

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།



10 December 1996

Cultivate a bodhicitta motivation, by thinking that the purpose of listening to, and practising the teachings is to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

Last week we briefly discussed how the state of liberation from cyclic existence can be achieved. To reach this state one must first see all the faults within cyclic existence. Then through this a sense of renunciation, the very strong thought to leave cyclic existence, is generated.

Having briefly discussed how to achieve liberation, the text then elaborates this under two headings:

1. What sort of life basis is suitable or needed to achieve liberation,
2. What is the suitable path which leads to liberation.

We have finished section one.

422.222.2 The Suitable Path which Leads to Liberation

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The suitable path leading to liberation, involves examining the root cause of cyclic existence, which is the innate conception of grasping at the ‘I’ as being inherently existent.

We should meditate in order to recognise this ignorance, (which grasps at the ‘I’, or self, in the wrong way). Try firstly to get some feeling or idea of how this ignorance gives the wrong notion of the way the ‘I’, or self, exists in reality. This is knowing what sort of picture of the ‘I’, or self, comes into the mind. Such a picture appears to our mind as if it were something that exists inherently and independently. If we check our experience of such notions of a self sufficient or independent ‘I’, it is so vivid and concrete, and it arises so spontaneously.

This spontaneous and innate conception of grasping the ‘I’ as inherently existent, is the root cause from which we experience all the mental afflictions or delusions, which then bring forth all the sufferings and problems in our life. We have to realise that we cannot completely end our suffering unless we apply the right antidote to this root cause of that suffering.

We can realise this by investigating the immediate source of our problems, or suffering in life. This immediate cause of why we cannot find lasting happiness and satisfaction in life is our unceasing desire for more and more things. For example, the immediate cause of discontent could be desire for something, or some hostile feeling. These are immediate feelings. If we investigate, then we can see that the reason why we develop desire

for example, is because of our ignorance of reality or ultimate truth. So the greater our ignorance, the stronger the mental delusions of desire, hatred and so on.

If we apply a specific antidote to a mental delusion (such as desire) by doing a specific meditation, then we can be successful in reducing desire and find some inner peace and satisfaction as a result of reducing that desire. But this inner peace and satisfaction is only temporary. It only lasts a short time. Because we have not dealt with the root cause, it is easy to generate desire again. In fact if we do not apply an antidote to the root ignorance, then we must suffer over and over again. If, however, we apply a correct antidote to that root cause of ignorance, and so minimise it, then we also automatically minimise all other mental delusions, such as desire and so forth.

To uproot that ignorance of grasping at ‘I’ or ‘mine’, our only antidote is the wisdom of selflessness or emptiness. This is because ignorance, and wisdom realising selflessness, directly oppose each other in terms of the way in which an object is apprehended. It is said the wisdom of selflessness is the only direct antidote to the ignorant mind.

It is important to contemplate and explore the impact of ignorance on our lives, on the basis of our own experience. We need to direct our attention within, instead of always blaming outer objects as the source of all the troubles and difficulties which we undergo in life. This is a different way of seeing the actual source of our daily problems. The actual source is not something totally hidden or mysterious to us since our mind is something with which we are very familiar indeed. If we direct our attention inwards, and watch our mind continuously we can learn a lot about it. In our life we go through periods of joyfulness, peacefulness and happiness, as well as periods of misery, chaos and a lot of difficulties. In both these situations, if we focus our mind on those outer things, we become distracted by them. We see them as the source of happiness or suffering.

If we direct the mind inward, we shall observe its role in our daily experience of peace and happiness. When we feel fulfilled and positive, enjoying immense peace and relaxation we hear from others about our obvious enjoyment of a good life. If at such times we look inwards, we see a state of mind which is very positive. It has kindness and understanding. On the other hand when we are in a very difficult situation, we see that our mind is very occupied by very negative thoughts and emotions, such as anger or uncontrolled desire.

Knowing how our experiences are determined by our mental attitude, then what is it that determines that attitude? The root cause is ignorance of the wisdom of emptiness. When there is ignorance there will be a stronger sense of ego - of 'I' and 'mine'. With such ignorance it is easier to lose our temper with even a very close, or intimate, friend. The anger is derived from this sense of 'I' and 'mine' which is an ignorant perception in the way 'I' and 'mine' exist.

Within our own immediate experience, think of a situation where we have a very close friend, who we hold so dearly to our heart, and for whom we would sacrifice everything, even taking on that friend's discomfort. But, if one day that friend does something wrong to you, and bruises your ego or sense of 'I' and 'mine', then it is possible to lose one's temper and strike out at that friend. There is no tolerance for that friend's actions, and there is resentment. Such hostile feelings immediately bring disturbance, and the loss of mental peace.

If, however, there is no ego, and this 'I' and 'mine' are reduced, then you will not feel so negative about what your friend has done. Rather you would be more tolerant, and even if something wrong was done you would not lose your temper, and consequently your inner peace. So it is important to understand that by turning the focus of your mind inward, you can see how so many unsatisfactory aspects of life are due to this ignorance and sense of 'I' and 'mine'.

The difference between the ignorance of self-grasping, and the wisdom of selflessness is in their mode of apprehension of the self. As said before, ignorance views this person who performs and experiences the results of those karmic actions, as existing independently, or self sufficiently without depending upon:

- any causes or conditions at all
- any cause or conditions collected together
- any single cause or conditions
- any part of any cause or condition.

So as a result of ignorance we view the self as; existing independently; existing by way of its own side; existing by way of its own self characteristics; a self sustaining existence.

The wisdom of selflessness cognises the person in a way directly opposite to that of the ignorance of self grasping. The wisdom of selflessness means the wisdom which realises that the person lacks, or is void of such inherent existence, such as existence by way of its own characteristics. Therefore it is said that having accustomed our mind to this wisdom of selflessness by meditation on selflessness, we can eventually totally uproot ignorance, and attain the state of liberation.

In terms of actual practice however, the actual realisation of such wisdom might be very difficult, and seem almost impossible to attain in this life. However, any effort which we put into trying to realise this wisdom, through studying this view of selflessness, will leave some impression on our mind. This will serve as a cause to bring us closer to liberation, and further from cyclic existence. It also serves as a cause to make progress to liberation after many future lifetimes.

As we have just learnt, the wisdom of selflessness, in particular the higher training of wisdom whereby you gain superior insight into the view of selflessness, is the main cause or path to liberation.

To actualise such higher wisdom, which is superior insight, we need to engage in the training of higher concentration because without overcoming the subtle internal mental distractions (by higher concentration) we cannot actualise this special, or superior insight. However it is said that before engaging in the training of higher concentration, one must engage in the training of higher moral ethics. This is because subtle internal distractions cannot be overcome without first overcoming gross external distractions by morality.

To cut a tree you need a sharp axe, and the wielder of the axe must have a strong shoulder and hand. Without a strong shoulder and hand the tools cannot chop down the tree, no matter how sharp the axe. Likewise the three higher trainings are indispensable. To cut the tree of ignorance of grasping at the 'I' we need the sharp axe of wisdom, supported by the firm shoulder and hand of concentration. Moral ethics is likened to the body of the person. It is the base which supports the hand, shoulder and axe. So it is said that morality is the base that supports both concentration and wisdom.

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

Edited version checked by Alan Molloy

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