

# 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་བཅུང་ས།



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Reinforce your bodhicitta motivation by thinking that the reason you are listening to these lam rim teachings is to attain full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Then, as a cause to achieve enlightenment, cultivate the thought that after listening to these teachings, you will put them into practice as a method of calming the mind.

## Preventing the Fourth Moral Downfall of Lack of Conscientiousness

We learnt in last week's teaching that by applying mindfulness, alertness, and a sense of moral shame and embarrassment to our daily practice and actions, we can be sure that no faulty action will occur through that fourth door of moral downfall, the lack of conscientiousness. Before we can integrate them into our practice we need to properly recognise mindfulness, alertness, and sense of moral shame and embarrassment.

### 1. Mindfulness

Mindfulness, as discussed here, is a tool to help us in our meditation practice. In this context it refers to a special mindfulness which possesses three characteristics. These are:

1. The object of mindfulness
2. The mental attitude of mindfulness
3. The function of mindfulness.

**Object:** In this context, the object is one with which we are already familiar, i.e. an object which we have known before.

**Mental Aspect:** Mental aspect is not forgetting that object.

**Function:** The function of mindfulness is not being distracted, i.e. retaining that aspect of the object, instead of being distracted by the influence of some other object or thought.

### Further Elaboration

The reason why the object must be familiar to your mind is because if you are not familiar with it, or if you have no prior knowledge of it, then you cannot recollect it. Therefore to generate this special mindfulness the given object must be **familiar to the mind**, which is the first characteristic.

But even if you have known that object in the past, if you are not holding that object in the mind now, then you cannot generate mindfulness. The given object must be in your mind which is the second characteristic of mindfulness.

This special mindfulness not only recollects the object, but at the same time it causes the mind **to** stay on the object without being distracted or interrupted. This third characteristic, the function of mindfulness, is very important since through it we can develop single-pointed concentration.

### 2. Alertness

Here alertness, sometimes called introspection, specifically refers to the alertness which is a result of mindfulness.

An example of how alertness arises as an effect of mindfulness, is if you have to look for a particular person in the very busy Victoria Market. In order to find that person you not only need to know their appearance, their skin colour, their size of body, and so forth but also while looking for that person it is very important to have all these details fresh in your mind. Then if you suddenly see that person in front of you, you immediately generate the thought “This is the person I am seeking”.

Alertness arises in our mind in the same way as the thought, “This is the person I am seeking”. By applying mindfulness not only do you hold the given object in the mind, but you also become more alert. If, as a result of some interference in meditation, you lose the object which is held by mindfulness, you suddenly become alert that a fault has arisen. This alertness arises only as an effect of mindfulness, in the sense that without mindfulness, alertness cannot arise.

### Shame and Moral Embarrassment

Shame and moral embarrassment are very helpful in safeguarding our moral practice, and enabling us to avoid immoral actions. In this context the main difference between shame and embarrassment is the fundamental reason why you avoid breaking vows or precepts or committing other immoral actions. Moral shame is when we decide to not commit a non-virtuous or immoral action on the grounds that it will result in a bad reputation or criticism, or even by thinking, “How could I commit such immoral actions because I am Bhikkshu”. Thus moral shame is the avoidance of unwholesome actions because of our own self-consciousness.

On the other hand, if you avoid doing such non-virtuous actions on the grounds that it would displease your guru or the three jewels of refuge, then this is moral embarrassment. Thus we avoid immoral action because of the feelings of some person we respect.

So we can see how important it is to have a sense of moral shame and moral embarrassment, because with this sense there will be more restraint in our actions, and without it we may become unscrupulous. It is for this reason that we take spiritual precepts and vows in the presence of holy objects and gurus. Then, having taken these vows we want to avoid moral shame and embarrassment, and will be inspired to think, “Because I have taken these vows from my guru I must be more mindful of keeping them”.

### **The Meaning Of Conscientiousness**

The mental factor of conscientiousness prevents delusions from overpowering the mind and it is the cause to exert joyful effort in the practice of developing virtuous qualities.

The three-fold training includes the training of morality whereby one properly keeps all the moral practices including all vows and commitments. This is possible through the application of mindfulness, alertness, conscientiousness, moral shame and embarrassment, and when all of these are applied then your moral practice can be pure. If on the basis of such moral practice we train in concentration and wisdom, then we see the possibility of attaining liberation and freedom from cyclic existence. This method of meditation is the stages of the path common to the middle scope. At this point transformation of the mind to the stages of the path of the great scope commences.

In the lam rim, the teaching on the stages of the path of the small and medium scopes is the preliminary teaching, because the main path to be followed is the stages of the path of the great scope. In order to engage in the mahayana or great stages of the path, one engages in the stages of the small and medium scopes but does not remain content with them. At the same time one sees that this preliminary training in the small and medium stages of the path is essential to complete the great stages of the path.

### **Meaning of Hinayana and Mahayana**

When we refer to small and medium stages of path as the hinayana vehicle, we are talking of the hinayana as the lesser vehicle, and the mahayana as the great vehicle. Thus we should know the difference between these two vehicles.

The literal meaning of vehicle or “yana” (Sanskrit) or in Tibetan “tek-pa”, is assuming responsibility for either one’s own purpose, or for that of other beings.

We can see the difference between those two vehicles on the grounds of either:

1. the purpose, or the aim, for following either of these two vehicles
2. the result, or fruit, of these two vehicles.

### **Purpose and Result of Hinayana and Mahayana Paths**

1. These two differences explain why the hinayana is explained as the lesser or inferior path compared to the mahayana which is called the great vehicle. In general the follower of the hinayana, or lesser vehicle, is one who has generated renunciation, and who seeks liberation from cyclic existence but merely for one’s own sake.

Whereas in the mahayana vehicle the purpose is for the needs of all other sentient beings.

2. Likewise, there is difference in terms of the ultimate fruit of these two vehicles. The ultimate fruit of the hinayana vehicle is liberation from cyclic existence, as a result of just abandoning all mental delusions. Whereas by achieving the ultimate goal of the mahayana path, one attains full enlightenment, free of all faults and limitations of knowledge.

Therefore, from point of view of the purpose of the path, and the result of the path, the hinayana is the lesser vehicle, and the mahayana is the greater vehicle.

Many of you have studied this topic of the difference between the two vehicles in the past. We are studying this topic again, because it is important to refresh what you know, so that it can build onto what you already know.

### **Test Topic**

The compulsory exam topic is the benefits of bodhicitta. There are ten benefits listed in the text, but also add your own thoughts arising from your own experience and contemplation.

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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 and the taped recording against the typed transcript and prepares this edited version.*

*Edited version checked by Alan Molloy*

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