
Study Group - “Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*”

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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Make sure that your motivation to proceed in spiritual practice is to attain the full state of enlightenment, for the sake of all sentient beings. Generate the thought that the purpose of listening to these teachings on the lam rim, and putting them into practice, is to attain buddhahood for the sake of all living beings.

Generating Renunciation By Understanding The Nature Of Existence

In the previous teachings we discussed the various types of suffering which are experienced by all sentient beings within cyclic existence or samsara. We saw that even if you are born in any higher rebirth, you are not free from the source of suffering, because all cyclic existence is subject to the three types of suffering, which we have also discussed.

The purpose of contemplating the sufferings of cyclic existence is to generate a true sense of renunciation, which is a strong yearning for the state of liberation from cyclic existence. To generate a true renunciation, the faults of cyclic existence must be recognised, and strong dissatisfaction with cyclic existence must be felt. And, as we learned from the teachings, there is nothing worthwhile in this cyclic existence, as all things in cyclic existence have the nature of suffering.

Think of the wonderful opportunity you have now with all the freedoms and suitable conditions for you to do whatever you wish. So you must also recognise its value, and understand that it is not without causes. It is the fruit of good karma - the wholesome actions created in the past.

You must also realise that not seizing the value of this great opportunity, is not realising the fruit of all one's virtue in the past. Of course it is best to generate a true renunciation in order to fully seize this human potential with its great opportunity. But even if full renunciation is not generated, at least we should try to become familiar with the true nature of cyclic existence, which is suffering.

Reducing Attachment To Worldly Existence

Geshe Doga says he always instructs that while we have suitable conditions, we should make full use of them, by engaging in spiritual practice and by making our life very happy. This means taking full advantage of material

comforts, like food and clothing, which we should enjoy with full satisfaction. At the same time, however we should not be too attached to surrounding things, and try to be generous to poor people. Then at the time of death there is no fear of loss, because there is no attachment in the mind.

The reality, is that as time passes by, all surrounding things which we possess, and for which we have exerted great efforts, become more distant. Friends or material wealth become more distant from you with every passing minute, but death, and the life after, is drawing ever nearer. We must therefore become concerned about something which we shall all face sooner or later, and reduce our concern for things that are becoming increasingly distant from us. It is our future destiny that we must think about.

If our minds are preoccupied with the temporary affairs of this life, then not only do we lose sight of future lives, but we also lose happiness in this life. The reason for this overwhelming concern about this life, and why it is so important to us, is because there is a strong attachment to this life. It is this attachment which is the source of our day-to-day problems and difficulties. Even if we have some success in obtaining desired objects, because of this attachment there is no satisfaction or contentment, or we may use those objects to generate pride in our success. If we examine, at a deep level, our strong attachment to this life's affairs we see that it is like weighing things on a balance scale - up and down with pleasure and pain. In this way we realise why we need to generate renunciation.

Renunciation is not just a sense of disgust, or dissatisfaction, with this life. Rather out of this sense of disgust, which results from contemplating the various drawbacks of cyclic existence, attachment is decreased and liberation from cyclic existence is sought. This is renunciation in the true sense.

True Renunciation Versus Artificial Renunciation

True or genuine renunciation is generated after feeling this sense of disgust towards all objects of cyclic existence - even towards the pleasures of cyclic existence (in the form of wealth or friends). From the depth of one's heart it is apparent that no matter where one is born in cyclic existence, or what one attains, the nature of

existence is suffering. There is nothing beyond that.

From this deep understanding of the suffering nature of cyclic existence the thought of seeking liberation is generated. This is true renunciation. Whereas artificial renunciation is when one thinks of leaving cyclic existence because of some immediate unfavourable situation, then when that immediate unfavourable situation changes, there is no longer any thought of renunciation. True renunciation can be developed by not only considering the immediate cause of suffering, but also by seeing all one's rebirths in cyclic existence as having the nature of suffering.

There is only one person who can free you from cyclic existence, and lead you to the state of liberation, and that is yourself. When we face death, there is nobody or nothing to provide protection or refuge apart from yourself. Considering the reality that we have to face death, and life after death, we must ask ourselves what can we do to overcome all these fears at the time of death, and in all future lives? Because if you do not do something, nothing else can.

The difference between one who follows, and one who does not follow spiritual practice is in their perception of life, and its purpose. For a non-believer in spiritual practice there are no future lives, so the comfort of this life is their only concern. To provide comfort for this life, any action is acceptable. Whereas for a true believer of spiritual path, they are responsible for not only this life, but also for many future lives. From this perspective the concerns of future lives become the primary concern. Therefore for the spiritual practitioner it is necessary to make some sacrifice of comforts in this life. By making this sacrifice you are in the position to create causes for long term future happiness.

Renunciation Is Essential To Developing Bodhicitta

Although this topic of renunciation is included in the stage of the path of the person of middle scope, this topic of renunciation is also essential for a person of the great scope to follow. For a person of great scope the main spiritual goal is the state of buddhahood. To attain the state of buddhahood, the person of great scope must generate bodhicitta - the altruistic mind of enlightenment. This altruistic mind of enlightenment is generated by cultivating compassion, or true sympathy, for the suffering of all other living beings. However before cultivating true compassion for all other living beings, one must understand the nature of suffering very well in the context of one's own life. Thus, anyone following the great stages of the path must generate renunciation, by contemplating the suffering of their own life.

If the topic of renunciation is such an important topic for the person of the great scope, why is it listed in the lam rim teachings in the stages of the path of middle scope? The reason is that for the person of middle scope, renunciation is the main driving force behind their

practice to achieve their ultimate goal, which is personal liberation. Any action produced out of the motivation of renunciation is a cause to achieve liberation.

There are three principal aspects of the path - renunciation, bodhicitta and the wisdom realising emptiness. It is wrong to put these three aside in favour of something else which is perceived as a more profound practice. If these three are excluded then there is no other profound practice, as renunciation is the primary cause to achieve liberation, and bodhicitta is the primary cause to achieve buddhahood, and without the wisdom realising emptiness we cannot cut the conception of self which is the ignorance that is the root cause of cyclic existence.

Our homework is to memorise the six root delusions. These can be found in the text *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. Here you will find a quotation from Vasubhandu's *Treasury of Knowledge* which lists the six root delusions. Next week we shall discuss the source of cyclic existence.

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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