Study Group - "Liberation *in the* Palm *of* Your Hand" A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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Try to reinforce the right motivation.

422.212.23: The Sufferings Of The Gods

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In the preceding teachings we discussed the human and demigod forms of life, and the results of obtaining both of them. We have learnt that the lives of both humans and demigods are subject to continual suffering.

We might think that being born in the godly realms would be fine, believing that in the godly realms there is only pleasure and happiness. But on examination, the gods also experience suffering. Therefore there is suffering, no matter which of the three realms of cyclic existence (desire, form and formless) you are born into, or whatever form of samsaric life you take.

Our subject at present is the suffering of the godly beings. This mainly concerns the gods of the desire realms, since it is said that there are higher gods living in both the form and formless realms. There are seventeen levels of form realm gods. With respect to the gods of the formless realms, they have no form as such so there is no specific area or place where we can find them. For instance there may be many formless gods in this very hall since they do not depend on any form.

As mentioned before, as long as one is not free from a life basis within cyclic existence, then no matter where one is born, the same life of suffering will continue. Leaving one life's body is no more than exchanging it for another body which also has the nature of suffering. And so we go on round and round in this cyclic existence of suffering.

As to the sufferings being experienced by the godly beings, there is the suffering of death, feeling discouraged, the suffering of fear and even some physical pain.

The Lack Of Essence In Samsaric Life

Through realising the suffering nature of the samsaric form of life, whether it be a human or godly form, the lack of essence in the samsaric form of life will be obvious. So because we are attached to this samsaric form of life, and because of our lack of understanding that samsaric life has no true essence, we create throwing karma. This in turn maintains our continuation in cyclic existence.

If, on the other hand, we thoroughly reflect on the suffering nature of all forms of samsaric life, then we shall generate some degree of renunciation to this life and so stop creating throwing karma. That is, we would stop creating the causes to return to this form of existence again. As long as we create the karma, we are bound to this samsaric form of life. Under the control of our own karma we take a samsaric form of life: where only suffering exists, there being no true happiness or freedom. Realising this, any spiritual practice should reinforce the understanding that there is no true happiness anywhere in this cyclic existence.

Thus a sense renunciation of all realms of cyclic existence generates the motivation to free oneself from that existence. Since the cause of taking continuous rebirth in cyclic existence is karma and mental delusions, we should always generate the motivation to counteract them with a clear knowledge of why they must be counteracted: they are clearly the source of all past suffering, and if they are not counteracted will be the source of all future suffering. With this motivation any practise is completed with a true wish to attain liberation. In this way, with continuous effort there is progress in terms of enhanced inner peace and happiness, while at the same time breaking out of the cycle of birth in samsara.

The Source Of Suffering

It is important to know the various types of suffering that exist within cyclic existence. For example, knowing that the realm of the gods also has many sufferings will naturally change any desire to go there. We have to go deeper to fully know that samsaric existence is pervaded with suffering, because we usually make our judgements on the surface or face value. At first glance, the place where the gods live is far more beautiful and enjoyable, with superior resources to our realm. Think of how we judge from a distance the lives of rich humans. We see their homes as luxurious with much comfort, their facilities are abundant, there is great wealth. On the surface it seems they have no suffering. However when we look deeper we see that they are just like us in not being free from suffering.

Why are they not free from suffering? Why are they not free from unpredictable events? Why is there no complete choice over our destiny? Why does it seem that our life is beyond our control? In our own life there are many occurrences that happen without us having any vague idea as to the reasons for those events. This not only happens in our own life but also to other beings, such as in the god realms, where the gods undergo suffering for the same reason as we do – having a samsaric form of life.

If we contemplate deeper on the value of this life, it has no



value at all. It is only the source of all our unwanted experiences, both now and in the future. Therefore when we think deeply, we realise that rather than being very attracted to this body and this life, we must become detached from them. This is the only way to be free.

Whereas if we are attracted to this body, not only do we experience unnecessary suffering in this life, but also, as a result of this attachment, we create causes for future suffering. It is because of attachment to this samsaric body that we collect a large number of these causes, and so continue this cycle of rebirth.

In a true sense this body is just a source of suffering, but in real life we, as ordinary beings, are attracted to it. Most of the things we do – eating and drinking, leading a very busy life, running here and there and so on – are because of attachment to our body. So we can see how in the context of this life we are enslaved by our body because of our attachment to it. Through this attachment we generate desire, which then serves as a motivation to create karma, resulting in suffering for ourselves and others. In fact, the main cause for us to take rebirth (or samsaric life) is karma and mental delusions, and the body we take in this life is the outcome of past karma and mental delusions.

How is this present life the outcome of karma accumulated in the past? This may be difficult to comprehend. It is very clear though, if we look at how the endless sufferings we experience in this life arise from our mental delusions and karma. This helps to support our understanding of why we have this life which has a suffering nature. It is very clear that this is all a result of the karma of our past lives.

Making Progress

The basis of making real progress in spiritual practice is realising the faults of attachment and then countering that desire. This is essential because all our negative actions and thoughts are caused by having some form of desire or attachment. It is due to the influence of desire or attachment that we generate other delusions, such as anger, jealousy, and pride. Recall the reasons for not becoming attracted to one's own body, and the importance of reducing attachment to it. On this same basis, one can reduce attachment to the attractive bodies of other people, and thereby reduce feelings of jealousy, anger, pride, which relate to other people's bodies. It is very natural to feel pride when seeing someone weaker, inferior or more ugly, or to feel competitive when seeing someone with more attractive qualities than we possess. Due to all these mental delusions that we generate in our minds, we create karmas which result in future suffering.

Therefore when we talk of performing a pure Dharma practice in terms of developing good heart to others, this cannot be generated unless we overcome negative feelings such as pride, anger, and jealousy. We have been studying this text on the lam rim not for days but for years! We must remind ourselves that the goal of this study is to bring some real progress to our lives. The aim of our study is not just to learn, which even a child does, but to integrate our studies into our life by softening our thoughts and deeds. We try our best to integrate what learn into our practice. We must ask ourselves every night "Am I making progress?", and assess our own progress in our thoughts and daily actions. Are they habitually more positive than negative? By seeing these teachings in terms of our own practice, we see how far we have to go. In our practice we talk about cultivating compassion. But how strong is that degree of compassion? For most of us it is very weak when compared to the intensity of our attachment. When we see someone very sick and suffering greatly, we do not immediately feel genuine and strong compassion. We do not feel compassion for all the suffering we see around us. But look how quickly we develop attachment to attractive objects and bodies! It is almost a natural response, which shows how important it is to overcome attachment, and make even small progress in our spiritual path. If it is not overcome, or challenged, we can never achieve liberation.

Therefore we must understand that the reason we are pursuing these studies is to remind ourselves to practise Dharma, which is to overcome negative states of mind. It is also to maintain our motivation to practise Dharma; to try to realise that the best time for practising Dharma is now, while we have a sound mind and body with all the other favourable conditions we enjoy. By thinking like this, we realise how fortunate we are to have all these favourable conditions. We are not deprived of any of the necessary things to make progress. With this in mind, think that engaging in spiritual studies is like engaging in a battle with our own negative states of mind. If we lose one day, we must not give up. Do not become discouraged, try again the next day. With a consistent effort our positive tendencies will increase while our negative tendencies will decrease.

There is not much point in being concerned about for how long, or when, you practise. What is more important is to ensure that any practice – even for one minute – is a complete practice. A complete practice starts with the right motivation which is being focussed on the goal, or aim, of the practice. That is, you clearly recognise the aim of the practice. It is not enough merely to want something in order to achieve it, you must do something. This is the actual deed or actual practice. At the end, before closing the practice you must dedicate merit accumulated from that practice, to the goal for which you did the practice. It is said that even if the practice is very short, if it is done effectively, you can achieve a lot, because it is a complete practice.

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

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