

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

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Cultivate the right motivation by thinking, “I wish to achieve full enlightenment in order to benefit all beings, and for this reason I am receiving these teachings on the graduated path to enlightenment. Not only shall I receive these teachings but I shall put them into practice to remove all my self-cherishing attitudes.”

Our Self-Potential: We can develop Bodhicitta

We have virtually finished discussing the method of generating bodhicitta - the altruistic mind of enlightenment wishing to attain full enlightenment for the sake of all beings. In very simple terms we understand that this bodhicitta or bodhi mind means having a good heart towards all other beings, and there is no doubt that everyone would wish to have such a good heart. The question is whether it is possible to produce such a wonderful mind of bodhicitta or a good heart? Or do we give up even trying to produce this mind, on the grounds that we cannot possibly cultivate such a mind of love and compassion for all beings?

We have to understand very clearly that this bodhicitta mind about which we are talking is the source of all those excellent qualities we want to achieve for ourself, as well as being the source of all those excellent qualities we want to achieve for the sake of other beings.

With a bodhicitta mind we have strong motivation to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all beings. If, at the same time, we have the full understanding of our own potential, then we can see that this desire can be fulfilled. When we see the possibility of achieving this ultimate goal for ourself and for others, then we can see that the other goals we pursue in our daily life are all small and very easy. We have to value the wonderful and extraordinary situation in which we live. When we realise this then we understand our own self-potential: what we can achieve, and what our capacities are.

In order to know our own self-potential we have to recognise all the favourable conditions that exist in our life. At the moment we enjoy a human life which is very special, because it has some special extra advantages. Then we think of our opportunity to study Dharma, or anything else we wish. In terms of Dharma we have this opportunity of studying the Dharma taught by the Lord Buddha. Not only that but we have the opportunity to study the higher teachings of the Lord Buddha - the Mahayana. Not only that but within the Mahayana we have the opportunity to study both the highest teachings of Sutrayana and Mantrayana. We are fortunate indeed.

If we consider all the other favourable conditions which

support our life, then we can see there is tremendous potential. If we take full advantage of this, then there are no difficulties in solving the temporary problems that we face in this life. We also have the opportunity to create the causes of temporary happiness for ourself in this life. Not only that but we also have some potential to eliminate suffering and create happiness for the sake of other beings. Our potential is not just to achieve the goals of this lifetime, but to also achieve the goals of happiness and eliminating suffering for oneself and other beings in future lives.

Recognising this favourable situation and our potential, then our time becomes very important for us. How we use our energy is very important, because we do not want to misuse this wonderful opportunity on something meaningless, which does not even bring happiness in this life. When we realise our own potential then naturally we shall become more conscious of time and how we use it, and of making the right choices in our life.

What is the point of studying something if it does not solve our problems or if it does not bring happiness? Before we do something we have to see very clearly, that let alone in future lives, will it even bring benefit in this life? This benefit is seen in terms of eliminating problems or bringing happiness to our life. As we study and practise Dharma it is very important to see how it helps and benefits us in this life as well as in our future life.

Practical Benefits of Bodhicitta

We should also remember all the benefits of generating bodhicitta which we have studied and discussed in the past. This should then be related to the amount of love and compassion that you have for other beings - even if it is a minimal amount. This small amount of love and compassion that you show if not to all, then to some beings, is the equivalent to bodhicitta for you.

Therefore, we have to see that the benefits of bodhicitta which we learn are the benefits of the qualities of love and compassion in one's own mind. Bodhicitta brings happiness and removes all the suffering from the minds of all beings. We have to see that our own qualities of love and compassion also have the potential to solve all our problems, and to bring personal happiness.

Even if we cannot produce a fully-fledged bodhicitta we can still be very appreciative of all the teachings on bodhicitta, and at least wish for such a mind of bodhicitta to be born in ourself. We can see that this mind, or the good heart, stops all unnecessary problems that arise in our mind in relation to other beings - their possessions,

their physical outlook, their skills or their qualification.

Unfortunately, because of this lack of good heart towards others all the wealth and possessions we see in the outside world stimulate desire, jealousy, pride and competitiveness, and these all bring problems or unease into the mind. We have to ask ourselves why we feel bad when we see another who is more beautiful, more qualified, more knowledgeable, or wealthier than ourself. It even happens with our own closest friends, and we feel jealous, which causes us mental pain. Some people who admit to this problem of jealousy find it difficult to see that this is in fact a bad feeling. This bad feeling is all caused by our own mental attitude to all these things we see in the outside world.

In this modern world technology is developing so fast, that more and more things come in contact with our eyes or ears, more and more frequently. If our mental attitude and way of seeing is not properly adjusted and established, then there are more sources of problems arising in our mind because there are so many new outside things. So we have to see that we need to adopt a different mental attitude, akin to what parents have towards their children. When their children progress or have success in life, it does not bring jealousy and competitiveness in the parents' minds, rather it brings joy. The joy of the children is also the joy of the parents, because of their true love and care for their children. If we also cultivate this same very caring and loving attitude for all beings, there is no way that we shall be jealous of their bodies or wealth, nor look down on those who are poor and weak. We shall feel love and compassion rather than jealousy or pride.

We have to see that we can benefit ourselves by cultivating more good heart, love and compassion in our minds. It is not like receiving a material gift of money or clothes, but rather it changes our mental attitude towards other beings, and through this change we prevent many unnecessary problems arising in our mind, and so we increase our happiness.

When we talk of cultivating love and compassion, 'cultivating love' means genuinely wishing for other beings to have happiness, and 'cultivating compassion' means genuinely wishing for other beings to be free from suffering and problems. Therefore, love and compassion does not just mean helping others and solving their problems, but it also means we are talking about solving our own problems, and bringing more happiness to our own mind as well.

If we train our mind with meditation practice and through this develop some love and compassion for others, this love and compassion exists only in our mind. It is just in our mind that we wish for others to be happy and free of suffering. Of course wishing alone does not directly benefit others to bring them happiness, nor does it free them from suffering, but it does directly benefit yourself. Suppose you cultivate love and compassion for some being who dislikes (or even hates) you. Then even if they see you as an enemy you are still able to control your mind, and not be overpowered by anger and hatred, and this is achieved through cultivating love and compassion for other beings.

We have to realise that in most instances when we feel bad or bitter about other beings, it is not because they came at you with a knife or something to physically hurt you, but it is what they say and do which hurts your mind, and so you become angry with them. Love and compassion is a shield which protects our inner peace and happiness.

Of course we also have to realise that the effort we make in trying to show more love and compassion for others implants a seed for true bodhicitta to arise in our mind. When such bodhicitta is produced there are tremendous benefits for ourself and other beings. We can understand this if we examine our own mind: there are states of mind which protect and secure peace and happiness in our life, while there are other states of mind which destroy that peace and happiness. However in our normal life we are not aware of how within us there are these different types of mind that can serve as causes to bring happiness or suffering in life. Whenever something goes wrong in life we must first point the finger at ourselves to find the cause, rather than always pointing it to outer factors. We also have to be aware how important it is to gain knowledge of our mind, and through this to see that cultivating the bodhicitta mind brings more happiness, and prevents a lot of unnecessary suffering in our life.

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

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