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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

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Let us make sure that we all generate the correct motivation. The reason for this is very important, because the quality of the actions we perform, whether they are good or bad, is predetermined by the motivations which preside over our actions. So to ensure that our actions will yield a good result or fruit, we have to make sure that our motivation is right at the start, and then do our best in the middle, and at the end of our actions.

We should try to cultivate bodhicitta as our motivation. The way to do this is by generating such strong compassion and love for all sentient beings that you take upon yourself the whole responsibility for releasing all sentient beings from suffering, and leading them to everlasting happiness.

First one generates the strong thought, “I shall free all beings from suffering and place them in the state of happiness.” Having generated this thought, go on to think about what is needed to be able to achieve this goal. What you need is the capacity to help other beings.

However, although you have this wish at present, you do not possess the capacity to free all sentient beings from suffering, and place them in that state of happiness. To achieve your goal you need to attain complete enlightenment or buddhahood first. And so you generate bodhicitta mind, which is the genuine wish to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all beings.

In our practice of generating the right motivation of bodhicitta we are training our minds to be more thoughtful, or considerate of other beings. We are also making sure that in our mental attitude there is no stain of mental delusion, that there is no selfish motive. In other words we are trying to develop this love and compassion towards other beings by performing all our actions with this motivation, and also by overcoming all self-interest and self-importance.

At this point we need to know why we must think of other beings, and work to benefit them. If we do this we shall see that not only is there benefit for other beings, but at the same time we shall also meet all our own needs. Not only will our actions benefit other beings, but we shall bring more happiness to our own life which will become more satisfying and meaningful.

We can also see that with a selfish motivation of thinking only of oneself, all the actions and goals we pursue in life become very small or narrow. Instead of happiness and satisfaction these selfish thoughts bring more harm and suffering to our life.

We can understand this simply by asking ourselves, “Why is my mind still dissatisfied with my life? Why am I still short of peace and happiness in my mind?” When we ask this we can see that it is because all the actions we have done so far in our life have been done under the influence of this selfish mind; out of the mind which thinks only of one’s own comfort and satisfaction. Because of this mind many of our actions have the effect of bringing disharmony to our relationships with friends, relatives and others. As a result of this selfish mind we meet many unwanted things that we have not confronted before. If on the other hand we could create more positive actions towards others, then we could achieve more happiness and satisfaction in our own life.

At the same time we also need to consider our own self potential and realise how great it is. As human beings we have all the freedoms and good, suitable conditions in our environment. We should think that we must work to utilise this life to benefit other beings. As said before, benefiting other beings not only broadens the scope of our own life, but we also have the self potential to achieve not only our own purpose, but we can do the same for all other beings.

We are trying to understand what dharma practice means, and how it is beneficial to our life. The main point is to always cultivate positive states of mind, while eliminating all negative states of mind. We have to see that both our happiness and suffering are mainly derived from our own mind. Happiness is derived from utilising our self-potential in the right way, and suffering arises by misusing that self-potential.

As human beings we all have self-potential. On the positive side we all possess a human nature which shows love and compassion for others. If we develop and strengthen that good human nature, and express it in our actions, the result is that we shall find more happiness.

Alternatively, if our actions are motivated by strong self-cherishing then the result is unhappiness and suffering as a result of our own actions. For instance, as a university student you might wish to come top of the class, but not extend that wish to any other students. With this attitude if some other student comes first you will be very disappointed and unhappy, and feel very miserable. Obviously this misery or suffering just because another student gains first place is totally the result of your faulty way of thinking. You would not experience this suffering if you believed that like yourself, all the others wish to come top, and as a result

you would be happy to see another student achieve this goal. We are all the same in always desiring the best outcome. With the right attitude these problems of mental suffering can be prevented.

Adopting the correct way of thinking, such as cultivating love and compassion, and thinking of the needs of others is dharma practice. Overall we have to see that as human beings we all have enormous potential within us: we have unique human qualities of discrimination, wisdom, love and so on. However if we let any negative emotions over-rule our mind then our actions become harmful to our own life.

So it is very important to see the important role that the type of mind or mental attitude which we hold plays in directing our life, and deciding our future. We need to know how our mind plays such a key role in life, and how important it is to always correct it, and always make sure that we have the right state of mind. If we do not do this then all our actions and mental decisions in our whole life will only be a source of suffering. Even the actions we recall as giving us some pleasure, in the end become a cause of suffering, called the suffering of change. The reason why the end result is suffering is because there was something wrong with the motivation which led us to do these actions.

Within our mind we have to understand the meaning of dharma and its opposite. Our practice has to be to always control or tame our own mind. We have to understand that the suffering which we do not want in our life is caused by our own unruly, negative state of mind, and that this unwanted suffering arises from within us. So we have to understand that the solution or remedy to overcome that suffering is also within our own mind. In simple terms we feel very disturbed and unhappy when our mind is overpowered by anger. For as long as anger is present in our mind no matter what we try to do we cannot comfort ourselves. Therefore, we can see that to find happiness and comfort we have to overcome our anger, and the true remedy to anger is found within ourselves, through cultivating love, compassion and tolerance.

In this way it is important to see that dharma practice is the source of all goodness and happiness, whereas all suffering and unhappiness is caused by some evil force. Both 'dharma' and 'evil' have to be understood within the context of our own mind, just as virtue and non-virtue, as the source of happiness and suffering, also have to be understood in context of one's own mind. From this point of view we have the self-potential to prevent suffering. Likewise, we have the self-potential to find happiness. The elimination of suffering and achievement of happiness are both in our own hands.

So happiness and suffering do not come from the outside. If we strongly wish for happiness we must create the causes ourselves. It is impossible for any other being to give you the happiness which you seek. Likewise impossible for others to remove the source of your problems and suffering. The most effective way of eliminating suffering and finding happiness is to transform your mind. The lam rim, or the stages of the path, is very suitable for us since in that path there are teachings that are relevant to all levels of practitioners -

those of small, medium and great scope. The lam rim teachings are suitable for all these levels of beings.

The essence of all the teachings is cultivating bodhicitta or good heart in our mind, which is possible if you put in the effort. If in your prayers you always wish for love and compassion for all beings, and are always accompanied by such great love and compassion, it has potential to be of benefit in this and future lives. If in your prayers you always wish to have that mind, and rejoice for others who are endowed with that mind, your prayer becomes a cause to generate bodhicitta.

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

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