

# 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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Ensure that you have the right motivation for receiving these teachings, which is the bodhicitta motivation.

In fact the refuge prayer which we always recite at the very beginning is to generate this motivation. This prayer distinguishes the spiritual path, which is implied by taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha, from wrong or perverted paths. Following the teachings the Buddha gave as a perfect and fully enlightened being is the perfect path, and this is the significance of taking refuge. Generating bodhicitta as you do in this refuge prayer shows that not only is the chosen path the correct path, but it is also the supreme path of the Mahayana great vehicle.

When you follow the Buddhist path it is essential that at the beginning of your practice you take refuge in the Buddha, his teachings and the Sangha to show that your practice is a genuine Buddhist one.

With regard to the topic of our teachings we have been discussing how to cultivate bodhicitta using the method of exchanging self with others. We have previously discussed the sub-headings of How to Equalise Self With Others and The Disadvantages of Self-cherishing.

We are now up to the third sub-heading which is Thinking of the Advantages of Cherishing Others.

## 422.321.222.3 Thinking of the Advantages of Cherishing Others

གཞན་གཅེས་འཛིན་གྱི་ཡོན་ཏན་སློབ་མ་ནས་བསམ་བཤ།

In previous teachings we have touched on the advantages of cherishing other beings. In following this method of exchanging self with others the most important elements are knowing the disadvantages of self-cherishing, and the advantages of cherishing other beings. Without developing these understandings it is impossible to exchange self for others, and thus to develop bodhicitta. It is assumed that you have gained some understanding of this from your own experience, and related this to the context of your own mind.

In regard to the advantage of cherishing other beings we can understand that the great many advantages that we have found in our life are the result of this attitude of cherishing others. This wonderful human body that we have now obtained is the result of this attitude of cherishing others. Likewise all our possessions and surrounding friends are the result of this attitude of cherishing other beings. So relating the teachings to our own personal life means realising that all the benefits that we enjoy now, and in future lives, depend upon cherishing other beings.

From our own personal experience as a human being in this life we know that we are healthy and face no shortage of material needs, and that we have many friends around us. Does this situation exist by accident or as the result of causes? We have to understand that it is because we have created the causes for this favourable situation. The main cause for obtaining this good form of human life is the pure practice of moral ethics, and it is other living beings who give us the opportunity to practise this pure morality. When we think further we realise that pure morality is a practice which begins with the thought of not harming other beings, and with this thought we refrain from actions such as killing. It is these moral actions of not killing other beings which are the cause to attain the higher rebirth that we presently enjoy.

What motivates us to engage in such moral practice? It is the thought of consideration and care for all other beings. Without this benevolent thought we would not engage in any form of moral practice, and with this benevolent thought of cherishing others we turn away from any immoral practice. We should also be able to see the causal link between the moral action of not stealing others' belongings, and possessing personal wealth in the future. There is also a causal link between thoughts of subduing anger or hatred, and gaining the friendship of other beings.

If we cultivate this attitude of cherishing other beings in our mind, then we can naturally develop a great many spiritual qualities. With this thought of cherishing others we are motivated to engage in spiritual practice. This cherishing thought can be a cause to bring about the harmony and happiness we wish to enjoy in day-to-day life. On the other hand if we do not cultivate this attitude of cherishing others, then we cannot stop our very uncivilised and harmful actions hurting even those closest to us. As a consequence of our own harmful actions, we in turn receive harm from others, even our closest friends.

Generally when we listen to, or study Dharma, we learn more about its advantages or benefits in terms of our future life, rather than the benefits to this immediate life. Why is the focus on future rather than immediate benefits? It is because it is said that the benefits of Dharma in this life are very obvious. Of course these benefits only become obvious if we put the Dharma into practice seriously.

Imagine a person who really cherishes others, who never harms any other beings, who is always generous,

compassionate and helpful to others, and who never shows even a shadow of anger or hatred. Would we not admire such a person? Would we not wish to be close to them?. We must realise that adopting virtuous practises such as showing love and compassion and never harming others, not only results in more personal peace and happiness, but also creates peace and happiness for others.

We must train ourself in this practice with those who are closest to us: by caring for them, helping them, and by making every effort to prevent any anger to the best of our ability. Then just as we admire anyone else who behaves in this way, we too shall be admired, loved and trusted by others. This practice is a true spiritual or Dharma practice, and the benefits in this immediate life are very obvious. When we realise that Dharma is about practices that create personal happiness and prevent personal suffering then we shall be inspired to practise it. Essentially having a self-cherishing attitude brings more unhappiness to everyone - ourself and others. Whereas the mind of cherishing others brings happiness to your own life and to that of others.

Shantideva summed up the difference between self-cherishing and cherishing others in his *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, when he said

There is no need to go in detail  
Think of the difference between  
A buddha who only thinks of the  
welfare of others and  
Ordinary beings who only think of  
their own welfare<sup>1</sup>

We learn from Shantideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* that even the Lord Buddha was once an ordinary sentient being like us, whose actions were only driven by the thought of self-cherishing, and so he wandered in cyclic existence. However the Buddha saw the faults of this self-cherishing attitude and destroyed it, and in its place cultivated the attitude of cherishing other beings, and in this way he eventually achieved complete enlightenment.

As ordinary sentient beings we still hold this self-cherishing attitude in the depths of our hearts. Because of this attitude there is no end to the problems in our life, there is no end to complaints and work in life. If we think of our future destiny we cannot be confident that we shall avoid a lower rebirth. If death came right now, we could not be certain that we would not go down to the lower realms.

However just as the Lord Buddha achieved full enlightenment, so too we have the same potential. If we follow spiritual practice then it is possible that just like the Buddha, we too can achieve the state of liberation. Of all the people in this room some may achieve liberation in one hundred or two hundred years. Whereas others will remain the same, the only word that comes to their mouths is "I" or some problem related to this "I". The self-cherishing or self-centred attitude is so diffused within our mind, yet change is just a matter of applying training to eliminate this self-cherishing mind.

As Shantideva said

There is no object or thing which does not become easy through the force of familiarity.

So if it is only a matter of familiarising ourself with this spiritual practice and then, as Shantideva said, anything is possible, diminishing the self-cherishing mind is not hard at all.

Of course if we do not engage in spiritual practice then we shall make no progress, nor will our practice become any easier. To think that we can practise later in life when we are closer to death is very deluded. The fact is that if it is so difficult to meditate, calm the mind and bring it inwards now while we are relatively young, healthy and free, then how much harder will it be at death when we may be overwhelmed by so many undesirable or unhappy experiences?

If, however, we are used to spiritual practice, and have faith and understanding in Dharma, and this attitude of cherishing others in order to benefit them, then over time and with this training, our practice becomes easier, and we can do it naturally. Then at the time of death we can recognise that the painful, frightening experiences that we are going through are the result of our negative karma and delusion. If we are familiar with the practice of cherishing others, we can transform that undesirable experience at death into a cause for further development on the path, by thinking "By accepting this pain, fear and suffering that I undergo may no other being undergo the same experience." If we could produce such a positive and virtuous state of mind at this last leg of our life, then it is said that this positive state of mind is a protection against falling into lower rebirth. We say the practice of Dharma is our refuge. This practice of Dharma which is a refuge only exists within our mind. To pinpoint this state of mind, it is the virtuous mind which we cultivate at the time of death.

If this human life is completed in this virtuous state of mind, then this life will not have been wasted since we have taken its essence. There are three levels of purpose, or essence, of this human life.

1. The small purpose is to achieve a better rebirth in future life.
2. The medium purpose is to utilise this life to achieve liberation from cyclic existence.
3. The supreme purpose is to utilise this life to achieve complete enlightenment or state of Buddhahood.

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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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#### **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.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Guide to the Bodhisattvas way of Life* Ch. 8, v. 130