

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



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Try to cultivate the right motivation which is bodhicitta. The benefit of cultivating bodhicitta is that it overcomes all the shortcomings and faults that result from a self-cherishing mind. Bodhicitta, then, is our protection and refuge.

Generally speaking we say that engaging in Dharma or virtuous, positive actions is a refuge because it protects us from the suffering results of negative or non-virtuous actions. What we should understand here is that Dharma or spiritual practice is something which is practised within the mind. Whenever we face problems in life, or unease in our mind, we look for a solution or refuge, and that solution lies within our mind. Whatever spiritual practice we do in life should be like take-away food, which we can immediately eat and taste: in other words it can be immediately utilised to minimise our internal problems or faults. From this point of view it is essential that our spiritual practice must be directed towards cultivating a positive state of mind such as good heart to others, and towards removing all the faults in our mind and daily actions.

Measuring our Progress in Spiritual Practice

It is not enough just to believe that spiritual practice or Dharma is beneficial. You may recite all the benefits of practising Dharma, just like you accumulate *mani* mantras, saying that practising the Dharma guarantees achieving higher rebirth as a human or god, or even liberation from cyclic existence. However to actually reap the benefits from Dharma we must examine our own situation and mental continuum. Are there more causes to achieve a better rebirth or a better future, or are there more inner obstacles to such a better future destiny? This is what we need to do to remember what Dharma is. If all our daily actions accord with the lam rim teachings then all our actions are Dharma; if they do not accord with lam rim then they are not Dharma.

If possible try to review your actions on a daily basis, but if this is not possible then at least try to do so weekly or fortnightly. In this way you gain knowledge of the type of actions that are accumulating. If more negative actions have accumulated then one cannot feel complacent, since these actions can cause immense personal suffering in the future. So to purify those negative actions you should engage in some purifying practice. However, if at the same time one remembers having accumulated positive actions then try to rejoice in this and develop the wish to accumulate even more of these positive actions.

There is no reason to feel hopeless about the future in terms of this life and beyond. The scriptural teachings clearly show us that in a very short time, or even in an instant, generating a positive state of mind will accumulate enough merit to be the source of lasting happiness in the future. By understanding this we become more motivated to

undertake positive virtuous actions even over a very short time. We can also understand that the non-virtue created in an instant will be the source of great future suffering. This understanding will motivate us to purify any negative action, however tiny.

Of course we cannot completely avoid negative actions in our daily life, so it is necessary for us to keep purifying those negative actions that we do create. If we look into the lives of noble practitioners they too make mistakes and commit negative actions, but they still make spiritual progress because they keep purifying their negative actions.

We have to understand that we are not short of knowledge of the Dharma. We all have faith in Dharma, ie some belief in the existence of future life, and a belief in the law of karma, which is that positive actions give happiness, and negative actions yield suffering. Geshe-la says that with the length of time you have been studying Dharma both inside and outside these classes, some students might be more knowledgeable than him! However, although having knowledge is an advantage, to gain real benefit from that knowledge one must engage in practices to remove the negativities of daily life, and purify them with the four opponent powers. Even though the Sangha have taken vows this does not mean that they are free from negative actions, or that they do not break their vows, because they do. However if you break a vow, your deep regret (which is an integral part of the purifying practices) can become a cause for you to create even more virtue, and create more merit. Therefore if you engage in purifying practices you can minimise the accumulation of negativities, and conversely you will be increasing the positive qualities within yourself.

Qualities of the Thought Transformation Teachings

"It is like a diamond, the sun and the healing tree."

In the last teaching we finished the origins of the thought transformation teachings. Next is the qualities of these thought transformation teachings, which are explained by comparing them with:

- a Vajra (or diamond)
- the sun's rays
- the healing tree

1. Even a fragment of a diamond or vajra stone can surpass the beauty of all other jewellery or ornaments. Likewise we should realise the surpassing qualities of these thought transformation teachings by understanding that even a part of them can be a cause to free us of all cyclic existence, and thereby be a cause for us to be free of all the suffering of cyclic existence.

Unlike other ornaments even a fragment of a diamond or vajra stone has such value that it can remove poverty. Similarly, even a part of the thought

transformation teachings surpasses all the teachings of the lesser vehicles of hearers and solitary realisers.

2. Even a fraction of the sun's rays can dispel darkness. Similarly, understanding even a part of these teachings is enough to remove the darkness of self-cherishing.
3. Even a leaf from a healing medicinal tree can cure many diseases. Similarly even a part of these teachings is the remedy to all the illnesses of mental delusions.

The Five Degenerations

"When the five degenerations flourish,
transform them into the path to full awakening."

These thought transformation teachings are also a very helpful personal guide in the most adverse situations and circumstances. In this degenerate age there are many unfavourable causes, so it is very easy for the mind to be disturbed. It is said that in this time of degeneration, we need the thought transformation teachings because they can help us to transform these adverse circumstances into the path.

This degenerate age has five types of degeneration which are in terms of:

1. sentient beings
2. mental delusion
3. views or ideas
4. lifespan
5. the age or time

A brief explanation of these five types of degeneration follows.

1. Degeneration of sentient beings refers to those beings who still remain to be subdued. Most sentient beings have been subdued one by one, but there are some who have been left behind. It is just like butter lamps - the pure butter burns first and at the end all that remains is the impure fat. Similarly there are sentient beings who have been unable to be subdued.

These unsubdued sentient beings can be understood by considering their thoughts and actions. Their thoughts are all in the form of mental delusion, and as a natural consequence their actions are all evil ones: their thought is negative and so are their actions. Their mental attitude is completely opposite to the spiritual teachings in the sense that apart from themselves, when others experience loss or suffering, they take joy in that and are pleased, and when others gain happiness, they feel a jealousy so intense that it almost sickens them. In addition their verbal and physical actions are also harmful to others. From start of the day to the end of it, these degenerate sentient beings of degenerate times lead their lives, and pass their time in these ways.

It is important to relate this to yourself. From morning to night what sort of thoughts do you hold in your mind, and what actions do you do?

2. Degenerate in terms of mental delusion. We can also think of the degenerate delusions of the degenerate times. In Tibetan terms we use the word "old" as equivalent to degeneration, in the sense that we talk of delusions which have not been challenged or remedied for a long time. They have become so rough, forceful and vulgar that it only takes a tiny cause for them to manifest themselves. Not only do

these delusions arise easily, but when they do they can disturb the mind immediately and forcefully. In these degenerate times mental delusions arise so easily we must apply these thought transformation teachings in our spiritual practice.

3. A degenerate view is any type of view which obscures or covers the eye of wisdom. This wisdom shows us what actions we should accept and what actions we should reject. If such a view becomes very common, it indicates the degeneration of view.
4. Degeneration of lifespan means the lifespan shortens.
5. Degeneration of time simply means the time when all the previous four degenerations are present.

Geshe-la hopes you have understood these five degenerations. There is no reason to hurry, so whatever the topic we cover, try to understand it thoroughly.

Saka Dawa

This month is most auspicious because it celebrates four important events in the life of the Lord Buddha.

On the eighth of the month Buddha became a celibate, and the fifteenth is the date of his birth (which in Buddhism means being conceived in the womb), death and enlightenment.

The month is called Saka Dawa. The word 'saka' refers to the star which becomes obvious during this month, [whilst 'dawa' refers to both moon and month]. It is regarded as a very good opportunity for virtuous or spiritual practices which have more potential to create merit.

The Offering Prayer

In the offering prayer we say:

Guru is Buddha, Guru is Dharma, Guru is Sangha,
Guru is creator of all.

This verse has origins its origins in tantra. The last line seems to have the connotation of an all-creator god, whereas in Buddhism the fundamental creator is karma. This should be discussed to see how it compares to the view of other religions, which posit a creator god.¹

Addendum to the teaching of 5 May 1998

Three Types of Pride

The translation of the explanation of the verse from Shantideva's text which described the three types of pride was clarified with the translator.

Shantideva's text says "Bodhisattvas should abide in this pride". The word 'pride' normally refers to a delusion, but in this case the three types of pride are in fact virtuous, and all three should be cultivated. They are:

1. Pride in overcoming afflictions
2. Pride in action
3. Pride in ability

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

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¹ Editor: This paragraph is a summary of a long discussion between Geshe-la and several students so the entire conversation could not be included.