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



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Subduing The Mind And Attaining Wisdom

As is always the case, whenever we engage in spiritual practice we should focus on the aim of the practice, which is to subdue the mind and enhance its wisdom. Therefore it is very important to always relate any practice to one's mind, and begin with the right motivation. If the practice is related to our mind, then we shall find that the more we practise, the more benefit we shall obtain. So we can always feel very positive about our practice because we can benefit from it.

We may not fully accomplish all our spiritual goals in this lifetime. However if we maintain the continuity of our spiritual practice until the end of this life, by calming and purifying the mind, and increasing our wisdom, then our life will be meaningful and not wasted.

We should always take responsibility for ourself. When we face some obstacle in our life or spiritual practice, we should acknowledge that, and be courageous enough to face it. Rather than relying upon support from outside, we must always be self-guided. Otherwise if we do not encourage ourselves, then it is easy to lose our spirit or self determination, and so not achieve success in either spiritual or mundane goals.

In our spiritual practices, the main goal is to develop a positive state of mind. With a positive state of mind, we can recognise those difficulties or obstacles which may weaken our practice, and make a maximum effort to overcome them.

Wholesome And Unwholesome Actions

The benefits of spiritual practice are very precious and valuable. This spiritual practice is like a great treasure which once found cannot be stolen or removed by others.

Spiritual teachings means a true understanding of the difference between wholesome and unwholesome. Practising those teachings is acting on the basis of our knowledge of the advantages of practising wholesome thoughts or actions, and the disadvantages of any unwholesome thoughts or actions.

Those of you who have taken spiritual vows or commitments should not regard them as a burden to be carried, or a restriction or restraint. Rather, you should try to see the benefits of safeguarding those vows, as

well as the benefits of adopting wholesome practice, and the disadvantages of following unwholesome ways of doing things. On that basis you make an effort to avoid the unwholesome. In this way you will not feel that following the spiritual path is an extra burden to your life. Rather, as you follow that path, you will see from your daily experiences that there is more peace, and satisfaction in your life.

Initially, taking a vow is making a commitment or promise to the Buddha that you will follow his path. So it is very important to try to develop, as much as possible, some knowledge of the benefits of choosing that path. Then, following that path, and safeguarding that vow, is a source of rejoicing. Not only will there be joy and happiness in this life as a result of following that path, but you also create the causes for future happiness as well.

Assessing Your Spiritual Progress

We have to ask ourselves "What extra benefit have I obtained by following spiritual practice?" In general someone who follows spiritual practice must have some extra quality over those who have no faith in that practice. Of course, this extra quality is not wealth, or physical looks, but it is some extraordinary qualities, resulting from a particular state of mind.

You must examine for yourself whether or not you have these qualities. Compare yourself now to before you met and began to practise the spiritual teachings. See if there is any change. What positive qualities have developed in your mind? If you have chosen a celibate life, finding out whether you have found extra benefit or not, depends on whether you have found extra inner peace, happiness and joy in the mind. Once you have seen where you stand in your life, or in your spiritual practice, you will not feel particularly happy if someone outside calls you a god, nor will you be upset if they put you down by saying "You are evil".

The Lord Buddha taught that the main purpose of the teaching is cultivating a positive state of mind, and subduing the negative states of mind. Not only this, but when put into practice, Buddha's teaching has the full potential to actively transform our mind into a positive state, and remove all negative states of mind. So if we practise with the understanding that Buddha's teaching

is to remove faults and gather good qualities in the mind, and then make an effort, we shall make progress accordingly.

Purifying Negativities Through Spiritual Practice

One obvious benefit of practising the spiritual teachings is our knowledge of how to purify the negativities which we accumulate. It is hard to prevent negativities completely, but how one deals with those negativities illustrates the difference between one who follows spiritual teachings and one who does not. If two people each create the same negative action at the same time, then the one who follows the spiritual teachings may later feel regret about those negative actions because of their belief in the law of cause and effect. That regret may later bring a change in their attitude, and may even lead them to purify that negativity by means of the four purifying remedies¹. Therefore the spiritual practitioner having created the negativity, and later purified it, will not have to experience the result of that negativity in the future. Indeed they may obtain a happy rebirth in future. Whereas the person without faith in the law of karma will have to pay for their negative acts in the future, for instance, by taking a lower rebirth.

Although it is hard to always feel positive about our daily spiritual practice, it is not without purpose. It has a great purpose, and for that you should feel positive.

422.212.23 Suffering Of Gods In Form And Formless Realms (Cont)

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In regard to the Lam Rim topics, we have finished the types of sufferings experienced by the gods of the desire realms. Next is the sufferings of the gods of form and formless realms.

The gods of form and formless realms spend their entire lifetime in a state of meditative concentration. Their life is not dependent upon outer foods, as they are sustained by the deep state of concentration. For aeons and aeons they remain in that single session of meditation.

It is said that these gods undergo no obvious suffering such as we in the desire realms experience. There is no suffering of suffering, nor is there suffering of change. However they are subject to the third suffering, the pervasive suffering of conditions. Because they are subject to pervasive suffering at the end of their lifespan, they can fall to lower rebirths.

Even though they remain in that concentration for a long time, they are not liberated from samsara. They still have mental delusions and obscurations and no control over life and death.

It is said that the gods of form realms mistakenly believe

that their state of concentration is the state of everlasting peace or liberation. So, initially upon taking birth in that realm they may think that they have attained the permanent state of liberation. Then, when they emerge from that state of meditation, they discover that what they thought was their liberation was not so, with the result that some gods generate the wrong view that the state of liberation is not possible. Because of such wrong views, they are then reborn in the lower realms.

The only time the gods of formless realms have a thought is when they were first born there. They have the thought "I am born". Then they enter that state of concentration until the end, consuming the positive karma which they have accumulated in the past. As in the case of the desire realm gods, since they do not accumulate new karma in that realm, most of them go to a lower rebirth after death.

The experience of formless gods is like us going into a deep sleep, and just before sleep having the thought "I am sleeping." Then we sleep, and on waking finding ourselves on the edge of a deep cliff. How frightening it would be to wake up like this. Similarly, formless gods from the moment of birth to their death, remain in that state of concentration, then they fall to lower rebirths.

Further in the text the contaminated aggregates are mentioned as an example of pervasive suffering, and as an explanation of the cause of our bondage to suffering. The highest of formless realms is the peak of cyclic existence. The lowest is the boundless level of the hell realms. From the peak of cyclic existence to boundless hell realms, all beings carry contaminated aggregates and so undergo limitless suffering, and are trapped in endless rounds of birth, death and suffering.

Seminar Topics

First recite the Heart Sutra and then have tea. Then discuss the coming seminar the main topic of which is the view of selflessness.

There are two types of selflessness:

selflessness of persons

selflessness of phenomena

From the point of view of Prasangika school (the highest school of tenets), there is no difference between these two types of selflessness, in terms of one being more subtle than the other. And yet it is said there is a difference in realising these two types of selflessness.

If there is no difference in terms of subtlety or grossness, then why are there two opposing conceptions of selflessness? There are two conceptions of self, and how do these two conceptions of self oppose these two conceptions of selflessness?

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

¹ The four forces: regret, basis, remedy, and resolve.