

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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འཇིགས་པ་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ལག་བཅུང་སྤྱོད་པ།



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Let us cultivate the bodhicitta motivation of wishing to attain full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. In order to achieve this, we listen to these lam rim teachings to tame our minds.

422.222.2 Which Spiritual Path will lead to Liberation

ལམ་ཇི་ལྟ་བུ་ཞིག་གིས་འཇིགས་པ་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་པ།

In the last teaching we began the topic covering which spiritual path will lead us to the state of liberation from cyclic existence. The path which will do this is the wisdom realising selflessness. This wisdom is the direct remedy to the ignorance of self-grasping. It is this ignorance which is the root of all other delusions, and the root cause of cyclic existence.

We understood, last week, that we must gain the wisdom which is a special insight into the realisation of selflessness. And to gain such a realisation of selflessness, we must first develop a single pointed concentration, called calm abiding, on the wisdom realising selflessness. But prior to gaining calm abiding we must first engage in the training of morality. Therefore the path to liberation is encompassed in the threefold trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom.

The lam rim teaching is the guideline for one to reach full enlightenment. Here we are concerned with the teaching on morality. Of these three scopes of the stages of the path, the one which we are currently studying is the common or shared practice. It is not the actual stages of path of a person of middle scope, rather it is the stages of the path common to a person of middle scope. The training of wisdom is explained later, in the teachings on the stage of great scope.

Morality

In general morality means a sense of restraint or refraining from non-virtue.

Technically, morality refers to the thought of refraining from harmful actions. True morality is the sincere thought, from the depths of one's heart, to refrain from each of the ten non-virtues: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, idle gossip, covetousness, malicious thought and wrong views.

We also need to realise that there are benefits in practising the morality of refraining from each of these ten non-virtues. Nagajuna said “Morality is the basis of all excellent qualities, just like the earth is the basis for all moving and unmoving things to exist.” We should

realise that our practice of morality serves as the basis for the cultivation of our positive qualities. Without laying the basis of morality, we can develop no spiritual qualities. As buddhists, morality (particularly that of not causing harm to other living beings) should be the basis of our practice; in the sense that all other spiritual practices we do, should be based on this foundation.

So morality mainly refers to the genuine thought of refraining. Therefore, in our spiritual practice we should cultivate this strong thought of restraint, with a positive belief about the benefits of such morality. Whatever happens in life, whether it be good or bad, you should still maintain your morality, refraining from doing any of the ten non-virtuous actions.

You should call this your spiritual, or dharma practice since what dharma means is “that which protects”. Here the practice of non-killing is dharma. It is dharma in the sense that by undertaking that practice you are protected from falling into the depths of lower rebirth. Morality is also our refuge in the sense of being a cause for us to take a happy rebirth.

Benefits of Morality

The practice of morality has great benefit both to our own personal life, and that of others. Why did Lord Buddha emphasise this practice of morality? Because morality is the source of true peace and happiness. If we talk of peace in terms of our own immediate environment, it will naturally be very peaceful if there is no harmfulness, and no cause of harmfulness. We can live very peacefully if there is no need to worry about threats to our life, property or relationships. It is living beings who are responsible for peace and harmony in their environment. If living beings hold harmful thoughts towards each other, having no respect for life, property or truth, then such a place would be a very insecure place in which to live. Even a single person engaging in one immoral act can be the cause of greater harm to hundreds of thousands of beings. One single individual practising morality on the other hand, can benefit countless beings, enabling them to attain true peace and happiness in their life.

Whenever we talk of practising morality, we first have to think about how we can control or tame our mind. We have to make an effort to minimise thoughts of harmfulness like killing, stealing, and so on.

If we then engage in meditation, we shall find it to be much more effective, and even easier, if it is based upon our progress in the practice of morality. However if our practice of morality is weak, then it can be detrimental to

our meditation, for example by not producing a good result, or by the meditation becoming very difficult. Due to the weakness of our morality, our mind is influenced by desire for pleasant objects, or gross outer objects of distraction. Not only do we find it hard to calm our mind by meditation, and focus on objects, or a particular topic, but neither can we make any further progress. Progress in meditation can only occur by firstly overcoming outer distractions. Only then can you counter the subtle meditation obstacles such as sinking. In this way we can make progress.

Morality as a Cause for Stable Relationships

What we are discussing here is something that everyone of us can put into practice. The first and best thing is to focus upon a practice which is very simple, and easy to put into practice, and which makes full sense. It is on this basis, that we decide to do further practice.

Morality is also the practice which can transform us into a better person, which is what we all wish. The effect of the morality of refraining from the ten non-virtues is to subdue all harmful actions of our three doors of body speech and mind. The actual practice is when we integrate the morality of refraining from ten non-virtues into our daily life. We do not just follow this practice of morality on the advice of our teachers, but because we see the benefits to our own life, and the contribution it makes to the peace and happiness of other beings.

How does this practice benefit others? It benefits those closest to us. For example if you are trying your best to keep the morality of refraining from the ten non-virtues, then that gives your friends much peace of mind, because they know that you have no thought of lying, or harming, or deceiving others.

Imagine their fear and mental insecurity if they thought you were not fully trustworthy in what you say or do in your relationship with them. Through the lack of practice of morality, even a close friend will live with a great sense of fear and suspicion in their dealings with you.

Whereas on the positive side if we practise morality, this has the potential to make our friends feel very trusting, so morality is a good cause for stability and harmony in our relationships, with resulting personal benefit. So our practice of morality, if taken seriously, will be of great benefit to ourselves and many others.

It is up to each individual to decide what sort of verbal, physical or mental actions they perform. In other words each individual being has to control their mental or physical actions. If you want your actions of body, speech and mind to be beneficial or useful, then you are responsible for creating such actions. Therefore the ten virtuous actions have the potential to transform all our actions of body, speech and mind into something beneficial.

Tea Offering

In making tea offering we say the three syllable mantra OM AH HUNG three times. Each repetition has a special meaning.

On the first repetition imagine the tea which is offered is purified of stains and faults.

On second repetition the tea is transformed into a heavenly nectar.

On the third repetition we transform our offering into something everlasting and inexhaustible.

After this the tea is offered to holy objects, who by accepting this offering experience uncontaminated bliss.

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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