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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལོ་ལྟོ་སྐོར་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལོ་ལྟོ་སྐོར་

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As usual let us begin by developing the correct motivation.

Thus far we have learnt that in order to feel a repulsion towards cyclic existence, we must see all the faults of the cyclic existence through meditation. This meditation, concerning contemplation on the various faults of cyclic existence, falls into two subjects:

1. Four noble truths
2. Twelve links or twelve dependent originations.

Four Noble Truths

To start with subject of four noble truths.

Their Order Of Presentation

There are two orders in which the four noble truths can be presented.

1. Order in terms of **cause and effect** of the four noble truths: the truth of origin of suffering is the cause, so it comes before the truth of suffering. Similarly the truth of path is the cause of cessation, and thus comes before the truth of cessation.

Therefore the order of the four noble truths in terms of cause and effect:

- i. the truth of origin or source of suffering which are mainly two - karmic source and afflictions source
- ii. the truth of suffering
- iii. the truth of path
- iv. the truth of cessation

2. The order which accords with the **practice on the path**:

This is the order of the four noble truths as they were taught by Buddha. The order is:

- i. truth of suffering
- ii. the truth of origin
- iii. the truth of cessation
- iv. the truth of path.

The reason why the four noble truths are taught in this order is because it is effective for training practitioners on the path. This will be covered again later but briefly the reason why this order is suitable for training is as

follows. The noble truth of suffering is taught first because it is essential to recognise suffering very clearly and having a strong wish to eliminate it is very important. Without a strong desire to be free of suffering there will not be any exertion to removing the causes of this suffering. On the other hand there will be a great effort to remove the causes of suffering if there is a strong wish to be free of suffering. With a strong wish to attain liberation one will make greater effort on the path to cessation of suffering.

The four noble truths are a very fundamental topic for those who seek liberation in terms of what they should adopt and what they should discard.

Regarding the order in which the four noble truths are taught, Maitreya said in his text *Uttara Tantra, The Sublime Continuum*:

"Know the suffering and abandon the cause"

In this text when Maitreya said that we should know the sickness then abandon the cause, and rely upon the medicine for recovery¹, he is using the analogy of a patient being cured of a sickness. This analogy shows very clearly why this order in which the four noble truths are taught is very suitable for practice. The patient has to identify his or her disease or sickness first, and then has to make an effort to cure that sickness. The way to cure it is to rely upon medicine, and the result of relying upon medicine is recovering from the sickness.

We should first of all recognise suffering as being like a disease, then identify its cause and think of removing it. The cause of the suffering which we want to remove is the truth of origin. The state of having completely removed the cause or origin of suffering completely is the truth of cessation. For this we need to have the aspiration or wish to attain the cessation of suffering. Since the fulfilment of that aspiration to attain the truth

¹Liberation.. p476:

The illness is to be diagnosed,
Its cause is to be abandoned,
Health is to be achieved,
The medicine is to be relied on.
Likewise, suffering, its cause,
Cessation, and path are to be
Diagnosed, abandoned,
Reached, and relied upon.

of cessation is the path, we see the need to follow the truth of the path.

This is a brief explanation of the order in which the four noble truths are taught.

Cultivating A Genuine Aspiration For Liberation

For the cultivation of a genuine wish to attain liberation, it is said that there are two possibilities which depend upon one's faculties or intelligence.

Those gifted with sharp faculties realise ultimate truth or emptiness prior to generating the aspiration to liberation. This is because those with such a sharp intellect either accept or reject ideas based upon their understanding. Therefore unless they have actual cognition of emptiness, or at least some gross cognition of emptiness roughly they cannot produce the genuine wish to seek liberation.²

For those with lesser intelligence there will not be a realisation of emptiness or a gross understanding of emptiness, prior to generating the aspiration to liberation. For these others with lesser faculties, reason is not so important. Without a prior understanding of emptiness they can still base a wish to achieve liberation upon their faith. Therefore those with lesser faculty do not necessarily have to understand emptiness before developing the wish to obtain liberation.

How Does Realisation Of Emptiness Help Develop A Wish For Liberation?

Gyaltsab Je's commentary to Maitreya's text uses the example of a painful headache in which instance the actual pain or suffering is seen as the truth of suffering. How does this suffering come about? It comes about as a result of karma having been created. Furthermore the karma one has created is motivated by some form of affliction. What is that affliction? In this manner if one traces the cause of the suffering to the root, the root cause of the suffering is the subtle misconception with regard to ultimate reality. This subtle misconception is the misapprehension of the self as being truly existent. So as one analyses this ignorance, which misconceives the mode of existence of self, one realises this way of conceiving the mode of existence of self is wrong. In this way one disproves the object of this misconception. In this way those with sharp faculties realise the truth of suffering, its cause, then the final termination of that cause, so that they then seek liberation. Cultivating the aspiration to liberation is one of the most important parts in the stages of the path of middle scope.

In order to uproot the cause of suffering one needs to eliminate the ignorance of misconceiving the mode of existence of self. The direct remedy to that ignorance is the realisation of emptiness. So you can see how it is important to at least have some theoretical

understanding of emptiness.

Realising Emptiness By The Threefold Training

One very important method of developing this realisation is achieving the state of single-pointed concentration. To achieve that state of single-pointed concentration one needs to live a life of pure morality or ethics. This shows us the importance of the threefold training. One needs to depend upon this training in wisdom, ethics and concentration to fully realise ultimate truth of emptiness, the realisation of which can directly counter ignorance which is the root cause of all suffering.

Here is an example to understand the role of the threefold training to aid in realising emptiness. To see an object clearly it is important that your eyesight has no defects, and the object of that eyesight is close enough and not moving. The actual thing which looks at that object is the eye. However the clarity with which that object is seen depends on other factors. If for example that object must be brought close to the eye to be seen, then the hand or arm are involved. However if the hand or arm is not strong it will shake, and so effect the sight of the eye. That actual object is likened to the truth of emptiness. The eye that perceives the object is the wisdom realising emptiness which is the training of wisdom. The strong healthy arm holding the object without moving is the training of morality. The hand which brings the object closer to the eye is the training of concentration.

Morality As A Prerequisite To Meditation

Student 2: Of the six opponent powers one is meditation on emptiness, and yet pure ethics are required prior to realising emptiness so how can one purify without first practising pure ethics?

Geshe-la: Without basis of pure morality, let alone realise emptiness, you cannot even maintain concentration in meditation. The practice of ethics or morality helps ones mind to abide within us. That is why it is said that the training of moral ethics is like the foundation for training in concentration. The fact that when we engage in meditation and our mind wanders all over the place without staying on the object indicates the weakness of our morality.

It is said in one text:

Morality is the basis for all moving and non moving things.

The "basis" is like the ground or the surface of the earth which is the support for all "moving" which refers to animate beings and "non moving things" which refers to the environment where these animate beings live. The start of all spiritual realisations can occur only if there is a good foundation of training in moral ethics.

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²This material was derived from Geshela's answer to a question, and was placed in the body of the text in the interests of clarity.