

Study Group - “Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*”  
A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga  
Translated by Samdup Tsering



ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལོ་ལོ་བཅའ་བུ་བཅུ་དཔལ་

4 April 1995

**Generation Of Bodhicitta**

Whenever we engage in spiritual activities there are two things to remember. One is to generate the right motivation at the beginning, and the other is to dedicate merit to the right cause at the end.

We should make sure that our motivation for studying and practising Lam Rim is the right one. Our motivation should be the motivation of the Mahayana. It should not contain any desire to obtain wealth and possessions in this life; nor the desire for a better life in the future; nor should there be the desire for any goal which is merely for our own sake. Rather your motivation should be that you are studying and practising Lam Rim to achieve the fully enlightened state of buddhahood for the sake of all beings.

**The Importance Of The Correct Motivation**

If our motivation for practising Dharma is for wealth, possessions or fame in this life, it clearly shows our mind is very attracted to this life. If this is the case, our spiritual practice will not help to overcome that attachment, nor will it help us to minimise mental delusions. Rather those mental delusions will increase since our spiritual practice is in pursuit of mundane goals, and it will not help to subdue our mental continuum.

The aim of our spiritual practice may be to attain the state of a human or godly being in next rebirth. This is, of course, possible, but there are sufferings to be experienced there. Also that higher status of human or godly being is not a permanent state, and soon we shall fall down to the lower realms again. We cannot deny that practising with the intent of attaining higher rebirth is pure Dharma, but the scope of such a motivation is very narrow, and it is not worthwhile to pursue that goal of higher rebirth in samsara.

Not only that, but to even to seek personal liberation is not the right motivation. We might attain the state of personal liberation in which we have abandoned all mental delusions, but this does not mean that we have reached the perfection of our own self. Because we have not reached the final goal of the perfection of our own self, we cannot extensively serve other beings. Therefore it is instructed that we should generate the wish of bodhicitta to attain full enlightenment for the sake of all

beings. Reaching that full state of enlightenment not only fulfils the entire purpose of oneself, but also benefits other beings.

**422.212: The Specific Sufferings Of Samsara**

སོ་སོའི་སྤྱད་བསྐྱེད་བསམ་པ།

Having finished the general sufferings or faults of cyclic existence we now study the specific sufferings of cyclic existence. The specific sufferings of cyclic existence has three sections:

1. Thinking of the sufferings of bad migrations, or lower rebirth
2. Thinking about the sufferings of the upper realms has two subdivisions:
  1. Thinking of the sufferings of humans
  2. Thinking about the suffering of the godly beings

**422.212.1: Thinking About The Sufferings In The Lower Realms**

ངན་འགྲོའི་སྤྱད་བསྐྱེད་བསམ་པ།

The first section of thinking of the sufferings of the bad migrations has already been elaborated in the path of lower scope person. Someone recovering from the disease of alcoholism can have such a strong aversion for drink that even the smell of alcohol would be repulsive and make them very sick. Similarly, after contemplating the sufferings of a lower rebirth, we become completely repulsed by the thought of being reborn there. In following the path of the lower scope, by abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions, we see that a higher rebirth is possible.

**422.212.2: Thinking About The Sufferings Of The Upper Realms**

བདེ་འགྲོའི་སྤྱད་བསྐྱེད་བསམ་པ།

This topic has two subdivisions:

1. Thinking about the specific sufferings of humans:
2. Thinking about the suffering of the gods

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## 422.212.21: Thinking About The Specific Suffering Of Humans

མིའི་སྐྱབས་བཞུགས་བསམ་པ།

You should ask yourself whether by taking higher rebirths you are free from suffering. The answer is no, because you are still prone to the suffering of that higher rebirth. So it is wrong to think that by being born in higher rebirths of cyclic existence that there will be less suffering. In the life story of Lord Buddha himself, he saw the suffering of old age, sickness and death, after which he renounced the householder's life and pursued the path of liberation.

So, as the text continues, we must be aware of all the suffering which exists in this human realm. Thinking of this suffering is not intended to add more suffering to our lives. Rather the purpose of such contemplation is to develop renunciation towards this human life within cyclic existence. If we trace the root cause of suffering in human life, it is the ignorance of ultimate reality; the ignorance of self grasping at inherent existence. But on the surface the immediate cause of our suffering, restlessness, disappointment and discontent is attachment to the seemingly attractiveness and beauty of cyclic existence.

This topic of thinking about the specific sufferings of humans has seven subdivisions.

### 422.212.211: The Suffering Of Birth

སྐྱེ་བའི་སྐྱབས་བཞུགས་བསམ་པ།

The first of the specific sufferings of human beings is the suffering of birth. We shall only deal with this briefly as the text gives a very clear description. One master said, "I am not frightened of death, I am frightened of birth". This is because the moment birth begins is also the beginning of the various forms of suffering. We cannot remember anything of our birth but that does not mean that we did not undergo suffering. It is said that the experience of being in the mother's womb is like being put in an iron vase filled with filth, and then having the lid tightly closed, for between nine and ten months. There is a lot of proof that what the mother does will affect the child. If what she drinks is too hot or cold it affects the child. If she engages in physical exercise the child will feel the movement. Although we do not remember these events now, whenever we take rebirth from the womb<sup>1</sup> we must experience these sufferings again. Likewise when we exit from the womb, that too is not pleasant. Our first response is to cry and our body is

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<sup>1</sup>Editor: There are four ways in which rebirth can occur: from an egg, a womb, heat and moisture, and miraculously. Here Geshe-la is only referring to the sufferings of taking birth from the womb since humans are generally born from the womb. In the times when we were born in other ways we encountered the various sufferings peculiar to those types of taking rebirth.

so sensitive that even being wrapped in soft cloth is like being wrapped in hot iron.

The reason why we have to take rebirth, why we have to undergo such experiences of suffering from that moment, and why it is all pervaded with suffering, is because the process of taking rebirth is all due to the force of our karma and mental delusions. So all these sufferings from the moment of birth are inevitable every time we are reborn, and only permanent freedom from cyclic existence can free us from these sufferings.

### Making Meditation A Personal Experience

The manner of contemplating this suffering of birth, for example, should not be like watching a play involving other people. Rather in our contemplations we have to feel that unless we permanently free ourselves from cyclic existence we shall personally experience these sufferings, and they will become our experience of life. In this way we can generate a sense of fear of taking rebirth, and so arouse some thought of seeking a permanent state of liberation, and some sense of renunciation towards cyclic existence.

You should read the sections on this topic in the text. It is very clear. Whatever you do, whether meditating or reading on the subject, try to make your practice a means of generating a sense of renunciation, or a sense of repulsiveness to being born in cyclic existence. Having cultivated this renunciation, one will then seek liberation. Then because one seeks liberation one will follow the path of the threefold training of morality, concentration and wisdom.

### 422.212.212: The Suffering Of Ageing

ན་བའི་སྐྱབས་བཞུགས་བསམ་པ།

After birth the suffering does not stop. The body one has attained does not remain the same—it changes. It undergoes a process of disintegration or ageing moment by moment. Gradually this body which was once youthful, full of strength and beauty will become frail, unattractive and lose strength. These changes can become a source of various types of suffering eg, mental suffering, particularly if someone is very attached to the look of their body. If they were very beautiful when young, and in later years see an elderly face in the mirror they feel very sad, and suffer, all because of changes in their body.

We cannot prevent the natural ageing of the body but to some extent we can minimise the mental problems which we experience with ageing and the resulting changes to our body. There are some who are more accepting of their looks as they age. Even though their body looks old it does not disturb their mind. Our body is subject to change due to both this natural force of ageing and various unpredictable conditions. We have no choice—we must put up with various sufferings caused by ageing.

Our contemplations on the suffering of cyclic existence

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should cause us to follow the Dharma practice with some sense of urgency. On taking rebirth the suffering of birth is followed by the suffering of ageing. As you grow older your body declines in outer looks, strength, function of organs and faculties, and response to sensual pleasure. Your life-span is constantly decreasing.

Everyone who takes birth is subject to ageing. No-one escapes the suffering it brings. Even the young and beautiful will experience it. So there is no point of being too attached to your fit and beautiful body. It will inevitably decline, so it is better to have less attachment to the beauty of the body. There are some who are reputed to be able to run hundreds and hundreds of kilometres, but when they become old they can hardly walk for a few steps, or even stand, or sit down.

Whose fault is it that our body suffers such changes? It is the fault of being born in cyclic existence. And why is one born in cyclic existence? It is because of karma and mental delusions. Of these two main causes the main one is the mental delusions which cause us to create karma. To be more precise, it is the ignorance of self grasping which is the root cause, and the antidote to that is the wisdom realising emptiness. To generate that wisdom which realises emptiness one requires stable single pointed concentration. To generate single pointed concentration you need to train the mind in ethics. So we need to follow the pure Dharma practice of morality.

From the text we gain a clear knowledge of subject of the teaching, but when we engage in meditation we must know how to combine the elements of our knowledge so as to produce a strong drive to achieve spiritual goals, and actually change one's way of thinking and whole view of life. Thus when contemplating the suffering of ageing, of course we have to think of all the sufferings of old age, but eventually this can be linked to the twelve links, then progressively linked to the entire stages of the path up to the state of buddhahood. If you want to combine the teachings with your meditation practice there is no lack of material upon which to meditate. If the suffering of ageing is the main subject, it provides a lot to meditate upon.

This finishes the first block of teachings. Next week is discussion night. So prepare for that and share your knowledge with others. The night after that will be the written test. This gives an opportunity to do self study and put pen to paper. The skill of writing is a useful thing to have. Those who do not want to write the test must still attend but do their own meditation.

The compulsory test question will be related to the short beginning talk on the motivation of bodhicitta. "Why do we need the motivation of bodhicitta when engaging in Mahayana practice? Why are forms of motivation other than bodhicitta not suitable for practising Mahayana?"

We shall recite the Twenty-one Tara's praise. This prayer is said so that all of us will meet all suitable condition of Dharma practice and be free of all obstacles. Also dedicate some prayers to those who are ill, for their

quick recovery and long life.

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**Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.**

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*The original typescript is prepared from Alan Molloy's original transcript, which has been checked against Damien Busby's notes. Adair Bunnnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.*

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