

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Try to think that the purpose of listening to this teaching on the stages of the path to enlightenment is to put it into practice, so that you can achieve the fully enlightened state of buddhahood for the sake of all beings. Make sure that bodhicitta is the motivation behind studying and practising this lam rim.

Recognising All Sentient Beings As One's Mother

As part of the meditation on this first step of generating bodhicitta - the step of recognising all sentient beings as one's mother - one must firstly establish the existence of a previous life. Using every logical proof to establish this fact, one then tries to develop the conviction that there was a life before this one.

If you go back through your past lives, you cannot say that your life began at a particular point. In other words the number of lives we have had is countless, or infinite.

After this think that your current mother is not only your mother in this lifetime, but has in fact also been your mother in countless past lifetimes. Likewise think of your father, then friends and relatives, and then strangers in this way. Then you see that all sentient beings, even those you view as your enemy, have been your mother countless times in the past.

Relating Theory To Daily Life

In the commentary on the lam rim text you find this comment by one bhikshu, “He eats his father's flesh and hits his mother. The enemy he killed sits on his knee. A wife gnaws her husband's bones. Samsara can be such a farce!”¹.

You need to develop your understanding of the fact that all sentient beings have been your mother, to the point that it spontaneously arises in relation to any sentient being: when you eat meat you feel some negative sense that you are eating the flesh of your mother, or if you observe a tiny ant, you immediately recall how in many past lifetimes all your hopes of survival depended on that ant who once served as your mother.

If you actually realise the step of remembering all sentient beings as being your mother, then that thought arises very spontaneously in your mind. Even if you do not achieve this realisation, some meditation on this step will have some effect in terms of reducing the self-cherishing mind, and increasing the thought of helping and benefiting others. Then, as a benefit of this

meditation you will have more patience and tolerance, especially when others cause personal harm.

422.321.122 The Second Cause: Remembering The Kindness Of All Sentient Beings As One's Mother

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In this second step you contemplate the kindness of all motherly sentient beings every time they were your mother, and since all sentient beings have been your mother, you extend the thought of this kindness to all sentient beings.

The easiest way to remember the kindness of all sentient beings is by first remembering the kindness of your mother in this life. This is easy to remember in terms of the beginning, the middle, and the end.

Our Mother's Kindness At The Beginning: During Pregnancy

Our mother's kindness in the beginning is for the nine months when we are in her womb.

Physically our mother felt the moment of conception. It is said that this very first moment of a new life takes away all the energy from the mother's body. You all know how women become very weak and lethargic at this time. It is said some women feel like they are falling over a cliff, or that they have a feeling of sinking down at the moment of conception.

It is good to contemplate how one's mother sacrifices herself at that moment, and this is important because our relationship with our mother is important. This meditation can develop closeness with one's mother and help to overcome any problems, either now or in the future.

Despite the loss of her freedom and pleasures, and the extra burden that she has to carry, the moment one is conceived your mother feels a tremendous, spontaneous flow of love towards you and thinks “This is my child”. At the same time extra worries and concerns arise in her mind. She is no longer responsible for just her own life, but now has the direct responsibility for two lives. If we consider the sacrifices she makes, her love must be very great and deep.

Your mother is always concerned about your safety when you are in her womb, and because of this she may have to change her lifestyle. If she is fond of jogging or dancing, she might stop this. She is also very thoughtful of what she eats or drinks - whether it is too hot or too cold - and she is even aware of her body temperature.

¹ Editor's note: we have inserted the text from page 575, *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*

As a result of your conception there are great changes and more stress to her life.

When you are in the womb, you receive all your energy and nutrition from your mother, so whatever she eats or drinks comes to you through the umbilical cord. When you are in that state you would probably die if you were fed by mouth. There are also karmic explanations as to why it is like this.

At the back of her mind your mother is always concerned about your safety. She cannot even sleep properly for fear of causing harm to you. Even at this early stage of your life you can see how much affection and love you receive from your mother; what sacrifices of her own pleasure and freedom she makes; what pain and discomfort she endures.

We should always remember her kindness so that we can be more grateful and appreciative of our mother. There are those who believe their mother has been very bad or has abused them. Why do these people hold such a negative attitude towards their mother? Do the reasons for which they feel negative outnumber her kindnesses? It is not right to completely forget the kindness which you receive from your mother, and hold in your mind the few abusive words that she said to you. You see the benefits of viewing your mother from the perspective of all the good things she has done for you.

Without the kindness of our mother we would not have survived. All the credit for meeting with the Dharma and being able to do what one wanted in life goes to our mother. In a formal meditation on the topic of the kindness of the mother, you clearly and vividly visualise your current mother in front of you. Then as we have just discussed, remember her kindness from the moment of conception through the nine months and ten days in the womb. Not only did she show great love and affection, but she also underwent great physical and mental pain. To some extent you can justify her difficulties by saying that her body was karmically or biologically built to carry you, but you should still consider how very difficult it is to carry an even small load for just a few hours, and imagine how you would feel. Your mother made great sacrifices while you were in the womb.

Our Mother's Kindness In The Middle: At Birth

Next we think of our mother's kindness in the middle, when she gave birth.

Here we contemplate what our mother undergoes, and what we are like at the time of birth. Of course all women who have given birth know from their own experience that birth is physically very painful. Those who have not had the experience of giving birth can learn about that pain through reading books, or by observing birth. Here, however it is important to think as if you had experienced the excruciating pain of childbirth yourself.

When you are first born you are just like a maggot. Compared to other species the human being has more potential, but at birth we are more helpless than most. Other creatures can get up and find their mother's nipple to suckle but we cannot.

Despite all this our mother forgets all her pain amidst her joy, which is greater than if she found a treasure. When newly born we are completely powerless and helpless, and reliant upon the care and affection of our mother. Immediately after our birth she holds us up to the warmth of her body. Having been in so much pain and in such a mess, how could she manage to hold you up if not for her love and affection. After all the pain she underwent there is no anger or hatred: it is all love and affection. As you develop she always provides every comfort through the warmth of her body, and she tries to entertain you and bring a smile to your face.

Her love is such that she is prepared to do virtually everything. Even if she is normally very fastidious she will wipe your nose with her own mouth or she cleans away your urine and excrement with her hand if it is necessary. These things happen even with women who will not normally even go close to a room which smells. If you do not remember your mother's kindness you will not have a sense of gratitude, and the wish to repay that kindness.

It is important to know the ways our mother has supported us. Then when the time comes you have the thought of repaying their kindness. If your mother is ill you think "It is now my turn to serve her. It is now my opportunity to repay her kindness."

Geshe Doga reminded everyone that the Study Group practice nights were open to all and asked members of the Study Group to make all visitors very welcome. He was also particularly pleased to see how clean the stained glass window was as a result of the cleaning on the previous Sunday in preparation for this Thursday night's Practice evening.

Cleaning is not just to clean out one's own karmic negativities, nor just to make an offering to the Three Jewels. It is also so that visitors to the Centre can enjoy it more because the place is kept neat and clean.

In the past Geshe-la has taught what you should reflect upon as you clean away the dirt and stains, so it is good to recollect those teachings as you clean and sweep around the place.

Geshe-la then spoke briefly about the saying "If you walk slowly you will get to your destination more quickly". He learnt the phrase when he was escaping from Tibet to India. On that journey people in his group kept asking their guide when they would get to India, and the guide told them not to worry, just to keep walking slowly. It made a lot of sense. If you mentally wish, you get very tense. If you relax and do not worry, you forget and get to your destination. Then, Geshe-la added, there is also the added benefit if you are a slow walker, that when you get to your destination, the fast ones will have made the tea.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.
