

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

འཇིགས་མེད་ཀྱི་མ་ལུགས་སྒོམ་གྱི་ལ་ལག་བཅུང་བ།



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As usual try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation, which is wishing to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings, and also generate the strong motivation to put into practice whatever you learn in this lam rim teaching.

422.321.2 Training the mind through Exchanging Self With Others

བདག་གཞན་མཉམ་བཟུང་གི་སྒོམ་གྱི་སྒྲུང་བ།

Having finished the means of generating bodhicitta using the method of seven-fold cause and effect, we now turn to the next technique of generating bodhicitta, which is exchanging of self with others.

This second method of generating bodhicitta is not taught because the seven-fold cause and effect method is ineffective, because following that method we can certainly generate the bodhicitta mind. However, the method of exchanging of self with others will help us to create a stronger, more intense form of bodhicitta.

These teachings on the method of exchanging self with others can be combined with the practice of giving and taking. The term ‘thought transformation’ was originally used to refer to this particular combination of methods. Shantideva’s text *A Guide to a Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* says that this very noble and secret teaching of exchanging self with others is taught for those who want to quickly protect themselves and others.¹

Lineage of these Teachings

We can trace the lineage from which this teaching on the method of exchanging self with others is derived. Manjushri taught it to Shantideva who passed it to Lama Serlingpa. It then went to Atisha.

Atisha had many famous Tibetan and Indian disciples but the instruction on this method was passed to Dromtonpa who is regarded as manifestation of Tara. Dromtonpa also had many disciples of his own including the “Three All Knowers”: Geshe Potawa, Geshe Purchung and Geshe Chengawa. Dromtonpa passed this lineage to Geshe Potawa who had two principal disciples, Geshe Langri Tangpa and Geshe Sharawa. From Geshe Sharawa the lineage was passed to his disciple Geshe Chekawa.

It is said that up to Geshe Sharawa the teaching on this method remained very sacred, profound and secret, in that it was not written down nor given to the public. Geshe Chekawa chronicled this teaching because he felt that it would be a very great pity if it was not taught to the public, and were to be lost. So Geshe Chekawa taught the method of exchange of self with others to the public, and composed his very famous text *Seven Point Thought Transformation*.

This particular lineage is called “The Lineage With Great Blessings” and is regarded as the third lineage, the other

two being the Profound Lineage Of View and the Extensive Lineage Of Deed. Atisha had three lamas: Lama Serlingpa, Dharmarakshita and Jampay Naljor. Of these three, he received the lineage of these teachings from Lama Serlingpa.

Seven Point Thought Transformation

Of the many works on thought transformation in the lam rim teachings, *Seven Point Thought Transformation* is regarded as the clearest and easiest to practice, and the most effective for training the mind.

As understood from its title, *Seven Point Thought Transformation* is based on seven main points of training the mind, whereas Geshe Langri Tangpa’s *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* is in eight parts, covered in eight verses.

Everyone should try to remember the seven points of *Seven Point Thought Transformation* which are:

1. Preliminary teachings on the type of life basis
2. Actual teaching on bodhicitta
3. Transforming adverse or unfavourable conditions into favourable ones
4. Explaining how to integrate the practice into one’s mind and life
5. Measurement of having trained the mind
6. Pledges of thought transformation
7. Instruction of thought transformation.

As part of our daily practice of thought transformation it is good to memorise this *Seven Point Thought Transformation*. If this takes too long, then say the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*. Geshe-la says he recites the *Eight Verses* as his source of practice. So memorise this, and as you say it make some effort to suffuse the meaning of it with your mind, and thereby generate the good heart.

Before he found Geshe Langri Tangpa’s teachings on thought transformation, Geshe Chekawa (the author of *Seven Point Thought Transformation*) was a very great and learned scholar in all the five fields of knowledge. However he was not satisfied so he investigated further, and discovered the work of Geshe Langri Tangpa, and in particular this verse:

Give the gains and victories to others;
Take the losses and defeats yourself

This verse particularly moved Geshe Chekawa’s heart, so he tried to meet the author, Geshe Langri Tangpa, discovering that he had already died. Eventually however Geshe Chekawa met Geshe Sharawa through whose teachings Geshe Chekawa generated true bodhicitta and composed his own bodhicitta teachings. It is said that as a result he even cured lepers of their disease, so his thought transformation teaching was also called The Healing Teaching.

As said before Geshe Chekawa felt very strongly that if

¹ Editor: Chapter 8 Verse 90

these instructions on thought transformation were not preserved in a written form they might be lost, which would be a great loss. Inspired by this, and by how these teachings could benefit so many other beings, he wrote this *Seven Point Thought Transformation*.

The first line of *Seven Point Thought Transformation* refers to the lineage of these teachings from Serlingpa, who was the main lama from whom Atisha received them.

This instruction, the essence of nectar, comes in a lineage from Suvarnadhipi (Serlingpa).

These instructions are called the essence of nectar instruction because the main subject of this teaching focuses upon generating bodhicitta, which is the “essence” of all the teachings. “Nectar essence” can also refer to the full state of enlightenment, which is the ultimate, eternal full state of enlightenment. This teaching is the means of reaching enlightenment, so it is called “essence of nectar”.

We shall continue this teaching on *Seven Point Thought Transformation* next week. Pabongka’s *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* has a clear explanation of *Seven Point Thought Transformation*² so try to read it before the next teaching.

Next week is discussion night. For the coming written test the compulsory question is to explain this verse from Chandrakirti’s *Supplement to the Middle Way*:

Love is the seed for a magnificent crop –
The state of a Victor.
Like water, love makes that crop grow,
And much later it ripens
Into the thing most desired,
As if it had matured and were ready for use.
That is why at the outset
I praise compassion.

We missed one teaching session in this block, but we did cover two subjects in the discussion session. They were:

1. Differentiate between love in general, and the particular love you generate as part of the seven-fold cause and effect method.
2. In the seven-fold cause and effect method, superior intention is generated after great compassion. Why do we have to generate superior intention? Why do we not go straight onto the generation of bodhicitta, and not bother with superior intention?

The discussion session is a good opportunity not only to learn dharma from others, but also to gain the experience of discussing dharma issues and philosophy with others. So discussions are a very important part of your study and practice. Make sure that you always try to maintain a very positive mental attitude.

If a complex, technical issue comes up, those who have studied dharma for some time should try to explain it to the others, and share whatever you know. This is your offering to others. At the same time others may have difficulty in understanding the points of view of others, and may get upset or even provoke others. It is important on the one hand to do your best to explain things to others, but if doubts cannot be cleared up do not be too concerned, but remain very positive. Try to show a pleasant expression so as to make others feel comfortable and confident of entering the discussion.

Three Types of Pride

Question: What is the difference between pride and courage.

² Editor: The text is reproduced as Appendix 5 in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*

Shantideva’s text says “Bodhisattvas should abide in this pride”³. There are three types of pride.

1. Afflicted pride
2. Action pride
3. Ability pride

1. Afflicted pride⁴ should be counteracted [as it is a delusion].

The other two, although labelled ‘pride’, are virtuous and are not delusions. Lama Tsong Khapa’s *Great Exposition* clarifies how these two types of pride are the same only in name and are not actually pride.

2. Action pride: Literally ‘pride’ in Tibetan is ‘nga rgyal’ meaning ‘I, victor’, which means wanting victory for oneself or to be on top. The bodhisattva who engages in deeds to serve others, particularly those in need, or who are destitute is driven by a determination to help those in need. This is ‘action pride’ and is within the literal meaning of ‘nga rgyal’.

3. Ability pride: The next type of pride is more like courage, self determination, spirit, or self esteem. It is this high self spirit and confidence in one’s own ability or potential which is so important in terms of counteracting the deluded mind. You have to have strong courage to be able to challenge delusions and gain victory over them. The bodhisattvas have this strong determination or willingness to undertake the task of benefiting others, a task which no other beings shoulder.

This determination is the opposite to the force of delusion – it is challenging delusion. The stronger the determination, the more that the delusions will weaken, and the more you gain control

Shantideva uses the example of a crow⁵ which is a predator of snakes. It is normally scared of snakes, but if it sees a dead snake it becomes quite aggressive because its enemy is weak. (This shows how devastating delusions [the crow] can be to us [the snake] when our self confidence weakens).

There is apparent contradiction in the meaning of the word ‘pride’, so if people quote Shantideva’s text to show pride is positive, then it is important to know that although the term ‘pride’ is used, it is really referring to high spirit, self determination or willpower.

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

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Note on authentication

The original typescript is prepared by Kathi Melnic 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.

³ Editor: Chapter 7, verse 49 “Pride is to be employed in three ways: in work, in opposition to passion, and in power. The pride of work (the second type of pride called “Action pride”) is in this knowledge: all is to be done by myself alone.”

⁴ Editor: The meaning of the first type of pride needs clarification. In the actual texts it refers to a “pride which is an overcoming of afflicted delusions”. This implies that the meaning of this first type of pride is actually to have pride in our ability to overcome delusions.

⁵ Chapter 7, Verse 52