

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ཅུ་ལམ་རིམ་རྣམས་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



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Please make sure your motivation is that of bodhicitta.

Morality (continued)

Previously we have noted that morality refers mainly to a sense of restraint, such as restraining from any of the ten non-virtuous actions.

To further show the importance of morality the Lord Buddha said ‘After I pass beyond sorrow, then this is your teacher’. The ‘this’ in ‘this is your teacher’, refers to the practice of morality within the continuum of any being.

Accordingly, we have to understand that if we have taken any formal moral vows, then those vows are the morality within our continuum. As Buddha said, those vows are your guide: they are no different from having the actual Buddha as your teacher. Likewise you should see the morality within your continuum of refraining from the ten non-virtues as your teacher, or spiritual guide.

We determine both the form we take, and the living conditions of our next rebirth. By making the best use of this life, with all its opportunities, we can have all that we desire in the next life. We all wish for a better rebirth in any of the happy realms. As Buddha said the main cause for such a rebirth is the practice of morality. So in addition to faith in Buddha’s teachings based upon our knowledge and understanding of them, we also need to make an effort to practise them. Having practised morality, we are guaranteed a good rebirth, so there is no reason to be frightened of death, or our future life.

If, with faith, we develop spiritual practice (such as the practice of morality, or the practice of preventing harmfulness to other beings), then not only will there be benefits in this life, and in future lives, but also, at the moment of death there will be peace and confidence. So there are great benefits in following a spiritual practice.

Having seen some benefits in following spiritual practice, we should then realise that the best time to practise is now, when we are physically very well and mentally alert, with clarity of thought and good discriminating powers. With such freedom we should contemplate the various topics of Dharma, thinking of how Dharma can help us do all that we want in this, and future lives.

As said before, we all wish to take a happy rebirth. But simply achieving a happy rebirth is not enough. To be able to have all the wealth and material we need to practise dharma and achieve our spiritual aims then the Buddha advised us to create the cause of those things which is practising generosity. This does not necessarily

mean material generosity, as we may not be in a position to do this, rather it means to develop the practice of generosity in the mind, thereby developing the state of mind which wishes to help others. Then if we do have the resources, we are ready to help others. So, keeping the words of the Buddha in mind, we should try our best to practise generosity.

Nagarjuna said:

Morality results in happy rebirth

Generosity results in abundant wealth

Patience results in beauty and lustre of the body

Joyous effort results in success in whatever action one undertakes

Concentration results in peace in the mind

Wisdom results in overcoming all delusions in the mind.

Spiritual practice, then, has the potential to fulfil all the desires of this and future lives.

It is important to always relate what we learn about Dharma to our own life and mind, otherwise our learning will have no true meaning. Then we can see how every event of our life illustrates Dharma. Look at our current life. We are human beings, which of course is a good form of life. As humans, we talk about our life in terms of bad and good things.

All the good aspects of our life are results of good actions in the past. They all show that we have created the cause: we must have practiced morality. We are not starving, and we have created enough wealth to be comfortable. This shows that we have practised generosity. Even if we are not perfect we do have some positive qualities such as patience, effort, some concentration to do the practice of meditation, and we have some wisdom knowledge. So on the positive side we have so many reasons to feel good and fortunate in our life.

However, at same time many unwanted things happen in life. This shows our lack of familiarity with spiritual practice. Our mind is so easily overpowered by delusions, and so very weak in virtue and other positive aspects. This shows that we must make more effort to change our mind.

If we relate Dharma to our own life in such a way, then whatever events occur in life, even very bad or undesirable ones, we can see them as a means of encouraging us to practise Dharma more in future, by minimising our negative actions.

So the most important part of spiritual practise is to fully

utilise our mental potential, and thus realise that we do have the capacity to achieve full enlightenment. By focusing upon our mind it is possible to eliminate many unnecessary problems which we are currently facing. There is an enormous amount to learn if we focus all our attention onto our own mind, because when we look into its nature we see the tremendous potential for change.

The Key to Spiritual Practice: Watching our Three Doors

The key to practice is very simple. All we have to do is watch our actions of the three doors of body, speech, and mind, then we can see that in each case there are positive and negative actions. The positive actions need to be adopted, and the negative ones abandoned. So in actual practice it is very important to have clear knowledge of what is positive, and what is negative. Then, based on this knowledge, we can, if not all the time at least at some of the time, adopt positive actions and abandon negative ones on a day-to-day basis.

Having developed this knowledge which discriminates positive from negative, it is very important to not be discouraged and say, "This is impossible! I cannot achieve anything, I cannot make any progress". Because you can make progress by focusing on those practices which are easiest or most simple for you. Then having achieved at that level, go on to the next steps.

As long as you make some effort on a daily basis you will make progress, and after a period of time you will be able to see that progress. You can directly experience the benefit of any effort made over a long period, no matter how small it is.

So the practice that we can all do, is to focus upon the actions of our three doors in daily life, constantly trying to improve them, even if we can't perfect the complete act. Take the example of speech. We know that saying certain words will disturb the minds of others, and so end in disputes and quarrels. We also know other words are pleasant to hear and are welcomed by others. Similarly with our actions of our body: our facial expressions are also of these two types. Of course the most important of these three doors is our mind, so it is always important to increase our understanding in terms of knowing the various types of thoughts which we generate in our mind, and what effect each type of thought has upon our experience in life.

If we gain more experience of our thoughts through continuous observation, then we can see the patterns of thoughts which destroy our sense of peace, happiness, and joy. We can also see those states of mind which always bring peace, joy, and happiness. This is the daily basis on which one makes an effort to increase positive actions of the three doors, and minimise the negative ones.

Engaging in positive actions of the three doors has a direct connection with topic of morality, because the benefits of doing the right or positive actions are also the benefits of practising morality.

Although in Buddhism there are many levels which we can study and practise, the Buddha always emphasised that of all his teachings, what is the most important for each individual is the teaching which suits them. There

are many aspects of teachings taught by the Buddha because of the diverse interests, needs and levels of those to be taught. For most people these days, the most important and relevant teaching is that which relates to their own life. The Buddha's teaching on morality directly relates to our daily life since it shows us what we should, and should not, do in terms of our actions of the three doors.

Shantideva said: "Before speaking to someone, you should first check your mind". This advice is also related to the importance of our speech. That is why before speaking to another, we should first check our mind to see the nature of our motivation.

Going further we should also think of our own daily actions of speech, and how the effect of those actions of speech are also the effects of the mind behind those actions. If our motivation is very negative, but our speech is very sweet and pleasant, the listener will not be fooled. The same is true of our facial expressions.

It is universally accepted that pleasant actions of body and speech are a very important and useful quality. For this reason school reports and references refer to conduct, behaviour in class, friendliness, cooperativeness with their teacher and other students, etc. It is a positive thing to have a good report or reference in respect of these qualities. From this point of view, the practice of morality of action of our three doors is something universally acceptable. Whoever adopts those values will become a more acceptable being to society.

Happiness in life is more than simply having good living conditions, or even an affluent lifestyle. Something more is needed. Adopting good moral conduct is another condition of happiness. Through it you gain friendship and the trust of others, and through that you achieve your aims and objectives in life. So this practice of morality is of direct benefit to everyone.

Next week will be discussion night. A list of discussion topics will be prepared for the study group test on the following week. The topics should be simple and general, dealing with simple issues. The compulsory question is "How does meditation help to control one's mind?". This can be answered in many ways, for example by the specific meditations we do, eg. how patience works to overcome anger. Or you are free to write about your own meditation, and what positive experience you gain through that.

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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