

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation which is a genuine strong wish to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and for the same purpose develop the strong determination to put into practice whatever you learn about the lam rim.

## Advantages of Cherishing Others

We are up to the topic of the advantages of cherishing other beings. Earlier we contemplated the disadvantages of self-cherishing from many perspectives. Now we try see the advantages of cultivating an attitude of cherishing other beings, by thinking of the benefits and good qualities to be gained by cultivating this attitude.

It is said that if this cherishing attitude were a material thing then it would be a priceless and most precious object. Of course what we need to consider in meditation are the many reasons for cultivating this attitude, and one reason is that this attitude is like a field which yields excellent fruit.

## Recollecting the Kindness of Others

In order to cultivate this attitude of cherishing other beings we must develop an understanding of the kindness which we receive from others, not just when they served as our parents, but at all other times.

We can understand this by realising how our survival in life is dependent upon the support of others. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said ‘It is through the love and compassion shown by other beings that life on this earth is sustained.’ We know very well for example that without the kindness and care shown by our parents we would not have survived. We can understand that even for our day-to-day needs such as food, clothing, and shelter we depend upon others. We might think that all our possessions, and the advantages we gain from them are because we bought them with our own money, which we earned by our hard work. This way of thinking is very self-centred, because in reality we only gain money and qualifications by depending upon the support of others. Our qualifications are useless if we cannot find a job, and this job must be provided by other people.

So we cannot assume that all the things we enjoy in life are created entirely through our own effort. Rather it is through the effort put in by many other beings that we now enjoy such good conditions. For instance, this very building gives many people the opportunity to accumulate enormous merit through listening to teachings, and at other times gathering for pujas. However this building which we enjoy is the result of the effort of the people who actually constructed it. We do not know who they were, but it is important to remember the kindness of their labour, since it is through their efforts that we now have this opportunity to practise Dharma and accumulate merit. In this way, we try to develop our understanding that it is through the kindness of other beings that we survive in life, with good

living conditions, with sufficient food, clothing, and shelter, and with the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills.

We can also think of how important it is in human society to share love and caring thoughts for each other, because happiness and living harmoniously are interdependent. It is very obvious therefore that when there is a deterioration of human love, either between nations, within the family or between friends, then more problems arise, which means more conflict and suffering in our life.

Basically what we are trying to do is adopt the right mental attitude of feeling grateful to others. We should make every effort to develop and display this attitude at all times, and to see it as true Dharma, or spiritual practice. True spiritual practice does not mean being isolated from society, closing one’s eyes and sitting somewhere. Rather it has to be done by mixing with other people. If you cultivate love and compassion, then have some interaction with others, you have the opportunity to put it into practice, and really be of benefit to them.

Even in your workplace you have to see that your attitude should not be self-centred. You should think of your employer’s needs, by understanding that you have been offered this job by your employer, and through this job you earn a livelihood so that you can provide the basic necessities of life. Therefore, your practice should include making an effort to cultivate a sense of gratitude to your employer. When you have cultivated this, then naturally you will seek the best way to serve them. Not only will this please your employer, but it will in turn secure your job. So it is important to relate these teachings to daily life and try to see their value.

We can also see the value of a cherishing attitude by reading the commentary teachings, which say for example ‘This thought of cherishing others is like a wish granting jewel’. The explanation for this can be found in the text. In short our training is one of developing a sense of gratitude to other beings, by understanding that all the goodness we enjoy results from them, and that all the temporary goals that we seek in life are dependent upon them, and that our good living conditions which sustain this life are dependent upon others. Our very existence is not possible without a mother. The Chinese government has imposed a one child policy [for population control]. The birth of a girl is resented, since she is regarded as a potential for further increase in the population. Thus our very existence in life depends upon other beings.

Our spiritual goal is to achieve full enlightenment or buddhahood, and we reach this goal by initially generating bodhicitta, and then engaging in a bodhisattva’s deeds, which are regarded as very profound and very precious. However without other beings we cannot follow this path to full enlightenment. Because without other beings we

cannot generate love and compassion, since love and compassion can only arise by observing the suffering of others and their wish for happiness. So the development of love and compassion is dependent upon other beings. Without love and compassion we cannot generate bodhicitta mind, and without bodhicitta we cannot engage in the bodhisattva's practice of the six perfections - generosity, morality, patience, etc. These practices of generosity, morality and patience are all causes to attain the state of buddhahood, but we cannot practise them without other sentient beings. Thus fulfilling our spiritual goals is totally dependant upon other sentient beings.

Even worldly goals such as education depend upon other beings. Being able to write even a single letter depends on being taught by others. During our schooling our parents took an interest in, and responsibility for our education, and met with our teachers to discuss our educational progress. So even our education has been supported by the kindness and effort of other beings.

By developing such an understanding of the kindness you have received, you then generate the thought of love, compassion and care for others. As a result of such contemplation you come to some understanding that although up you have received so much kindness from other beings, yet you have always ignored them and in the core of your heart only considered yourself. This leads you to resolve to make an effort to change this attitude and to cherish other beings instead of cherishing yourself.

In his text *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Shantideva says,

Both the Buddha and all other sentient beings  
Lead one to the ultimate state of enlightenment,  
Why is the Buddha regarded as worthy of homage  
And not the other sentient beings?<sup>1</sup>

So from this we try to understand that if we cultivate a thought of cherishing other beings, we find ourselves very peaceful and relaxed, and because of this all those around us automatically receive benefit. They can sense the love and compassion which we hold for them, just as animals are very relaxed and calm when they are close to those who look after them with great care and affection, but become fearful and insecure, and run away from anyone holding harmful thoughts towards them.

This thought of cherishing other beings serves as a source of personal peace and it also brings harmony between ourselves and all other beings. Because there is harmony we see others in a friendlier light, and they in turn will show more faith in us. If however we only hold a self-centred attitude, then we shall face problems such as loneliness and rejection. Why are some people disliked? Why do they have difficulty making friends? It might be because they are very selfish and do not open their heart to others. For example, some parents might have many children but the children choose to live far away, having nothing to do with them. Of course there are two sides to this, the children might have done something wrong, but it might also be that the parents harmed the children. Usually people harm others out of self interest.

What we are doing here is training our mind, and through this training trying to develop more love and compassion

for others, or in other words adopting the right attitude. The love and compassion which we develop in our mind through this mind training are the true Dharma. If Dharma is something precious and worthy of homage, then these qualities which we cultivate in our mind are worthy of homage, as well as a source of happiness in the past and future.

Geshe Doga always gives this advice. Make an effort to train your mind in order to keep increasing good qualities in your mind such as love and compassion. To make progress in this mental development spend as much time as possible studying Dharma, while at the same time continuing to work and earn money. Save some of your earnings, but do not be too stingy, making sure that you provide yourself with healthy food and good clothes. Then, when you reach old age you will have equipped yourself with good inner and outer conditions. Thus one of the main causes for living a good life is maintaining a good positive frame of mind. What is this positive frame of mind? It is as we are studying here, diminishing the self-cherishing mind and developing the thought of cherishing others.

**The Difference between Self-Grasping and Self-Cherishing**

The common feature of both these minds is that both hold the "I" as their object. However the way this "I" is held by these minds is different. The "I" which serves as the object of self-grasping is non-existent, whereas the "I" which serves as the object of self-cherishing does exist, as it is the relative "I". With the self-grasping view we hold the "I" or self to be truly existent, whereas the self-cherishing view is one of cherishing the "I" or self.

The "I" apprehended by self-cherishing does relatively exist but the "I" apprehended by self-grasping does not relatively exist. When we say "I am eating" or "I am shopping" that "I" does exist. The owner of a beautiful pet dog, will always care for it and keep it close. In the same way you cherish the "I" that relatively exists. All your concern is directed to the needs of that "I" and because of this you then ignore others.

Some Tibetan scholars assert that those who have achieved the state of Foe Destroyer or Solitary Realiser do not have a self-cherishing attitude because they have abandoned self-grasping. They assert that self-cherishing arises from self-grasping. Other scholars do not agree with this, and assert that eliminating self-grasping does not necessarily remove self-cherishing, and so Hearers and Solitary Realiser Foe Destroyers still have self-cherishing.

Most of the time both self-grasping and self-cherishing are mixed together. Even though they are separate it is very hard to distinguish between them. If you observe in extreme circumstances such as great fright or fear when you feel "My life is in danger!" it is possible to differentiate between the "I" which you are holding onto with great concern, and the "I" which exists to you as a view of inherent or true existence. [This latter view is the view of self-grasping, whereas the former is self cherishing].

Sometimes when you come to the subject of identifying the object of negation in the teachings on emptiness, the teacher advises students to go out and look for the "I". Some students think that they can find it, and go outside to look, and then return to report that they could not find it!

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<sup>1</sup> *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's way of Life* Ch6 v113

A Buddhas qualities are gained  
From the sentient beings and conquerors alone  
So why do I not respect them  
In the same way I respect the conquerors