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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅངས།

29 November 1994

Try to reinforce your motivation of bodhicitta by thinking that you are listening to teachings on the Lam Rim and that by following this practice you will attain the perfect state of enlightenment for all sentient beings.

Faults Of Cyclic Existence (cont.)

Generating Renunciation And The Aspiration For Liberation

In the stages of the path of the person of middle scope the main practice is to overcome attachment towards the pleasures of cyclic existence, by generating some feeling of disgust towards the pleasures of cyclic existence. In this way one cultivates an aspiration for liberation from cyclic existence, and to be successful in this practice one has to see every fault of cyclic existence.

We have been discussing a classification based on six faults of cyclic existence. We have so far discussed the first two faults of cyclic existence - the faults of uncertainty and lack of satisfaction. It is important that as one develops theoretical knowledge of cyclic existence, one becomes more truly aware of the existence of these faults in daily life. Not just theoretical understanding is needed. If we absorb this understanding into our hearts, it will have some effect on our perception of the real situations of cyclic existence that we experience in our daily life, such as the uncertainty of friendships, relationships or wealth. A lot of us continually undergo suffering, some sort of misery or carry some sadness in the mind because of separation from a friend you like, or not finding the one you want. Experiencing such situations brings misery and suffering in our life. However if we take these teachings on the faults of cyclic existence to heart then experiencing such situations will generate feelings of disgust towards cyclic existence. We understand how unreliable or uncertain are our relationships, our positions, and our wealth or financial status. As a result we realise that within cyclic existence there is nothing which is sustaining. There are many things which are seemingly a source of pleasure and happiness, but in the end are of no benefit.

Therefore for the spiritual practitioner these very adverse situations of cyclic existence strengthen their belief and commitment to follow the spiritual path. As a result of facing such difficulties they decide to lead a celibate life and can even attain full enlightenment in this very

lifetime. Therefore if we put this teaching into practice, then even the very adverse circumstances which we face instead of simply causing, serving as a cause for suffering, they can be a cause to enhance our spiritual potential. They can generate a sense of renunciation and thereby a genuine aspiration to liberation.

So it is important when we learn about faults of cyclic existence that we assess the benefits of our learning in terms of it helping or encouraging us to overcome attachment to the temporary pleasures of this life. In other words learning of faults of cyclic existence counteracts attachment to this life. If we overcome attachment to this life then naturally we can seek the goal of a future life, and then the spiritual goal of liberation.

It is best is to understand this teaching in the context of one's own life experience then it is not something very difficult to comprehend. After all, we are always thinking about our life and its problems. So if we should use that interest in meditating, contemplating or reflecting on one's own current or past situation, we should try to see that situation from the point of view of the teachings on the faults of cyclic existence i.e. the faults of uncertainty and never being fully satisfied. As a result we shall clearly understand from the teaching how we undergo suffering as a result of having attachment to one's body, possessions and friends. This shows that all the suffering we experience now and in the past is because of not being able to overcome or break attachment to the various objects of cyclic existence.

We have to consider in what way this meditation on the faults of cyclic existence will change our life. It is supposed to bring more happiness into our life. This happiness is either physical or mental and if we examine them, we see that the mental happiness is more important than the physical happiness. For example think of someone deprived of all physical pleasures that can be obtained; deprived of food and drink, with not even enough resources to have a meal a day. Nevertheless he or she can mentally live a happy, contented life. For that person the lack of enough material support is not a concern. Although that person lacks material comfort, they still have mental comfort. On the other hand someone having all the material

comforts imaginable may still be very restless mentally. So for that person the material comfort does not bring happiness or comfort at all.

Therefore the experience of our mind is very important, because without happiness in the mind nothing else can offer happiness. If we absorb this teaching into our practice it can help to bring more peace, satisfaction and happiness in our lives because it can influence our way of thinking. Consider our thinking about relationships. If the relationship is very healthy it is important not to have very strong attachment to it, and also to remember that it is subject to change. With this awareness of uncertainty and the lack of satisfaction, then when later confronted with change your attachment will be reduced at that time. However if you hold that relationship with strong attachment it is hard to overcome desire or attachment to that relationship, even when something goes wrong in the relationship. Despite the barrier that emerges when the relationship breaks up, there is still attachment in one's mind and so one mentally views the other person as before. This can bring a lot of suffering to the mind. This suffering, then, is the direct outcome of the disease of desire or attachment.

422.211.3: Fault Of Repeatedly Leaving The Body¹

ལྷན་ཡང་ནས་ཡང་དུ་འདོར་བའི་ཉེས་པ།

When the time of death comes we have no choice - we must leave this body. Even if we wanted we cannot have the same body all the time. As we go through the cycle of birth and death we must change body again and again. This is regarded as a type of fault of the suffering of cyclic existence.

We stop the teaching here and, as usual, we will recite the Heart Sutra.

Living In Relationships Without Attachment

Student 1: Does living in relationships without attachment mean to become very aloof or distant? It can seem to the other that you do not care. This aloofness may cause even more problems in the relationship rather than less. How is this dilemma resolved?

Geshe-la: It is extremely difficult to completely overcome attachment. We must be careful in our practice of overcoming attachment because attachment must be removed from our mind. Sometimes deep down in our mind there is still attachment which is untouched but outwardly, physically we try to isolate or distance ourselves from the other person in such a way that it causes annoyance. This causes problems in relationships, and is also dishonest because it is pretending that you do not have attachment. Having less attachment does not mean showing less care or love to another person.

Therefore the best thing which can strengthen a relationship and cause mutual benefit is to develop love for one another.

Some have problems because the person with whom they are having relationship is too attached, and they find this difficult. Whereas others say they enjoy relationship with a given person because there is not much attachment to the other person.

We must also be careful with our mannerisms. For example someone offers you a meal, and instead of saying 'No thank you I am full' you make a horrified gesture or just grunt. It is not good manners to react like this to the hospitality of others and is very annoying. Such little things can cause problems.

Meditating Upon One's Own Suffering

Student 2: Some people say that it is very depressing to meditate upon ones suffering. What is a good way to meditate on one's suffering?

Geshela: The way of meditating that is suitable depends upon scope of mind of the practitioner. As you said, for some people, especially the beginner, recollecting the various problems undergone in the past or even current problems is very difficult and painful. Some people cannot cope with the experience and that is not good. For others with a background in spiritual knowledge, reflecting upon past or present suffering can strengthen conviction and generate renunciation, and by reflecting on the suffering of other sentient beings you can generate compassion towards them.

In general when we meditate on the truth of suffering we think of future suffering - the suffering which you have the potential to experience in the future. If you reflect on those future sufferings, you realise you cannot tolerate them, so you generate a strong wish to avoid it. Out of this strong wish to be free you then look for a cause to overcome that suffering. So such a meditation is very effective in encouraging our spiritual practice.

Also you contemplate the suffering of other beings and cultivate compassion or a thought of helping them out of their suffering. It is not just reflecting upon your own or the suffering of others which can enhance your spiritual potential, but rather the way in which we reflect upon that suffering. If we observe our own or the suffering of others from the point of view of the law of karma we shall cultivate spiritual knowledge out of that reflection. By understanding law of karma everything we see with our eyes can be integrated as part of our spiritual practice. Otherwise after going to the zoo and seeing miserable and tortured animals locked in cages, they come home and feel the same. They feel disturbed and they lose the meaning of their own lives . So in that case observing suffering has not helped at all. Whereas if we go to the zoo with an understanding of the law of karma, when we come home we think how wonderful it is that we are born as a human being with good living

¹ *Liberation In The Palm..* p. 480. The title used in the text is "The bane of repeatedly leaving bodies."

conditions. Through our knowledge of the law of karma we recognise that this results from causes which have been created in the past. But also there is no certainty that in the future you will not be one of those animals. Therefore you can develop your spiritual practice and potential by reflecting on what we see in life.

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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