

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་སྐབས་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་སྐབས་



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Make sure that you generate the best motivation.

The text now leads us to the topic of the law of karma. We covered this in some detail in the lower scope stages of the path, however the topic of karma is also relevant here. Having discussed the topic of delusions at length we now see how these mental delusions are the driving force which cause us to create karma or actions. In terms of the causal links we see how delusion is the main root or source to cause us to create that karma and its ripened results.

There are two meanings to the term “action” or karma. Here the term “action” specifically refers to actions driven by delusions, whereas “action” or karma in general is not necessarily driven by delusions.

## 422.221.2: How Karma is Accumulated

དེས་ལས་གསོག་པའི་ལས་ཀྱི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་

Karma is a mental factor which influences the way other minds and mental factors (secondary minds) engage with objects. That is, it causes the mind to engage with, or be directed towards an object.

Karma can be understood at both a gross and a very subtle level.

The subtle meaning of karma refers to a type of mental factor which has the specific function of affecting both primary and secondary minds concomitant with it. In other words it affects both the mental factors and the sensual consciousnesses. Take for example the eye sense consciousness. If there is a visual object, in front of us we see it with our eye sense consciousness. In seeing it our eye sense consciousness is engaging with that object, and may judge it to be appealing. It is the mental factor which we call karma which is the main cause for our eye sense consciousness and all its mental factors to engage with that object.

In terms of the grosser way of looking at karma there are two aspects of karma.

## 422.221.21 Karma Of Intention<sup>1</sup>

སེམས་པའི་ལས་ཀྱི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་

This is the mental thought which occurs prior to doing an action. Before we engage in any action we have the thought or intention to engage in that action. So all verbal and bodily actions are governed by this intention to perform that action. Therefore it is karma which

motivates us to perform our actions. We have this thought *prior* to performing the action.

## 422.221.22 Intended Karma<sup>2</sup>

བསམས་པའི་ལས་ཀྱི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་

This is the thought which is there while actually performing the karma. It is also the action we perform using our speech or body.

## Three Types of Karma

With delusions in our mind it is inevitable that we will create karma, and this karma will be of one of three types. All of them throw us into cyclic existence or samsara. Study the text for details about these three types of karma. In brief they are:

1. Unmeritorious karma
2. Meritorious karma
3. Immutable or inflexible karma

The main driving force behind all these three types of karma is any form of mental delusion.

## Unmeritorious Karma

The cause of creating unmeritorious or non-virtuous karma is the desire for a goal within this life. Out of desire for meat, for example, we create unmeritorious karma by killing; through desire for wealth we steal; or we engage in sexual misconduct out of sexual desire. Thus we search for satisfaction within this life out of desire. The karmas so created are non-meritorious, and act as a cause for our rebirth into any of the three lower realms.

## Meritorious Karma

The main thought behind creating meritorious karma is to seek some happiness in a future life. With this mental scope we desire to come back as a human or godly being. Influenced by this desire, we create the cause by meditation or spiritual practices such as accumulating merit or purifying negativities, to allow us to take rebirth as a human or godly being. However our life is still subject to cyclic existence. Despite it being meritorious karma, the result of our action is to remain in samsara because the main cause behind our actions is desire for the pleasure of cyclic existence.

## Immutable Karma

To create this karma we seek an even higher form of pleasure or happiness. In creating this karma we see that happiness in the human or godly realms is very gross but we still seek the happiness or peace which exists in the

<sup>1</sup> Page 521 “Liberation in the palm of your hand”, the title used in this translation is “Mental Karma”.

<sup>2</sup> Page 522 “Liberation in the palm of your hand”

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upper realms of samsara - the form and formless realms of godly beings. The karma we subsequently create will still confine us to cyclic existence because of desire for those realms.

Of these three karmas the third is called immutable karma and is unmovable whereas this is not so for the first two. This is because the meritorious and non-meritorious karmas are a propelling cause to be born in the desire realm and are changeable. Consider a person who is destined to be born into the lower hell realms. On entering the bardo state leading to the hell realm, then the karma in the bardo or intermediate state can be changed through the force of virtuous practice or prayer by the people left behind. Then instead of going to the hell realms that person will go to higher states.

Whereas the karma to be born in the form and formless realms of godly beings is fixed at the time of creation of that karma. For instance the propelling karma to be born in the first level of concentration of the form realm cannot be changed to bring about rebirth in other realms.

You should go over the text which gives a very clear explanation.

### **Applying our Knowledge**

We should try to obtain some benefit from studying dharma. Not creating any non-virtues or sinful karmas is extremely difficult or almost impossible for us. In other words even though we know all about dharma and karma, we still cannot prevent ourselves from creating non-virtuous actions.

In what way should our learning benefit us? It is best if we use our learning to be always mindful and cautious, so we prevent the creation of any non-virtuous actions right from the start. But if this is not feasible in the early stages of our learning, we should at least feel strong regret for any non-virtuous karma which we might have created. Know the spiritual practice for purifying negative karma (which is by applying the four remedial forces of purification), then we know that even if we have not stopped ourselves creating negative actions at least we have purified those we have already created. This way we are not adding any more negative karma.

As we learnt before, whether the main cause which determines the shape of our actions is a cause to attain liberation from cyclic existence, or a cause to be reborn in cyclic existence, it is the mental intention behind our action which determines its quality.

Therefore it is essential that whenever we create an action, we do so with the motivation of renunciation, because with this motivation we ensure our actions are a cause to free us from cyclic existence. Similarly using the bodhicitta mind, or the wisdom realising emptiness will ensure that our meditational practice, or our actions are not a cause for rebirth in cyclic existence. Rather they ensure the achievement of the state of liberation, or even complete enlightenment.

What is most important for us in following the spiritual teachings is making progress in our practice. If that is our goal, then it is very important in pursuing dharma study that our motivation is not just to gather more

information. Rather it should focus on how what we have learnt is of the most help to us, and what are the most useful things we can apply to our practice?

Of course we are not saying that learning is unimportant, because of course it is important. But it should not be our main purpose for being here and studying. With the right motivation for studying dharma, we shall regard what we study as guidelines for practice, for calming our mental continuum, and instructions for the remedy of our mental delusions. With such a way of focussing on our spiritual pursuit, then every effort we make brings more gentleness, more calm to our mind-stream and in our daily actions. Therefore as long as we follow it, our spiritual practice will always be beneficial.

Whereas with a wrong motivation for learning dharma it is possible that no matter what we learn, we shall feel that it has nothing to offer. Instead of calming the mind and minimising delusions our learning will only increase the delusions and confusion in our mind.

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

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### ***Edit methodology***

*The initial transcript is prepared from Alan Molloy's notes. These are checked with Damien Busby's notes by Alan Molloy and any differences noted.*

*Adair Bunnett then compares her notes against the typed transcript and prepares this edited version.*

*Edited version checked by Alan Molloy*

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