

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

འདྲེན་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུང་སྟེ།



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Generate the altruistic mind of bodhicitta.

The Mind in the Moments near to Death

In the last teaching we began a discussion on the type of mind which we should have in the moments before death.

The mind which occurs at the time of death is the mind which will be nourished by the two mental factors of craving and grasping, and whether it is virtuous, non-virtuous or a neutral state of mind depends upon the type of mental factor which influence that mind.

This mind near the time of death will have a great influence on the type of rebirth which we shall take, so this time when we are close to death is a very crucial moment of life. In the last moments of this life, it becomes evident that all the possessions in which we placed all our hope and trust have to be left behind. From this angle, that last moment before death is the most tragic and worst thing which can happen to us in this life. Yet it is also a very important moment as it determines our future destiny. The best we can hope is that we face that last moment with delight, and if not with delight then at least with no fear or regret in our mind.

In terms of their experiences, this moment can also differentiate between one who practises dharma and one who does not. To a large extent we can control our experience if we remind ourselves of our practice, and cultivate compassion towards other beings, or if we generate faith in the triple gem. By reminding ourselves of virtuous thoughts in this way it is possible to generate a virtuous type of mind. To a certain extent others can also help us to cultivate such a virtuous state of mind at death by reminding us to do such practices at death time.

In terms of shaping or moulding our mind, the kind of shape we achieve, and the difficulty we experience in creating that shape, all depends upon our familiarity with that practice of shaping the mind. So as much as possible, it is important for us to train and familiarise ourselves now with virtuous states of mind. If we become very successful, then our mind can be transformed very easily into the shape we want. All we need to do is to remind ourselves of that practice, or for others to remind us of that practice.

We should train ourselves in the practice of freeing our mind from being overpowered by desire or hatred. On a constant and very regular basis we should place our mind on an object which does not arouse desire or hatred and, without any distraction, try to stay on that object for

a period of up to five or ten minutes. The benefits of practising such single pointed meditation is that our mind immediately becomes more peaceful, subdued and tamed and so we enjoy more inner peace and tranquillity. In the long term if we become very used to the practice of single pointed concentration, and thus free of the dominance of desire and hatred, then we can do this practice as we approach the moment of death.

The Gross Mind at Death

There is a time before completion of the death process when our mind is still in a very gross form, in that the mind can function as normal and remember the things of this life. At this time it is very important to have a very virtuous frame of mind, which will be nourished by the two mental factors of craving and grasping which bring us closer to a future life. If at that time we generate a peaceful state of mind then there is great benefit to us, because at the time of death the only thing which can help us is our spiritual practice. Our body, wealth and friends cannot help. If we are very familiar with our spiritual practice we can make this experience very peaceful. In other words we can prevent disturbing emotions such as desire and hatred from arising because such afflictive minds means that our mind will be non-virtuous. Then craving and grasping will be nourishing a non-virtuous mind which is a very fearful, frightening and unpleasant experience as well as causing a bad rebirth in the future.

During our lifetime we are very distracted by external objects. We place all our hope in them by thinking that they give us security in life. At death however we realise that there are in fact no external objects which can give that comfort. It is said that if one is used to following spiritual practice, and has developed faith and conviction in that practice, then it becomes evident at this moment of death that true security is within the mind. So the true spiritual practitioner, even when all other things have failed to help, experiences a feeling of being secure and having safe direction, because they know the answer lies within. It all makes sense to the spiritual practitioner, whereas on the other hand someone who lacks belief finds this extremely difficult to accept.

It is said that physical sign of having a virtuous state of mind is that the heat of the body begins to withdraw from the lower part of body towards heart. Whereas the sign of a non-virtuous state of mind is that the heat of the body withdraws from the top of the body towards the heart.

There is also the experience of the mind. If a virtuous state of mind exists then a white bright light, or the feeling of being in a very pleasant place, or house, or a feeling of delight or joy filling the mind is experienced. On the other hand if the mind is non-virtuous, then there are very unpleasant appearances or feelings in the mind, such as sadness or fear.

The Subtle Mind at Death

After the gross process of death, one undergoes the subtle process of death wherein the mind becomes neutral - neither virtuous nor non-virtuous.

At the very moment that the subtle process of death finishes, that is the ceasing of the very subtle state of mind, then simultaneously one assumes what is called the intermediate state of being. This is the state of existence after death, where the physical body is left behind, and cannot be carried with you but still the mind goes on.

The Intermediate State of Being

The features of the intermediate state being are now described. Their form is made of mind and wind, rather than a form of body which is made of bones and flesh. The shape is similar to the shape of the next rebirth. If the next rebirth will be human, then this form will reflect the shape of that human. If it is to be a godly being, then that shape will be reflected.

The size of this intermediate state being is equal to the size of an infant between the ages of four to five.

The intermediate state is also complete with all the sensory organs of the body. It would also have super perception or clairvoyant power. Furthermore no object can obstruct its movement towards its rebirth. The only object that can obstruct it is the womb (or place) of its next rebirth¹.

The maximum lifespan of the intermediate state being is up to one week. If, after this, there is no rebirth they must die again, and again be reborn as an intermediate state being.

We shall stop here. You can refer to the Lam Rim text where the features of this intermediate state of being are clearly described.

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

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 Bunnnett then compares her notes against the typed transcript and prepares this edited version.

Edited version checked by Alan Molloy

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¹ Editor: It is also stated the only other object that can obstruct the movement of the intermediate state being is the sacred reliquary or other sacred objects.
