

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།



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Try to cultivate a bodhicitta motivation by thinking “I shall listen to these teachings on the stages of the path and calm my mind, and through this create the causes to attain full enlightenment for the sake of all beings.”

Morality as Non-Harmfulness

In recent teachings we have discussed the practice of morality, in particular the morality of not causing harm to any other beings, and the morality of refraining from the ten non-virtuous actions. As we study the dharma, it is important to remind ourselves that the main purpose of our study is putting the dharma into daily practice.

With a very clear understanding of the practice which we are undertaking, we shall feel more positive and confident that our practice really does have some benefit and relationship to daily life. Recall that the kind Buddha said that the source of peace and happiness in the world is the path of non-harmfulness. We should try to relate the meaning of these teachings to our own practice and knowledge of the outer world. Then we can understand very clearly that true peace, happiness and harmony in the world has to come from the minds of all the beings living in that world. If all those living beings have more mutual respect for each others’ lives, then naturally the world becomes a better and safer place in which to live.

Even on an individual level, if we each follow the path of non-harmfulness, then wherever we go, or whoever we meet, we shall be accepted and liked because of our respect for their life, and because we cherish this practice of non harmfulness. So it is not only at an intellectual level, but also as a result of our own experience that we learn that peace and happiness is not something that we can collect from the outside world, but is something for which each and every living being is responsible. In fact cultivating love and compassion towards other living beings is the basis for fulfilling our wish for peace and happiness.

Even if the subject of the teaching is very simple it is still very important for us to contemplate it fully, so that we can put it into practice. Think carefully about the statement just made: if we practise the morality of not causing harm to others, then this has effect of bringing more happiness to our own life and also solving our problems. Rather than just accepting this statement blindly, we must consider whether this is indeed the case. If we show love and compassion to others we certainly solve their problems, but how are we helping ourselves? In fact if we truly practice the morality of not

causing harm to others, or the morality of maintaining wholesome actions, then the result of such moral ethics is that our mind will be more peaceful, calmer and at rest. We also develop our mindfulness and alertness. So morality is a very good base upon which to make progress in meditation. With a sound moral base, we shall find the practice of single-pointed meditation much easier. Thus, finding a sense of peace and rest in life is not just the result of particular material conditions, but rather more importantly this sense arises from conditions which must be created within our own mind.

The Story of Taka Lama’s Attendant

There was a very well known monk who was the attendant to a famous Tibetan Lama called Taka Lama. [The attendant was interned with the other Tibetan monks in Buxa, the internment camp for Tibetan refugees in India.] He became very close to the late Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, spending a lot of time with him, and was very fond of telling interesting stories about his life in Tibet.

As an attendant to the great Taka Lama in Tibet, he enjoyed great privileges, and had a great deal of influence over the public. Wherever he went he had servants, and enjoyed a life of luxury. However following his escape to India he lost all these privileges. He did not even have enough food to eat, and lived a life of great poverty. Yet in this poverty he found more contentment and mental peace than he had ever experienced in the past. What he was saying is that being at rest, or feeling very happy is not really determined by outer conditions.

Three Types of Vows

There are many ways to integrate the practice of morality into our life. Whoever follows this practice should know very well the benefits of practising morality, as well as the shortcomings of not practising it. If we talk of the practice of morality as a formal practice then there are three types of vows which we can take.

1. The vows of self liberation, which includes the vows of bikkshus, bikkshunis and also lay vows
2. Bodhisattva vows
3. Secret mantra vows.

For a full explanation of these vows, and the practice of morality you should read the commentary in the Lam Rim text. Before taking any vow it is very important to make sure that you can keep it, and that you fully understand the benefit of that vow.

The celibacy vow in particular qualifies you as a Sangha, or member of the spiritual community and qualifies you as Buddha's representatives. You should see that every effort you make in maintaining this vow is no different from the effort made in promoting and preserving the teaching of Lord Buddha. Also any vows that you take should be seen as the source of all your happiness, both now and in the future.

Types of Lay Vows¹

If you do not take such celibate ordination vows you can take the lay person's vows. These are five in number.

The four root vows are:

1. Refraining from killing
2. Refraining from stealing
3. Refraining from lying
4. Refraining from sexual misconduct

The fifth vow is refraining from intoxicating drinks which is not a root vow but is integral to the lay persons vow.

Categories of Holders of Lay Person's Vows²

There are six categories of holders of lay vows. Translated literally they are:

1. Holder of one precept - this person holds only one root vow
2. Holder of some precepts - refers to a holder of two root vows
3. Holder of most of the precepts - refers to one who holds three root vows
4. Complete holder of lay person's precepts - this person holds all four root vows
5. The holder of lay person's vows by virtue of taking the refuge precepts - this is someone who just takes refuge precepts. Such a person is still considered to be a holder of the lay person's precepts
6. Holder of the lay person's celibate vow - this person holds all four root vows, with the vow to refrain from sexual misconduct being replaced by a vow to refrain from all sexual conduct.

The vow to abstain from intoxicants is regarded as integral to the practice of a holder of the lay person's ordination.

If you break any of the four root vows that you have taken then you should apply the four means of purification, which gets rid of negativities. However if you break all four root vows you must take the root vows again, and this will restore them.

Morality can be observed by taking such vows, but even without taking such vows or precepts, we can still practise morality by abandoning the ten non-virtues.

Discussion

¹ This part of the translation has been reconfirmed as the correct interpretation. There are two explanations that emphasise the importance of the abstaining from intoxicating drinks. The first is that there is a total prohibition on taking any intoxicating drinks if one is a holder of any of the lay vows. The other explanation is that although there is no blanket prohibition on intoxicants, the taking of the vow to abstain from intoxicants is integral to or fundamental to the holding of any of the lay person's vows.

² Editor: These divisions of the holder of lay person's vows (In Tib. "Ge-nyen") were clarified with Geshela.

Student: In the Ganden Lhagyama that we recite before the teachings there is a verse which says:

Whatever non-virtues of body, speech and mind
I have accumulated since beginningless time
And especially any transgressions of my three vows
I confess over and over again with fervent regard from my heart

What three vows does this refer to?

Geshe-la: The pratimoksha (individual liberation), bodhisattva and secret mantra vows

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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