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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ཅུ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



8 July 1997

Please come out of your meditative equipoise.

The only beings who can preach dharma while in meditative equipoise are fully enlightened beings - such as a buddha. If you are not a fully enlightened being, you cannot sit in meditative equipoise and give teachings, or listen to them.

As you all have some knowledge of the bodhicitta mind, you should use this knowledge in your practice as much as possible. It is very important to use bodhicitta as the motivation for any practice in which you engage. Somehow you have to cause your mind to concentrate on the topics of the dharma teachings. That is why it is important to spend some time mentally preparing oneself before any practice.

Observing the Benefits of Dharma Practice to our Current Life

Becoming more familiar with spiritual practice and with the virtuous, or wholesome states of mind is all a matter of how much training we give to our mind. That is why it is very important to always examine one's mindstream on a daily, or consistent basis. Since you have already gained some dharma knowledge, you get some idea of what is best for yourself, and your mind, when you examine your mindstream.

We all want our mind to be very stable and calm, not only now, but at the time of death we wish to die with that calm state of mind. Therefore we have to realise that the only way to gain such a virtuous state of mind is by training our mind - by getting oneself used to spiritual practice as much as possible. If we do this, we can then see our progress in terms of our familiarity with virtuous practice.

If you continue to regularly practise training your mind in virtue, by engaging in meditation on a regular basis for a period of time, (e.g. an hour, or less if this is too long) then as the years pass you will see how much progress you have made. As you make progress then the practice becomes very easy, and a very natural thing to do. This means that even at the time of death when you is very mentally and physically weak, you are still mentally able to undertake virtuous practice.

The Benefits of Dharma Practice in this Life

We should always be convinced that the dharma practice we do has some real meaning for both this life and future lives, because we shall then take that practice to heart.

It is very obvious how dharma practice benefits one in this life. What we all wish for in this life - physical and mental happiness - is not something obtainable just through some material or outer conditions. We might

think that physical or material happiness can be found by always keeping ourselves busy with work. But we cannot find it there. It depends on our mental attitude, or way of thinking, as well as the outer conditions. We can understand this fact very clearly if we examine our own day-to-day experience of pain, pleasure, ease or unease. If we examine the causes and conditions of these experiences of like and dislike, we see that the conditions are not only outer ones. There is also an inner factor. What is that inner factor? If we examine our mind, it is a negative way of thinking, or negative habits or influences in our mind.

In this way we see that all our experiences are the outcome of our attitude. We have to see how the dharma practice which we do assists our life. It should add to our life. We should know that even in this immediate lifetime, without the assistance of the very virtuous, sustaining dharma state of mind, it is impossible to find lasting peace and happiness in the mind, by just relying on outer conditions.

The Levels of Happiness

It is possible to seek various levels of happiness or pleasure in this life. The best is to seek the happiness which is lasting, and experienced at a deeper level.

What is happiness or pleasure to most ordinary people? The happiness and pleasure they experience is mere conditions. They experience it either when their mind is overpowered, or influenced by distractions such as mental fantasies, or something physical like a social indulgence. We have to realise that there is happiness beyond these mental fantasies and social indulgences.

We need deeper happiness because this very gross happiness which most people seek is very unstable and can disappear like a rainbow. As we grow older, attaining more than sixty or seventy years of age, it is very difficult to experience such gross happiness. We see many people who are well off, but who still live a very unhappy and very miserable life. We see very old people who, despite having achieved much in life, see their life as empty and who experience only grief.

For people whose only conception of pleasure is gross material pleasure, there is no happiness when they are deprived of this pleasure, and then their life has no meaning. So it is very wise to think of seeking happiness and self satisfaction independently through self contentment, spiritual practice, and meditation rather than depending upon material conditions, or mental distractions. Mental distractions or fantasies can

sometimes bring good experiences, but overall they are the cause of more suffering and confusion in the mind.

The Importance of Practising Now

It is important to do more practice of dharma when we are young and very fit. We should try to balance our life at that age, rather than just wasting all our time in material pursuits. Of course it is important to earn money, but at the same time we should try to use some of our time for spiritual practice, and go beyond seeking just material pleasure. If we train like this, then in the latter period of life we shall be very secure, both materially and spiritually.

In short if we simply examine our own life, and the lives of others - old and young, rich and poor - we can gain some knowledge of what is best to do now, and how to avoid suffering in the future.

We have to take full responsibility for our spiritual practice ourselves, and we have to see that practice as a means of enriching ourselves with an inner wealth. Just as we must work hard to gain outer wealth, it is our responsibility to accumulate inner wealth through spiritual practice. As mentioned earlier, for many of us it is very unrealistic to completely follow the spiritual path - in other words to completely renounce the comforts of the world. In our era it is very difficult to completely renounce the world. It is not like in the past, where many practitioners renounced worldly pleasures, and followed the spiritual path without any belongings or any good material comforts. It is more practical for us to think, "I shall make sure that I am not short of both material wealth and spiritual wealth. I shall try to achieve both goals."

As is always said when making any effort to achieve spiritual goals, what is most important is not learning, but integrating the dharma into our mind and our actions. In essence dharma practice is to benefit other beings. So we have to recognise the real spiritual practice that we do. Real spiritual practice which benefits other beings - especially our parents, the sick or the very old - has the greatest benefit. Then there is some connection between the practice we do, which is to serve and benefit others, and our own life.

Learning from our Elders

We have to see that at a young age we are just observing, whereas the elderly are busy being observed. In truth, however, one day we shall also grow older, and in turn be observed, and we ourselves shall go to a nursing home [the places where the very elderly people live]. If we see suffering in this world, there is no guarantee that we shall not experience that same suffering in the future.

So in this way we relate everything in our life to our practice to gain a fuller understanding. Through benefiting others we can create harmony, which becomes a source of joy for ourselves and others. Harmony is very important for both the young and the old, for children and parents. Harmony is an interdependent quality, it cannot exist in isolation. Through serving and respecting their parents, children give so much support and joy to them. Likewise children, and young people generally can learn so much about life from their elders.

Geshela says that when he is asked about seeking a livelihood, and how to live life, he replies "Seek this

advice from your parents". Of course some older people look down on and ignore younger people, and that creates problems, but generally it is true that elderly people have more real experience of life. There is a lot of knowledge to be gained from elderly people. In this way you can respect them and hold them in high regard.

Geshela said that he meant to continue on the benefits of bodhicitta tonight. What he has just taught indicates the ways in which the teachings can be expanded into all aspects of life, and have many levels at which they can be understood.

Discussion

Geshe-la: Name the seven fold instruction of cause and effect to generate bodhicitta.

Students: Recognising all beings as your mother, Remembering the kindness of all beings, Repaying the kindness, Love, Compassion, Superior Intention, and Bodhicitta.

Geshe-la: What is the meditation before seven-fold cause and effect?

Student: Equanimity

Geshe-la: What is the meaning of equanimity in that context?

The equanimity which is the immeasurable equanimity has two types, depending on the focus of the equanimity: Where the focus is upon oneself, wishing to attain this mind of equanimity

Where the focus is upon others, wishing them to have the mind of equanimity.

On which of these two do we focus before the seven fold cause and effect meditation?

It is the first one. Before the seven-fold cause and effect meditation on bodhicitta, we generate a personal equanimity. Prior to the seven-fold cause and effect meditation you must level your mind by completely removing all thoughts of holding some close, and feeling aversion or distance to others. This completely equalises our attitude to all beings, and we hold the same attitude to all. If our mind is not level like this, it is impossible to later cultivate what is called impartial love and compassion.

The equanimity in the Four Immeasurables focuses upon others developing the mind of equanimity. This is a meditation we do wishing to level the mind of all other beings, so that they have no attachment and aversion to others.

If we apply the same way of thinking we can see that whenever we enjoy food or drink, we transform that moment into a spiritual practice - as a cause to inspire us to practise more dharma. Likewise the experience of some difficulty is also a reminder of dharma, because if we realise that these unwanted experiences are the outcome of our negative actions, we shall cultivate the motivation of not creating further negative actions.

It is in this way that you develop your meditations on the law of karma, or the law of cause and effect. Making progress in your knowledge of the law of karma, means contemplating the various life experiences, looking at their cause and effect, and thereby cultivating the thought of doing what is to be done, and avoiding what is to be avoided.