

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



30 July 1996

Try to cultivate bodhicitta and use that as your motivation.

## 422.221.33 The Way One is Conceived in Birth

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།

Having discussed the intermediate state of being, the next topic is the way one is conceived in a new rebirth.

After death, but before finding the next rebirth, there is an intermediate state of being in the sense of being between death in the former life, and beginning the next life.

In the text the stages of birth and death are presented in terms of a being who is to be conceived in a mother's womb. Such an intermediate state being will have a shape which is similar to that of its future life. As this intermediate state being wanders around seeking its next rebirth, it is said that when the time is right it will be attracted to, and then see those beings of the same species as its current shape (which resembles its future rebirth).

As for the actual moment of conception into the next rebirth, it is said the intermediate state being will actually see the future father and mother having sexual intercourse. Then, it is said, if the intermediate state being is to be reborn as a female, it will feel aversion towards the female organs and attraction to the male organs. If it is to be reborn as a male, then the attraction and aversion is opposite. The intermediate state being sees only the male and female sexual organs, and no other parts of either body, so it becomes very frustrated and generates hatred, and it is with this feeling of hatred that the intermediate state being is conceived into the womb.

Now for a very general explanation of the actual process of conception. What happens is that out of very intense desire, the father and mother engage in this sexual activity, which results in an orgasm. First there is the thick semen; this is followed by the more refined semen, from which the sperm impregnates the female egg. This mixture then becomes like milk which having been boiled and allowed to cool, becomes a thick cream. In general, conception or rebirth occurs when the sperm impregnates the egg in this way. Then the intermediate state being ceases, and the new life begins. There are exceptions. In general though, conception or rebirth occurs in this way.

This is one explanation of the stages of a being entering cyclic existence. The next explanation is mainly derived from Lama Tsong Khapa's *Lam Rim Chenmo, The Great*

*Stages of the Path*, and is based on the twelve links of dependant arising.

## The Twelve Links of Dependent Arising

Concerning the twelve links of dependent arising, the related sutra states:-

“Because this exists that will arise. Because this is produced that will be produced.”<sup>1</sup>

The twelve links of dependent arising are:-

1. dependent arising of Ignorance
2. dependent arising of Karmic Formations
3. dependent arising of Consciousness
4. dependent arising of Name and Form
5. dependent arising of Six Sense Sources
6. dependent arising of Contact
7. dependent arising of Feeling
8. dependent arising of Craving
9. dependent arising of Grasping
10. dependent arising of Existence
11. dependent arising of Birth
12. dependent arising of either Death or Old Age

## 422.221.331 Ignorance

མ་རིག་པ།

The first dependent arising, ignorance, serves as the root cause of cyclic existence.

This ignorance is the ignorance which grasps at the self of a person, and is the direct opposite to the wisdom which realises the ultimate nature of reality. We should understand how these two are opposite in terms of their view of an object.

In general there are two forms of ignorance

(1) Ignorance of the law of cause and effect, that is being ignorant of the fact that virtuous action brings positive results, and non-virtuous action brings suffering.

(2) Ignorance of the ultimate nature or the truth of things. This is the ignorance of the first dependent arising.

The ignorance of the second type, which is the ignorance of dependent arising views oneself as if we exist inherently and independently by way of our own character without depending upon any other causes or conditions. We can recognise this ignorance in our experience of the sense of “I”, as an experience of our self identity.

Generally speaking it is not necessarily the case that any

<sup>1</sup> Editors note: The complete quote is “because this exists, that will occur. Because this has arisen, that will arise. Similarly ignorance serves as a subsidiary cause for the compositional factors....” *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* p. 527

sense of “I” or self which we experience is identical to this self grasping. However we can still identify an ignorance of self grasping that is holding onto some inherently existing “I” or self. By holding onto this ignorant view of self, we can see how we are led to create various actions which have the consequence of binding us into the endless rebirths of cyclic existence.

As a result of ignorance of the first kind (that is, the ignorance of the law of cause and effect) we create non-meritorious, or black karma. We do this because we do not fully understand that non-virtuous action creates suffering, and so we make no effort to prevent or minimise these non-virtuous actions, nor do we purify those we have completed.

On the other hand with knowledge about the law of cause and effect we can be more mindful of our actions, in that we minimise non-virtue and increase virtuous actions. Because we know the consequences, we then create positive, meritorious or immutable actions, and this ensures a better form of life in cyclic existence.

However if we are ignorant of the nature of self grasping, then any action whether it be meritorious or non-meritorious will be a cause to be reborn in cyclic existence, and the root cause of this is ignorance of the ultimate nature of things.

An action leading to continuing rebirth must have at its basis this ignorance of self grasping. It is just like the way this body supports all the other organs - the eye sense organ and so on. Chandrakirti said: “Initially there arises a sense of ‘I’ and attachment to this sense of ‘I’, from there follows all the actions which bring us into cyclic existence.”<sup>2</sup>

Within our own experience we can trace all our non-virtuous actions to this ignorance of the ultimate nature of reality, which underpins this sense of self. From this strong influence of such a sense of ‘I’ or the ego, we see how we lose control over our actions, and engage in conflict with, and abuse and hurt others. Then we find ourselves rejected by others - even those closest to us - and lead a miserable life.

So the true benefit of learning is calming ourself, therefore it is important to relate our learning of dharma to our own experiences.

#### 422.221.332 Karmic Formations

འདྲ་བྱེད།

Ignorance serves as the motivation to create the next link of dependent arising called karmic formation. Motivated by the ignorance of cause and effect, negative or non-virtuous actions are created, and this is karmic formation. Taking the life of another, for example is karmic formation.

#### 422.221.333 Consciousness

རྣམ་ཤེས།

After the karmic formation the third link is consciousness which stores the latency or the impression of karma. When the action of killing is completed, it does not cease or become non-existent. Rather it leaves a latency or

impression which is carried by the third dependent arising called consciousness.

If consciousness is the ground or field, then karmic formation is a seed, and ignorance is the one who sows that seed. Another analogy begins with the person being the one who sows the seed. Then karmic formation is the action of sowing the seed, consciousness is the field and ignorance is the seed that is sown.

The results the seed produces depends upon the conditions it meets. When the right conditions - water, manure, heat - come together then the seed will germinate to become a sprout. Similarly when the latency of karmic action meets its conditions of craving and grasping, it will produce its result which is a future rebirth.

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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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<sup>2</sup> From the text “Madhyamika-Avatarā’ Chapter one