
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།

8 August 1995

Try to generate a good motivation

We have talked a lot about the various types of suffering, and the faults, or pitfalls of cyclic existence. The purpose of contemplating those faults is to overcome our attachment to cyclic existence. When we contemplate clearly on cyclic existence we realise that wherever we take rebirth in cyclic existence, whether it be a higher or lower realm of existence, the nature of existence is the three types of suffering.

Pervasive Suffering - Our Own Contaminated Aggregates:

Pervasive suffering is the main, or root source of the other two types of suffering which are the suffering of misery, and the suffering of change. So when we talk of generating renunciation towards cyclic existence, we have to know, and recognise, the nature of pervasive suffering very clearly. Because all the sufferings which we experience in cyclic existence are due to being subject to that pervasive suffering. What is pervasive suffering? It is nothing but the afflicted, or contaminated aggregates which we possess, no matter where we are born in cyclic existence.

There are five contaminated aggregates - form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness - and these are the actual cyclic existence, or samsara. As we have heard, over and over, samsara is the source of all our troubles and sufferings. When we talk of the bondage to samsara, we are talking of the bondage of our own contaminated aggregates. So seeking liberation from samsara means we must relate that samsara to something within ourselves.

From our own experience we can come to understand that of the five contaminated aggregates, we are particularly attached to the aggregate of form, and this attachment leads us to create so many karmic actions. Because of the existence of the contaminated aggregate of form there is feeling. There is attachment to feelings of pleasure, but hatred or dislike of the feeling of pain. In this way we generate the very prejudiced attitudes of viewing some as friends, and others as enemies.

Therefore the aggregate of form is the basis on which various types of feelings are generated. It would not be too detrimental if, having obtained the contaminated

aggregates, there were no fluctuating feelings of pain and pleasure, etc. But with this contaminated aggregate of form, these fluctuating feelings of pleasure and pain are almost inevitable. In order to generate a sense of renunciation to cyclic existence, one needs to contemplate the faults of one's own constituent aggregates, and the way they are so susceptible to change, because as soon as one acquires these aggregates, there is no escape from cyclic existence.

Pervasive Suffering Of Conditioning Defined:

The literal meaning of pervasive suffering is the pervasive suffering of conditioning.

'Pervasive' means present in all types of suffering. If we go into detail, 'pervasive' indicates the pervasiveness of the seed of karma and delusion, which means that as long as one is subject to pervasive suffering, one possesses the seed of karma and delusions.

Think of how, when we are in a very calm state and then, on meeting some unexpected conditions, we immediately lose that calmness and generate anger in the mind. Even if we remain in a calm state of equanimity, if we look deeply inside there is still a seed of karma and mental delusions - the potential to generate very hostile states of mind.

In the term pervasive suffering of conditioning, the word 'conditioning' indicates that pervasive suffering is the condition to create negative karmic actions. As mentioned earlier, we have the tendency to always be attracted when we perceive a beautiful form, and feel aversion towards an ugly object. We have the same discriminating attitude with regard to the various feelings of pain and pleasure, and due to such discriminating attitudes of liking and disliking we create various negative karmas. Therefore this pervasive suffering is something which is most intolerable.

The aggregates are called 'contaminated' or 'afflicted' because they are the result of afflictive emotions, or mental delusions. Since these aggregates are dependant on afflictive emotions they are called afflicted aggregates. It is similar to describing those people under the rule of a king, as the king's people.

The Whole Of Samsaric Existence Is Suffering And Deceptive:

We realise the suffering nature of samsaric life by

contemplating our own life situation. We can think of a continuous period of time in which we are very helpless. Without any choice or desire we have to confront unwanted things, where there is almost no solution. Not only do you have no choice other than to suffer, but no-one else can help you. For example, there are some people with chronic disease. It is a situation they must experience alone. Doctors cannot help, neither can medicines, nurses or friends.

Therefore when we contemplate the nature of this suffering of samsaric life we must remind ourselves of our own real life situation. We are so trapped in it, and no-one comes to help. Even if someone does come to assist, they cannot do much to help that situation. It is not right to blame this situation on a friend, or on an outside condition, because the cause of all these events is having to take this type of life - this samsaric body.

Even when we think of our own body, and go deeper, we find there are no [good]¹ qualities. Similarly if we look into any other object within cyclic existence - material possessions, friends, relatives - nothing in cyclic existence has even a single [good]² quality. What they are is unreliable, and very deceptive objects. In this way we try to realise how in cyclic existence there is not even a single virtue to be found in any object. Therefore to develop an understanding of the faults of cyclic existence, one generates renunciation, and reduces attachment to the appearance of various objects of cyclic existence.

Developing A True Thought Of Renunciation:

True renunciation is the thought of seeking liberation from cyclic existence. As Lama Tsong Khapa said³:

True renunciation is generated when, day and night, this thought of seeking liberation arises as a result of a long familiarity with the understanding of how all the appearing marvels of cyclic existence are unreliable, and are untrustworthy.

True renunciation is generating this very spontaneous thought of seeking liberation. It is a very spontaneous thought, just as someone who is starving to death would dream of, and have endless thoughts of eating. Therefore there is a great deal of emphasis on producing a true sense of renunciation, because the effectiveness of our spiritual practice depends upon that. If we can generate some degree of renunciation it can bring a more stable peace and happiness to our mind. Thinking of the preciousness of our present life, we should not let this life pass without achieving something lasting - a concrete goal in life.

Although we have achieved countless past lives, most were wasted. It is just by some rare conditions, by chance,

that we are able to find this excellent form of life now. So utilise this life to achieve some lasting purpose in life such as making some effort to cultivate renunciation, thoughts of seeking liberation, and also to contemplate the law of karma.

It is important to always inspire yourself, and to get into spiritual practice out of your own motivation. This is the only way. How much would we listen to others if they advise us to practise? We won't listen. We must produce the motivation to practise from our own side, without any excuse. If we use the excuse "There is no time", that is not right. When death comes there are no exceptions, and death does not wait. So engage in practice on a regular basis, regardless of the length of time.

Even if we do not accomplish all spiritual qualities in this current life, your efforts will bear fruit in future lives. Even if we are born in cyclic existence, we shall not be the same as other miserable and confused beings. Because of our knowledge of renunciation and the law of karma, we shall have more potential, and the benefits of what we have practised in this life.

Always feel positive about spiritual practice, without discriminating between whether the practice is complete or incomplete. We also have to appreciate for ourselves, every single quality of dharma which we cultivate in ourselves. We must cherish even the thought of wishing to follow dharma, the thought of following the footsteps of the Lord Buddha.

The causes to produce such a thought take a great deal of effort and time. Having the thought or wish to practise dharma is like finding something that cannot be found in three thousand world systems. It is very precious and is very positive for the reason if you think of the place where you live, and the social culture and background of that place. If the culture of a country is influenced by Buddhadharma, it is quite easy for people to follow that way of thinking.

For that reason, one sees how one cultivates the thought of Buddhadharma, because that thought is the source of all joy and benefit to all beings. Always try to feel positive, because development on the spiritual path depends upon the individual and their conditions. Therefore, cherish whatever spiritual qualities you have gained so far. They are very precious, so think of safeguarding them.

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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¹ Editor: The usual word used in Tibetan is *Yon-tan* which means good quality or excellence or excellent quality.

² *ibid*

³ *Three Principal Aspects Of The Path* by Lama Tsong Khapa.