

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



འདྲེན་པ་སྒྲིལ་བའི་ལྷན་སྒྲིལ་བའི་བཅའ་བློན་པོ་འགྲུབ་པའི་གྲྭ་པ་མཆོག་གི་སྒྲུབ་པ་

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The visualisation of Shakyamuni Buddha is a suitable practice for meditation. If you feel uncomfortable visualising on the crown of your head then you can visualise the image in front of yourself. If you choose to have it above your head, the base of the visualisation should be about 15 cm (6 inches) above your crown¹, and the object should not be very large. With improvement in your visualisation skills, a large size can make you feel uncomfortable (due to its weight). So visualise the object in a small size. Also, use the same size, colour and all the features of the object whenever you engage in this type of meditation. This is important, so that calm abiding can be cultivated more quickly.

Now generate the proper motivation for listening to the teachings.

We have been discussing the sufferings of human beings in terms of the four types of suffering: birth, sickness, ageing and death. As discussed last week, it is important to know the reasons for meditating on suffering and how this meditation can be put into practice. Having finished the sufferings of birth, ageing and sickness, the next is death.

422.212.214: The Suffering Of Death²

འཛིན་བའི་སྤྲུལ་བའི་སྤྲུལ་བའི་ལུས་པ།

At this point we should recall the teachings on death and impermanence which we covered in earlier teachings. The main fact is that none of us can do anything to prevent death. However we have the capacity to prevent unwanted experiences at the time of death. We can prepare ourselves now so that at the time of death nothing will frighten or worry our mind, and the moment of death will be very calm and peaceful.

Preparing For Death

Just as we prepare in order to accomplish daily activities, so there are certain things that can be prepared before

death comes. These include getting our mind used to wholesome ways of thinking, or in other words getting our mind used to virtue. Because, if at the time of death we cultivate a very positive state of mind, then death is not terrifying, and our future destiny is not unpredictable and frightening.

The great Lama Langdo Rinpoche said:

Death for me is like changing this very old body, which is old in the morning, to a divine body in the afternoon.³

To a person used to virtue or spiritual practice, death is a matter of leaving this old body to attain a new one. It is not something very unwelcome or frightening. The experience of death, for the very advanced spiritual practitioner, is very joyful. For a medium practitioner there is no feeling of nervousness or reluctance. Lastly, for the lower level spiritual practitioner death is not something regrettable.

One of our main challenges as spiritual practitioners is death. Meeting that challenge is a matter of familiarising the mind with virtuous practice and positive ways of thinking. Virtuous practice does not come naturally and at the time of death it is even more difficult to generate a virtuous state of mind. So it is important to cultivate a virtuous mind now. If through your practice, your mind becomes very familiar with virtue now, then at the time of death, cultivating that virtuous state of mind is only a matter of having the motivation to do so.

Therefore it is important to know how to integrate this study on death into our own practice so as to encourage our spiritual development. Performing the Guru Shakyamuni Buddha meditation at the time of death would ensure a very peaceful death, and a better future. So you can see the benefit of becoming familiar with this meditation now.

Why Does Fear Arise At The Time Of Death?

Fear arises at the time of death because of being separated from all those things to which you are very attached – your body, possessions, close relatives, friends, followers

¹ During the teaching Geshe-la actually gave the following illustration of how far the visualisation should be above the crown of your head. He made a fist with the thumb stretched upwards. This is about 15 cm or 6 inches.

² “Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand”, page 492

³ Page 342, *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand*

or students, and any other pleasant objects. Most of our fear is all because of our attachment to all these desirable things. There is also fear because of physical pain. Of all these reasons, the main reason for fear is of the mind being parted from this body. That separation of the mind from the body is the literal point of death. Without this attachment to the body there is no reason to be scared of leaving it.

How can this fear of death be utilised?

Unless we do something about it, death is not something we look forward to. It is quite natural for us to feel unhappy if we think of death now, because it entails permanent separation from all the desired objects to which we are attached.

Those not following a spiritual practice either do not think of death at all, or if they do, they just experience fear. For a spiritual practitioner however, that fear causes them to search for what will help at the time of death. The things that will fail to be of benefit are worldly things like wealth, friends, relatives and possessions. The spiritual practitioner realises that the only thing that can help is spiritual practice.

Therefore for a spiritual practitioner, thinking of death now, or reflecting on this fear of death, can stimulate them to practise now. It can also help them gain a deeper understanding of life, and the impermanence of all the things around them now. Thus attachment to those things is minimised.

If at the time of death one thinks of worldly things that are attractive, attachment is generated, and there are other objects which generate hatred. If, at the time of death the mind is allowed to wander in those directions of desire and hatred it becomes very unstable. So it is important to train the mind in meditation now, to cut off from all those objects that generate desire and hatred, and to focus on virtuous objects that enhance inner peace. Then, at the time of death we can focus the mind on virtuous objects, and completely stop all other thoughts from arising.

If we have taken this life due to the force of karma and delusions then death is unavoidable. Nothing in this world including our body, possessions and friends can be of help at the time of death, so there is no point in pursuing and grasping at those things. Realising the true insignificance of all those worldly objects, one generates a sense of disgust towards them. That sense of disgust towards samsara is the main cause leading to the state of liberation.

The sense of renunciation is very important to cultivate, and if all our spiritual practice is performed within the force of this sense of renunciation, then our practice becomes a true cause to attain liberation. From this point of view talking about death is not just to frighten us. Rather it is to lead us to a state of liberation – the state beyond life and death.

Now we are going to roll some mantras, but before that we shall recite the Heart Sutra.

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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