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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལཱ་ལག་བཅངས།

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Try to ensure you have the right motivation.

The Antidote To Attachment

We have finished the definition of attachment. Having recognised attachment, we now consider the antidote to counteract it.

Although we may have many reasons why we are unhappy and dissatisfied with life, the fundamental cause of this is attachment, or desire for things. The best thing after recognising all the faults of attachment is to find the remedy that removes that attachment from its root. If we cannot completely remove attachment, then at least we can try to partly overcome the specific form of attachment or desire which torments our mind, and causes pain and unease. Even if we cannot overcome or counteract all levels of attachment, it is worthwhile to apply the remedy described here to overcome the very gross or forceful attachment, which brings us unhappiness in the immediate short term.

In our normal view of daily life, there is a misconception that happiness (or pleasure) can result from attachment or desire, and that without this desire or attachment, there is no way to experience that pleasure or happiness. This kind of view is always the one that appears to our mind, and so we follow the tendency to attachment. Therefore as spiritual practitioners it is important to see that this is not the right view, and that in fact this view enslaves one to desire or attachment. So we have to try to not become completely habituated to desire or attachment. It is said in the sutras that drinking alcohol can be very addictive. If one keeps drinking it one becomes addicted, even to the point of death, as a result of that habit. It is said that desire has that same addictive quality. The more acquaintance one has with it, the more it is sought.

In trying to overcome attachment, it can be attacked at its root cause, or at least one can minimise one's acquaintance with it. There are thus various levels in overcoming attachment.

Overcoming Attachment By Meditation On The Foul Aspects

The meditation to overcome attachment is meditation upon the unattractiveness or ugliness of the given object of attachment. The objects of attachment can be our own

body, possessions and so forth. Let us say the object is our own body. According to the perfect classical instruction¹ the way to meditate is that you imagine that from the centre of your forehead on the right side blood and pus drips, and oozes. From the centre of the forehead it covers the whole right side of your body. Then imagine that from the centre of your forehead to the left side of your body, is just a skeleton, i.e. just bones. Viewing our body in this manner, there is no way it can be attractive, and there is no way that the mind can become attracted to the body.

When our mind is overpowered by attachment we need to ask ourselves, "Is that attachment benefiting me? Is that attachment something positive for me? Will that attachment show mercy on me?" These questions can be asked not just of attachment, but of any the negative states which dominate our mind. Is that state showing sympathy to us? Or is it causing some unhappiness in our life? If we consider this, and want to remove that negative state of mind, then the only way to remove it is to change our own mind. This we have to do ourselves, because our mind is not going to change this attachment or ill thought without assistance.

We need to overcome the negative state of mind not only because we are seeking the ultimate goal of full enlightenment, but also for the purpose of benefiting ourselves in this very lifetime. From our own experience, we can learn that external things eventually fail to satisfy us. We might think, out of desire, "If I had a new partner, then I would be happy". However there is no external object which is a true cause of mental satisfaction. So mental satisfaction must come from within our own mind, and this is achieved by overcoming all the mental delusions in our mind. For example, overcoming a degree of attachment will bring peace and satisfaction to the mind.

With this in mind, as a remedy to attachment we meditate on the unattractiveness of the body - either

¹ This quintessential instruction has its source in the Abidharmakosha. Geshe Doga has described this instruction several times in different teachings: 8th September 1989 in the commentary to the sixth chapter of the Madhyamika-Avatarata and also in the "Love and attachment" course of 30th May 1993. A brief mention of this meditation is found in the text of the sixth Chapter of the Madhyamika-Avatarata itself.

one's own or another's body. If we follow this meditation it becomes very effective. It is said that you do not have to be very specific, when meditating on the unattractive qualities, for the meditation to be very effective. That is, it is not necessary to meditate upon the specific object of your attachment; you do not have to be focussed on 'de-beautifying' the specific person to whom you are attracted. Rather, to be effective, all you have to do is think of the body in general as unattractive - dripping blood and pus and as a skeleton.

You can also think of the whole ground as covered by bones and skeletons. You can visualise the ground in front of you as covered with flesh, blood, pus, organs and bones. Also visualise that the meat turns an unpleasant reddish colour then an unpleasant bluish colour - like rotten meat. The meat and bones are not joined together in an attractive shape, but are scattered about. Also the shape of the meat is uneven, just like when maggots eat meat, and leave holes in different parts of it.

Regardless of the object of your desire or attachment, if you do this meditation with the images as clear as possible, then observing the objects in this most disgusting way will have some effect on the mind, and minimise, or even completely overcome attachment.

Mostly we are attached to the bodies of other people. If we examine it our attraction is only based on the outer or external appearance of the person. So try to think that, although outwardly there is some appealing beauty, what is inside is just filth. In actuality we see that it is just storage for filthy things. Thinking in this way will help lessen our attachment to objects, especially when it is so strong as to cause pain in the mind.

We assume that we have finished the root delusion of attachment. The next root delusion is anger, but we shall not go further tonight.

You should read the lam rim text as much as possible since the text has all the instructions you need in your practice. When studying the texts, it is wrong to put aside the lam rim and look for instruction elsewhere. Apart from the lam rim all other books we read have no meaning to our life, and are just to pass time. As we read the lam rim text we find it to be like a very responsible parent giving good advice to their children. The lam rim covers everything we need in our spiritual practice: how to set up an altar, how to make offerings and even how to clean our room. It shows not only the meditation technique to use, but it even shows what sort of cushion to use, and what sort of motivation to have. It tells us what attitude to have when teaching dharma to others, and how to listen to the teachings.

It gives instructions if you have some emotional problems such as anger, attachment and so forth. If our interest is not so much for this life, but beyond then the causes to achieve a better rebirth are shown in the lam rim. If you want to abandon cyclic existence completely,

or even achieve full enlightenment all the methods to achieve these goals are in the lam rim.

It is a unique quality² of lam rim that not only does it present all these instructions, but they are presented in a very orderly manner, like a meal that is ready to eat and drink.

Next week is discussion. The week after is the test. The compulsory question is 'What is the difference between attachment and compassion, and how do we overcome attachment?'

Geshe-la encourages you to actually write the test questions. Generally meditation is more important than writing. Some of you specifically requested that you prefer meditation. If you are doing meditation in that time then that is the best and your time is not wasted. However sometimes if you are not doing something physically, then it is so easy for the mind to wander. If you are sitting there, and the mind is wandering outside then it is better to write the answer. But if you do not do the test because you are lazy, or could not be bothered, then that is not good for you. Then it is best that you write your answers.

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

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² The lam rim is generally stated to have the Four Greatnesses (page 81 *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand*) and the Three Features (Page 92 *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand*). In brief the Three Greatnesses are:

1. The lam rim is complete because it contains all the subject matter of sutra and tantra.
2. It is easy to put into practice because it places the steps in taming the mind in a sequential order for easy practise.
3. It is superior to other traditions because it contains instructions from two gurus who were schooled in the traditions of the two forerunners.