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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལོ་ལྔ་པའི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལོ་ལྔ་པའི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་

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To generate the motivation of bodhicitta think of reaching the state of full enlightenment or buddhahood for the sake of all beings, and that it is for this reason that you engage in the practise of the stages of the path.

The source of all inner enemies are the delusions. There are six primary or root delusions, of which we have finished the first three - attachment, anger and pride - so do not forget about your study of these three.

422.221.111.4 Fourth Root Delusion - Ignorance

མ་རིག་པ།

The fourth root delusion is ignorance, which in Tibetan is *ma-rig-pa*. The first syllable *ma* is the negative term and *rig-pa* means to know or to understand. So literally the word *ma-rig-pa* means not knowing or not understanding. Here however, *ma-rig-pa* refers to a mental factor which prevents the mind from seeing things as they are, or which clouds the view of the ultimate mode of existence of things.

So ignorance is the delusion which obscures or clouds our mind, and prevents it from seeing the law of cause and effect, the three refuge objects, and so on. It is this particular ignorance which is the root cause of all the other delusions.

Ignorance and Wrong View - two different approaches

With respect to the identification of ignorance, the earlier Indian masters had two views. According to one system, ignorance is identified as being the same as the wrong view of transitory collections¹. The early masters who assert this view include Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti and Vasubhandu.

The other system asserted by the early masters such as Asanga and Dharmakirti define this deluded ignorance and the view of transitory collections separately. They explained that ignorance is like a dullness which obstructs our mind from seeing the truth, and due to that ignorance we then generate the wrong view of transitory collections. For example, at dusk when the light is fading, we might mistake a coiled rope as a snake. This misconception of seeing a coiled rope as a snake is like the view of transitory collections. The reason why such wrong views occur in our mind, is because of the ignorance which prevents us from seeing the true reality of what is there. Therefore ignorance and wrong view are defined separately.

The reason why we misconceive that coiled rope as a snake is because of the darkness. Similarly the reason why we generate

such a wrong view of transitory collections is because of some kind of dullness which clouds our mind. Thus from the point of view of differentiating between ignorance and wrong view, we see that ignorance is the root cause which is responsible for giving way to wrong views in the mind, such as the wrong view of transitory collections.

However all the early scholars agreed that the view of selflessness, or the wisdom of selflessness is the antidote or remedy to ignorance: this will be discussed later under the topic of special insight.

422.221.111.5 Fifth Root Delusion - Afflicted Doubt

བློ་ཚོར་པ།

The next root delusion is called afflicted doubt. It is doubt concerning the four noble truths, or the three supreme objects of refuge, and so forth. Adding the term “afflicted” excludes other types of doubt such as doubt about which road is the right one, or doubt about finding our way. These are doubts but they are not afflicted doubts.

Faith as the Antidote to Afflicted Doubt

In order to overcome this afflicted doubt we must maintain our faith and conviction in the benefits of dharma and the law of karma.

It is said that faith usually involves some understanding of why we practise dharma. This understanding is not just on an intellectual level, but it is from the depths of our hearts. Such faith in dharma is said to be the root cause for all virtue to arise. On the other hand if we lack such a faith, then we shall not sincerely practise dharma. Then all the things we do relating to meditation and study are just pretence.

Asking ourselves whether there is any benefit in the dharma we are practising, or whether we actually believe what we are studying, shows that doubt may possibly arise. So there is a long way to go to fully overcome that doubt, to believe in the law of karma and the qualities of the triple gem, and to actually see benefits of dharma.

Without generating this true faith in dharma you will not sincerely, and wholeheartedly engage in dharma practice, and as a result will not gain any true spiritual experiences or realisations. Then because you do not gain those benefits and spiritual realisations after all the effort and sacrifices you have made, you may become frustrated and disappointed with your spiritual practice and develop doubt.

¹ The wrong view of the transitory collections is one of the five wrong views. These five are all included in the sixth delusion of wrong view and will be covered in subsequent classes.

So to achieve benefits in dharma practice in the long run it is best to practise according to your own level and capacity. In other words do not push yourself to do a particular retreat, or to complete a particular practice, because it is most important to practise a little bit of dharma, enjoy yourself, and feel positive about it.

If you practise in a very easy consistent way, according to your own ability, and with faith, then even if you are not practising as much as others seem to, you will see progress and benefits over a period of time.

We have to be very realistic: we have only been practising dharma for a very short time compared to the length of time with which we have been familiarising ourselves with mental delusions (which goes back to beginningless time). There is a risk that when we first meet dharma, we shall become excited and take many commitments without considering whether we can keep them for the rest of our life. We may seriously engage in dharma practice for a day, a month, or a year, but not seeing any progress we become frustrated, and then generate this afflicted doubt. Then because of this afflicted doubt, we generate wrong views about the law of karma and the benefit of dharma. Then, when we look back at our life, and see that all our study of dharma, and all our practice turns out to be like a venomous poison.

There are many students here who do not take commitments and do retreats. Their approach is very simple and they apply the teachings to their own day-to-day lifestyle and always try to keep faith in dharma. In the long run there are more benefits this way.

Therefore what we are discussing here is how to best fit dharma into our daily life. Our core practise is to maintain our faith. But in terms of other practises e.g. taking commitments, then we should always check our abilities. Geshe-la is saying this in a friendly manner, not to indicate that you are incapable of practising dharma, rather that whatever dharma you do should be done sincerely and with faith. This is what he does himself. Whenever he teaches to others he never says something which is not from his heart, or just to please them. Geshela is not the kind of person who flatters others nor does he like anyone to flatter him. However it does give him great delight when he sees friends who practise dharma wholeheartedly.

In fact how much we practise dharma depends upon our faith in it. Faith in the law of cause and effect, for example knowing that killing or stealing results in suffering in the future, will make us more aware of the need to refrain from such non-virtuous acts. If in our daily actions we are performing more virtuous actions, or even if we feel regret about having done any non-virtuous actions, this shows that we have more faith in the law of karma. Whereas doing more non-virtuous acts in our daily life, and having no regret about them, shows the weakness of our faith in the law of karma.

So we can see the role of faith in making progress in dharma. When there is faith in the law of karma, we shall naturally feel deep regret for all the wrong actions we have done so far. So why do we feel this regret? We feel it because the law of karma is unfailing and incontrovertible, in that if we create wrong actions we shall suffer in the

future. This is certain. Thus we avoid negative actions and regret those already done. It is faith which motivates us to purify those negative actions by, for example, the practice of confession.

It is also faith that ensures that the dedication of merit will be multiplied, and serve as a cause to achieve liberation or enlightenment. If one truly believes and has faith in it, then one will follow that practice.

Lacking faith in the law of karma is an obstruction to gaining higher status or higher rebirth - the main cause of which is abandoning non-virtuous acts and creating virtuous ones. Likewise lacking faith in the four noble truths is an obstruction to liberation. Lacking faith in the truth of path to cessation is an obstruction to achieving cessation, because you will not seek that truth of the path. So we have to apply the dharma to our minds and actions rather than viewing it as something unrelated to one's negative states of mind. So it is within the context of our own mind and actions that we must see the benefits of dharma and the truth of the law of karma.

A Brief Method of Practising Faith

We leave the teaching here. First we shall recite the refuge prayer three times then seven rounds of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Make sure that you have a convenient posture that is relaxing for yourself, and as you recite the refuge prayer visualise in the space before you all your gurus and buddhas. Take refuge in them, and generate the altruistic mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta. Having done this try to feel deep regret for all the types of negative actions accumulated in your lives since beginningless time. This accumulation of negativities is like deadly poison going into your body. So feel this regret then make a strong resolution, "From henceforth to the best of my ability I shall not repeat these same actions." Confess these negativities and make a resolution not to repeat such actions in front of all the buddhas and gurus. Then we chant Buddha's mantra and as we chant imagine, in the form of a stream of light and nectar from all the gurus and buddhas, descending to fill our bodies and purify all our negativities, thus transforming our body completely so it becomes pure and crystal clear. If you like you can visualise the blessings going to all other sentient beings and purifying them just like you. Finish the recitation then dissolve the gurus and buddhas into yourself.

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

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