

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ཕྱུ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



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As usual before the teachings, cultivate the bodhicitta motivation by thinking that we are receiving these teachings on the stages of the path to enlightenment to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Along with this have the strong motivation to put these teachings into practice.

## Four Important Points About Spiritual Practice

In the past we have discussed four important points in great detail. They are:

- 1 Why we need to practise Dharma
- 2 We are capable of practising Dharma
- 3 We must practise Dharma in this very lifetime
- 4 We must practise at this very moment

Whatever the level of our spiritual practice, for example in terms of the three scopes, we must do that practice with awareness of these four important points.

### 1. Why we need to practise Dharma

Firstly we must look into the purpose of practising Dharma or some other spiritual practice. We know that there are different schools of spiritual teachings, and here we must investigate the point of following such spiritual practices. The answer to this lies in the basic inborn sense of “I” that all beings have. This sense of “I” arises spontaneously and is always present within us, and it always wishes for happiness and tries to avoid suffering. Whoever has this spontaneous sense of “I” will automatically have this fundamental desire to find happiness and be rid of suffering. Based upon this natural wish for happiness and no suffering, every being then engages in those activities which are seen as a means to fulfil that desire. Even those people who live a very worldly or mundane life ultimately try to fulfil this wish within their lives, whether it be in their education or work.

We have to distinguish spiritual actions from very worldly actions. What they have in common is the hope that they will produce happiness and eliminate suffering. However the worldly person is one who views outer, or material objects as a true means of finding happiness and eliminating suffering. They see that making progress in the material world, and in the ideas which help to develop that material world as the way to increase their happiness and reduce suffering. Whereas a person following spiritual teachings, believing that those teachings will eliminate suffering and help to attain happiness, does not share that view. The spiritual person sees that the source of happiness is wholesome, positive, virtuous actions and the source of suffering is

unwholesome, negative, non-virtuous actions, and so they act accordingly in order to achieve happiness and remove suffering.

## The Scopes or Levels of Spiritual Practice

A spiritual person knows that no matter how much outer development you make, it does not necessarily bring more inner happiness. They see that in addition to material conditions humankind also needs a spiritual guide to truly find inner happiness.

Generally speaking all schools of religion are founded or initially developed on this knowledge: that human problems cannot be solved nor can all human wants be fulfilled by material outer conditions, and that inner wants in particular cannot be fulfilled just by material conditions. We can say that the basic foundation of all religions is the same – the value of love and compassion. All schools are founded to help living beings, and to eliminate their problems and suffering.

By knowing that inner happiness does not necessarily come from outer conditions, no matter how good they may be, we understand that the importance of spiritual teaching in our life is that it is the true means of finding happiness within oneself. So we understand that we need to follow these spiritual teachings in order to find this happiness and peace. Therefore we have to understand that the real meaning of the spiritual teachings is those practices which are the antidote to the delusions or mental defilements within our mind. All our unhappiness or sufferings are the direct outcome of the mental defilements or delusions that we generate within our mind, and if these delusions are not counteracted there is no inner happiness or peace.

We also have to see that our spiritual practice is that true antidote to these delusions, whereas material conditions can sometimes increase them. When that happens then in spite of our great material comfort we find that instead of feeling more happiness, we experience more suffering. Therefore we realise that we need to practise the spiritual teachings or Dharma.

## The Lower Scope of Practice

What is the real spiritual teaching? It is the practice which we can apply to diminish the mental delusions within us. The next question is the meaning of the words ‘mental delusion’ or ‘mental defilement’, which refer not just to one but to various types of mental delusions. A spiritual practice is one which counters delusion. What type of delusion qualifies as the object of true spiritual practice? At the very least the practice that we do must

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be to counter the delusion of being attached, or attracted to this present life or world. Therefore if we follow the practice of spiritual Dharma at the lowest level, the type of delusion to overcome is attachment to this world. If our practice does not target attachment to this world, it is said that it is not effective in enhancing inner peace and happiness. However if we could turn our mind away from the affairs of this world, and engage in wholesome actions, then these actions can truly bring more peace, relaxation and happiness in this life as well as being a cause for a better future rebirth, for example as god or human being. This is the practice of Dharma at the lowest level.

### **The Middle Scope of Practice**

If we go further with our spiritual practice, we realise that it is not enough to have overcome attachment to this present life, and engaged in spiritual practices in the hope for a better future rebirth, because a better future rebirth does not ensure lasting happiness. Therefore our next goal is to seek the everlasting happiness which can only occur if one liberates oneself from samsara or cyclic existence. Therefore the delusion one has to counteract now is attachment to the pleasures and marvels of cyclic existence. If this attachment is not removed then there is no end to being reborn over and over again in this cycle, and there is no end to suffering, and no true happiness. Then motivated by the desire to overcome attachment one turns to the spiritual practice called three-fold training. If you follow this training, you see the end to this cycle of rebirth in cyclic existence. This is the medium level of spiritual practice.

### **The Great Scope of Practice**

Going further than this middle level of practice you may feel complete confidence and conviction in following this three-fold training to overcome attachment to cyclic existence, and thereby bring about an end to this cycle of rebirth in cyclic existence, but this is still not enough. You see that the fault is your self-cherishing attitude in only seeking a personal goal, and not seeking to benefit all sentient beings. Therefore you seek to achieve full enlightenment in order to benefit other sentient beings. And so you generate the genuine mind of enlightenment. This is the aspiration to the great scope or goal of spiritual practice, the bodhicitta mind.

In short, we need to practise Dharma because we want happiness and do not want suffering. This point therefore includes a reflection upon these three scopes of the spiritual path. Our knowledge of Dharma has to be such that when we engage in analytical meditation we shall be able to start from one point as a base or main subject or root, and then like a tree from that point we should be able to think of other whole branches or topics that come from that root, and of all the sub-topics that come from that branch. At the same time we need to be able to condense a whole range of topics into one main point.

## **2. We are Capable of Practising Dharma**

To completely understand why we are capable of practising Dharma we need to fully contemplate the meaning of this precious human rebirth, and realise how outwardly and inwardly we have all the suitable

conditions of life. In terms of outer conditions we are now human beings having the all the leisure and endowments which make this life a perfect base on which to follow spiritual practice. Inwardly we possess a human mind which is gifted with a sharp knowledge and ability to discern things. So, gifted with all these physical and mental conditions one has very suitable conditions in which to practise Dharma.

## **3. We Must Practise Dharma in this Very Lifetime**

We need to practise Dharma in this lifetime because this wonderful human life of leisure and endowment which we have found is rare, and not something which can be found again and again. This provides us with the motivation to practise Dharma now, while one has this wonderful human life.

## **4. We Must Practise at this Very Moment**

We must practise Dharma right at this moment because not only is this very suitable human life very meaningful, with great potential and very rare, but it is also very uncertain, and could end at any moment. It is wrong to think "Before I practise Dharma I shall enjoy life and become rich". It is wrong to delay or procrastinate over one's practice. We have to see that we must practise Dharma at this moment.

Meditation on these four points is done so as to lead to the effect of the last point: no form of laziness should prevent or interfere with Dharma practice. It is as if we must rush to practise Dharma because you have no time left if you don't practise now. We must emphasise that such a thought of committing oneself to practise must be genuine, and arise on the basis of a great deal of contemplation and understanding of spiritual practice. It is with this mind that we commit ourselves to follow spiritual practice.

Next week we return the teachings on the seven-fold cause and effect, beginning with superior intention.

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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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The original typescript is prepared by Jenny Molloy from Alan Molloy's original transcript, which has been checked against Damien Busby's notes. Adair Bunnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.

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