

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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As we are all ordinary sentient beings, we can neither listen to nor teach Dharma if we all remain in meditative equipoise. Only a fully enlightened being such as Lama Tsong Khapa can do so while in a state of meditative equipoise. This is indicated by his two hand gestures: the right hand at the heart symbolising teaching Dharma, while his left hand is in the gesture of meditation equipoise. These simultaneous hand gestures symbolise his achievement of full enlightenment.

Assuming you have established the right motivation of bodhicitta in the beginning, the next topics according to the outline of the teaching are reflecting on the disadvantages of the self-cherishing attitude, followed by considering the advantages of cherishing other beings.

422.321.222.2 Disadvantages of Self-Cherishing

བདག་གཅོད་འཛིན་གྱི་སྐྱོན་སྐོན་དུ་མ་ནས་བསམ་པ།

What is important in this meditation is to relate self-cherishing to our own mind. It is a different story if you are already a bodhisattva, who has already fully developed the attitude of cherishing others, and fully removed the attitude of self-cherishing. The rest of us, however, must first see the faults of self-cherishing as much as possible. By seeing all its shortcomings we can recognise self-cherishing as our enemy, and then think of removing this attitude. Because without ridding ourselves of self-cherishing it is impossible to develop the bodhicitta mind, let alone achieve full enlightenment.

A verse in *The Guru Puja* says,¹

"The self-cherishing attitude is a chronic disease which is responsible for bringing all unwanted sufferings".

Referring to the self-cherishing attitude as a "chronic disease" shows the seriousness of this disease. Shantideva's text *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, says 'All suffering and harm that exists in this world arises from this self-centred view'. This shows us that a self-cherishing attitude is the source of all the unwanted suffering in the world: the suffering of physical ill-health, mental ill-health or the harm caused by any human or non-human beings. So we do not need this self-cherishing attitude, as it has no advantages, it has a great many disadvantages and because it brings all unwanted suffering in life. Understanding this, we become

motivated to eliminate self-cherishing.

A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life says²

"All happiness that exists in the world comes from the attitude of cherishing others whereas all suffering that exists in the world comes from self-cherishing".

This verse is saying that all suffering comes from the attitude of desiring personal happiness. We need to think about the meaning of this quotation, so as to see the causal link between the suffering we experience, and our attitude of seeking personal happiness, or self-cherishing.

The indication of the existence of this self-cherishing attitude is a deep sense of 'I' within us, or attachment to this 'I'. With this deep sense of 'I', or self-cherishing, it is natural for us to desire some things and to not desire other things. Thus thoughts of like and dislike arise. Out of this sense of 'I' a strong desire for personal happiness arises. If our selfish desires are not automatically fulfilled as they arise, then this selfish mind motivates us to undertake various types of actions. We can investigate the nature of these actions that we are forced to undertake as a result of being motivated by this selfish desire.

If you read the lam rim text you will find the disadvantages of self-cherishing and the advantages of cherishing others explained very clearly. However personal practice is the most important factor with which to make progress in spiritual development. In our own meditation practice we try to realise how holding onto this self-cherishing attitude results in more problems and suffering for ourself and others.

With this self-cherishing attitude we disregard others, even those who, like our parents, have been kind and helpful to us. Not only that but this self-cherishing attitude also induces all sorts of mental delusions, such as pride in even minor qualities that you might possess, or competitiveness with equals, or jealousy of the qualities, skills, possessions, or knowledge of others. Also it is easy to generate hatred, since we cannot endure even a minor loss or undesirable event. So we see how with this self-cherishing attitude we give way to all sorts of mental delusions, and with mental delusions in our mind there is no room for mental peace and happiness.

² Editor: The closest quotations that we could find to match Geshe-la's teachings were verse 113, Chapter 8, "Having seen the mistakes in (cherishing) myself and the ocean of good qualities in (cherishing) others, I shall completely reject all selfishness and accustom myself to accepting others." And verse 129, Chapter 8, "Whatever joy there is in this world all comes from desiring others to be happy, and whatever suffering there is in this world all comes from desiring myself to be happy."

¹ Verse 91, LTWA edition, "This chronic disease of cherishing ourselves is the cause giving rise to our unsought suffering, perceiving this, we seek your blessings to blame begrudge, and destroy the monstrous demon of selfishness."

With a self-cherishing mind our actions harm others, turning them into our enemies.

As the lam rim teachings say, this self-cherishing attitude is the source of all the problems in our life and relationships. Beyond learning about these disadvantages, we must also integrate this knowledge into our life, by making an effort to diminish this self-cherishing attitude, and to progressively transform it into the attitude of cherishing others.

One fault of a self-cherishing attitude is not being able to have harmonious relationships with others. Whether the relationship is between parents, or between siblings, or between parents and children, or between friends, in our society there are continuous problems and conflict existing in these relationships, and they are all due to this self-cherishing attitude. Without overcoming this attitude we cannot overcome the problems either of this life or future lives. Nor can your spiritual teacher do anything to solve your problems.

In general, everyone has a strong drive to meet their own needs. A self-cherishing attitude is not however, an appropriate or reliable means of meeting those needs, since in reality the self which we wish to protect does not exist by itself: it does not exist independently of all other conditions. From a philosophical point of view the self does not exist autonomously.

Even in relative terms, meeting the needs of the self depends upon the support of others. For example, we may desire a partner. Not only that but we desire the right person and a lasting, meaningful relationship. A self-cherishing attitude, however will become a great obstacle to fulfilling what we desire, which is a good relationship, because with self-cherishing we do not see the good qualities in others. All we see is that they are objects to blame for all the problems which we face in our relationship with them. So our self-cherishing attitude obscures our mind from clearly seeing things: all we can see is that we are perfect. If we see a fault in ourselves we cannot admit it, and blame the other instead.

In real life, and in television shows, people advance towards loaded guns with little more than a stone in their hand, facing certain death. This appears to be an act of great bravery and courage, but is in fact quite stupid! Likewise the self-cherishing thought motivates us to do actions which result in the opposite of that which we desire.

The next disadvantage of self-cherishing is that it is the source of all non-virtuous actions. The motivation behind killing other sentient beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and so on, is to bring some personal gain or happiness. Because of this self-cherishing attitude you want only happiness and not unhappiness; you want only gain and not loss; you want only success and not failure. In real life however we cannot gain anything without enduring a loss; we cannot achieve anything without putting in an effort. So self-cherishing gives us a wrong way of thinking about reality. As in the example of facing a loaded gun, a self-cherishing attitude can even lead to death. If you allow a self-cherishing mind to direct your actions, the end result is loss: in

attacking your perceived enemy, you are injured instead. So recognise this self-cherishing mind inside yourself, and try to see what kind of message it is trying to pass onto you. If you listen to those messages and follow them, then all your actions will be non-virtuous and a source of suffering within this lifetime.

By seeing more and more faults of this self-cherishing attitude, we can then learn how to blame all things that go wrong in life onto this self-cherishing mind, as is said in the thought transformation teachings. When these teachings say “All the blame goes onto one”³, they are referring to the self-cherishing mind. In this way we can recognise that if we want to keep this self-cherishing mind, we shall not find lasting peace and happiness in this life, let alone in future lives.

Geshe Doga welcomed Geshe Sonam Dhargyey to the teachings. Geshe Sonam Dhargyey’s father lived near Geshe-la in Tibet, and they were very close. Now, although the father was a lay person, his son is a geshe and also very close to Geshe-la.

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 *Eight verses of thought transformation*, “Banish the one object of every blame”.