

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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལཱ་བཅའ་བུ་

19 September 1995

Try to generate the correct motivation by thinking that I seek the state of buddhahood for the benefit of all beings, and that in order to achieve this state of buddhahood I am undertaking this study and practice of lam rim.

422.221.1 How Delusions are Developed¹

ཉོན་མོངས་པ་སྐྱེ་ཚུལ།

In our previous discussions we learned that the root cause of cyclic existence is mental delusions. So we need to first identify those delusions before we can apply any remedy to overcome them.

In essence, delusion refers to a negative or very disturbing thought, or state of mind. The effect is such that whenever delusion is present, that person will experience a very unpeaceful and uncontrollable mind due to the force of the delusion.

The purpose of practising meditation is to overcome or defeat mental delusions. If you want to shoot an enemy with an arrow, you have to identify the target very clearly. When we sit in meditation our target is to conquer all delusions. As there are many types of delusions - e.g. anger, pride, desire - each of these should be clearly recognised in order to overcome them.

We must also overcome delusions because they are the true source of all our emotional problems. Unless we recognise this true source and apply some remedy, then all the other things we do to try to overcome our problems will not help.

When we are involved with some unsatisfactory situation we relate the cause of our situation to some outside factor or person. We may blame an outside person, and then engage in a dispute, and fight with that person, yet the true source is our own delusions which we continually generate in our mind. If we examine events with a clear sense of discrimination, we can see that external factors are only of minor importance in determining our day-to-day feelings of pleasure and pain, and the deeper cause of those feelings is something deep within ourselves.

Once we clearly recognise how all our problems arise from the delusions which we generate within ourselves, and then accordingly follow meditation practice, we can actually achieve the goal of that meditation practice, which is to reduce delusions. So with a clear idea of the purpose of meditation, we know that we must target all our mental delusions, with the knowledge that they are the cause of our daily restlessness and unhappiness. Unless we free ourselves from the dominant force

of delusion, there will be no end to the mental suffering, and no freedom from unhappiness. As a result of meditation we can reduce the force of our delusions so the feelings within us become more settled and stable, and we can experience that inner sense of peace and happiness.

422.221.11 Identifying Mental Delusions

ཉོན་མོངས་པ་གྲུབ་པ།

There are two categories of delusions:

422.221.111 The primary or root delusions

ཅོ་ཉོན།

422.221.112 The secondary delusions

ཉེ་ཉོན།

422.221.111 The primary or root delusions

ཅོ་ཉོན།

There are six primary delusions: attachment, anger, pride, ignorance, doubt and deluded views. Of these six the first is attachment.

422.221.111.1 Attachment

འདོད་ཆགས།

If we were to define attachment; its object is any contaminated object; its perception is to perceive that contaminated object as beautiful, attractive or appealing; its wish is to then acquire that object; [its function is to generate suffering]².

Because attachment is a delusion, it is something to be

² Editor: Further definitions of attachment are:

Geshe Rabten *The mind and its functions*:

“Attachment is a distinct mental factor that, when referring to a contaminated phenomenon that exaggerates its attractiveness and then proceeds to wish for and take a strong interest in it. As a contributing condition, it acts as a basis for the continued production of discontent.”

Lama Tsong Khapa: “Attachment is a hankering after any pleasurable external or internal object by taking it as pleasing to oneself. For example, just as it is difficult to remove oil stain from a cotton cloth, in the same way, this hankering after and getting more involved with the thing makes it very difficult to get rid of.”

¹ Page 508 *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand*. The title used in the text is ‘How delusions are developed’.

overcome. But our experience of attachment towards other people for instance, has been perceived as an expression of our desire for happiness and pleasure. Therefore when it is said that attachment is negative we might ask 'Why is attachment negative, since it is not only a means of bringing some satisfaction or pleasure to myself, but also to others as well?'

Also, in our experience attachment and love are very closely connected, so that it is very hard to separate them. Therefore we need to consider in what way attachment is different from the feelings of love and compassion towards others.

The Difference Between Love and Attachment

The difference is very clear even in the definitions of attachment and of love. Attachment, as described before, makes us desire things because they appear to be very beautiful, useful or are a means of self gratification. Here we can see that attachment is basically desiring, or wishing for things, because they are seen as a source of pleasure, or satisfaction for oneself.

If we consider the various feelings which we have towards other people, this will give some idea of the difference between attachment, and love and compassion. For example in a husband-wife relationship there is a strong sense of desire and bonding to each other. In the relationship between, say, a mother and her son there is also an intimate feeling of closeness. Of these two relationships, it is usually the man - woman relationship which has more attachment. There may be some element of love, but the relationship is mainly one of attachment. The reason is that each sees the other as a source of personal pleasure, and this attitude generates strong desire, a feeling of wanting to be close. Whereas in the relationship with their children there may be some attachment, but mainly it is a feeling of love.

Generally speaking it is very difficult to establish a relationship of pure love. But by knowing the difference between love and attachment in relationships with others, we can see how desire has a selfish purpose, with no sense of giving, or concern for the needs of the other person.

Consider a relationship, where the woman finds out that the man has another girlfriend. If she has a strong feeling of attraction to the man, then day and night, night and day, she would find no peace, nor enjoy food, nor drink nor going out nor even resting. This is because the object seen to be a very essential source of fulfilling self or desire is lost. The same applies to the man if his girlfriend leaves him for another man. If he is attached to her, he will undergo the same misery. The crux of the problem is that in this circumstance you have lost everything.

Now with the mother-son relationship, if the mother finds out that her son has found a new girlfriend, who is very nice and very attractive, she will be very happy for her son. Deep down she may feel some sadness that she will lose her son, but this is not as strong as her delight.

So the main difference between love and attachment is in the attitude. Love is being wholeheartedly concerned with the needs of the other person; with whether they have enough happiness or pleasure. There is a sense of sharing the burdens of life. Love is solely a feeling of helping others. Whereas attachment is very self centred. It is an attitude of seeing others as the source of one's security and pleasures. The common feature of both love and attachment is the strong expression of a feeling of closeness with another person.

If love is the source of all joy and happiness in one's own personal life, in society and in the world, then attachment is the

source of unending misery in the lives of ourselves and others. So if we wish our relationships with others to be the most enjoyable, lasting and beneficial for all, then we need to develop more love in our relationships rather than attachment.

This means being very caring and considerate of others, recognising that some actions please whilst other actions cause harm to others. If we have thoughts for the needs of the person with whom we share our life, then naturally they will reciprocate and show kindness and help to us when we are in need.

Love is the thought of giving pleasure and happiness to others. So if you have love, your feeling of love will grow even stronger when they are in desperate need of help. If you have a strong feeling of love then the more trouble the person you love is in, the more sympathy you will feel.

As we saw, attachment is hoping for something from others to satisfy your life. If this is your main feeling, then in a situation where the other person is facing troubles, and going downhill in terms of finances or health, your attitude to that person may change. Since they are no longer attractive you will tend move away from them. Therefore a relationship which is mainly based on attachment is very unstable, and not very fruitful or beneficial to either partner.

With relationships based on love, both parties get more benefit or satisfaction out of it while it remains. Whereas if it is based upon attachment there is less benefit. To go further, suppose this relationship breaks up in the future. Then the relationship based on attachment will leave great pain in the lives of the former partners. Even though your friend may have finished the relationship, if you have attachment, your object of desire is still there like a disease which will inevitably cause you suffering. Whereas in a relationship with a true caring thought for someone you love, the relationship may finish, and although the object of attachment is lost, the object of your love is not. Therefore when such a relationship breaks up you do not suffer as much as someone whose relationship was based on attachment.

So love is the source of happiness now, and in the future, whereas attachment is the source of misery now. With attachment there is no contentment in the mind. If you have one, then you want one hundred; then if you have one hundred, you want one thousand. Attachment deludes your mind as to the true nature of reality. The true nature of reality of cyclic existence is not appealing, whereas attachment makes us see cyclic existence as attractive. Therefore we do not generate renunciation, and so we have no strong aspiration to seek liberation. Therefore attachment is not only the source of immediate problems, but it is also an obstruction to achieving the ultimate state of liberation.

Student: Can we have attachment to non-contaminated objects?

Geshe-la: No, you cannot generate attachment to non-contaminated objects since only contaminated objects can be perceived in a number of different ways. For example the shape of a cup can be perceived as elegant, or ugly. There are different perceptions in regard to its entity. Whereas for non-contaminated phenomena you cannot perceive any difference in their entity.

Attachment has more to do with the way an object is perceived by your mind. For example at different times you might experience anger or attachment towards the same person.

Student: Is Buddha an example of a non-contaminated object? But Devadatta saw him as being not perfect.

Geshe-la: If you see the true aspect of the Buddha you

will not generate any delusions. However we cannot say that what ordinary people perceive with their eyes corresponds to the true, real aspect of the object.

One of the qualities of the Buddha's physical aspect is that there is no difference or gap, between the physical aspect of the body and the mind which perceives it. So if the aspect of the body is perceived as perfect, it is always perfect. Whereas for other objects, the way they are perceived is subject to change. Therefore, we cannot absolutely say its aspect is beautiful all the time, because we perceive it as beautiful at one time, but on another occasion we do not perceive it as beautiful.

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 Bunnnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.

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