

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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With a pure bodhicitta mind listen to these profound teachings, and then think of putting them into practice.

## Compassion in Buddhism

Meditating upon compassion is different to those meditations which use a particular topic as an object of mind, because it is a transformation of your mind into a compassionate one.

Compassion is one of the unique teachings of the Lord Buddha. The other unique elements of the Buddha's teaching are the teaching on peace and non-harmfulness; the uniqueness of the teacher the Lord Buddha, who is without fault; and the teaching on selflessness which is the unique feature of Buddhist philosophy. These unique qualities distinguish Buddhism from other teachings.

## Meditating on Taking

The Taking meditation begins with the cultivation of a true feeling of compassion for all beings by sincerely wishing that they all be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

As said in the last teaching, when you think of the suffering that other beings undergo, you have to recall all the types of suffering listed in the Noble Truth of Suffering, and all the causes of suffering which are discussed under the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering. You have to observe other beings so clearly that you can actually feel their suffering. Compassion is when you have the spontaneous, sincere wish for them to be free from suffering.

Then having generated this compassion you undertake the meditation of Taking, the purpose of which is to train the mind so that eventually you are able to actually help all beings out of their suffering. In it you mentally imagine taking upon yourself all the sufferings, and the causes of suffering, of all beings. If it is not possible to imagine all the beings in the universe, then just consider the beings you know, and imagine taking their suffering and unhappiness and its causes into you, and dissolving it into your heart and its self-cherishing attitude.

One example to help in this visualisation is when you shave your hair, the blade cuts away the hairs which fall away. In the same way you imagine taking the suffering and its causes, which then float into the self-cherishing attitude at the heart and both the suffering and self cherishing are dissolved. It is important to imagine that all of your self cherishing completely vanishes as soon as you take upon yourself the suffering and its causes. Not only does the suffering of others and its causes disappear, but at the same time your self-cherishing attitude also vanishes. This is useful because some people might think that they may feel some discomfort when they do this meditation on Taking. Finish your meditation on Taking with a strong feeling that all sentient beings are now freed from suffering and its

causes.

## A Detailed Meditation on Taking

One way of doing this meditation on Taking in detail it is to take upon yourself the suffering of the living beings of the different levels of existence. For instance you can first observe the suffering of the three lower realms of existence, and take that upon yourself. Then subsequently you can take upon yourself the suffering of the demigods, the gods and humans. You can consider the suffering of bodhisattvas, even those on the tenth ground. As you know bodhisattvas on the tenth ground, and the Foe Destroyers or Arhats of the lesser vehicle do not experience the suffering of cyclic existence since they have uprooted its causes. However they are not perfect beings as they still have obstructions to omniscient mind, so consider taking upon yourself these sufferings of the obstructions to the omniscient mind.

Having taken upon yourself the suffering and the causes of suffering of all beings from the lowest hell realm to the tenth bodhisattva ground, you then feel that all their suffering is removed, and all the causes of suffering (including the negative actions and obscurations) are purified. You can feel very certain about this purification of the negativities and obscurations, and the removal of all types of suffering.

It is said that there are two exceptions which should not be used as objects in the meditation of Taking. They are one's spiritual lama, and the Buddha

As the Buddha is a being who is perfect without any faults so it is not appropriate to use him as an object of Taking, and it is regarded as both inauspicious and inappropriate to think of one's guru as experiencing suffering, or having any type of fault.

For spiritual development it is very important to view one's spiritual guru or lama as a perfect being or buddha. The guru is like a mediator through which one receives the blessings and spiritual attainments of all the enlightened beings.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama said 'Ordinary beings have to rely upon someone with a flesh body to receive the blessings of the buddhas'. Thus to understand the crucial role of one's guru in spiritual development we have to view the guru as the Buddha, and so as faultless. We should train ourself to understand that any faults we see in the guru are just reflections of the faults in our own mind. The only way to transcend our ordinary frame of mind is training ourselves to see the guru as an enlightened being.

An example of how the guru is a mediator for the blessings of Buddha is to see the guru as being like a magnifying glass. In bright sunlight then we can use a magnifying glass to focus the sun's rays to light a fire in tinder. Without a

magnifying glass however, we cannot make fire using sunlight alone. No matter how powerful Buddha is in giving blessings to sentient beings, without the guru as mediator, sentient beings have no access to these blessings. Therefore guru devotion is emphasised in spiritual practice. We should regard any faults we see as being due to our own mistaken view or misconception. This even applies to physical faults: Geshe-la has white hair or we may have a guru who is blind. Everyone can see this so our observation unmistakably concurs with ordinary perception. However we should see our guru as perfect. If we see what we believe are imperfections or mistakes, then these are due to our mistaken ordinary perception. When Lama Yeshe passed away many students believed Lama Zopa was very upset, so they included Lama Zopa's sorrow in their meditation of taking others' suffering. Without being critical of their motivation, this was a misunderstanding of the practice, because we have to understand that the guru is faultless, and such things as misery don't occur.

### **Taking Your Own Suffering**

In relation to this practice, the root text says

Commence taking progressively from your own side.

According to one common interpretation, doing this meditation of first taking your own suffering is suitable for those of lower mental capacity, or those who cannot perform this meditation on taking the suffering of other people straight away. In any case taking your own suffering is mind training. Train by thinking of your own suffering, and progressively take it up: in the morning take the afternoon's suffering, take tomorrow's suffering today, take next year's suffering this year, and the suffering of the next life in this one. In this way the mind can be trained in respect to yourself, then extended to all other beings.

Whatever the order you use, or class of beings you choose, whether they are found to the East or to the West, whatever the connection they have to you the actual meditation is the same: imagine their particular suffering and its causes, take it upon yourself dissolving it into your heart where it vanishes along with your self-cherishing.

Of course the success of this meditation depends upon how seriously and carefully we undertake this meditation practice. If we are not really concentrating, or do not understand the suffering of other beings, if we only have a vague thought of other beings, and imagine we take up their suffering, then there is not much effect upon our mind. We shall achieve little and we then question the effectiveness of the meditation. Whatever we feel depends upon our state of mind. If our mind is well trained in this meditation it has a very clear picture of the suffering of other beings, it does not just imagine but really feels their pain and agony. It is not easy and we have to concentrate with clear focus and single-pointed concentration to really feel their suffering. Then when you clearly feel their suffering it is natural to feel sympathy, because you understand how unbearable their suffering is. So sympathy or compassion arises, and we wish to take that suffering upon ourselves. Just as their suffering is real to you, so taking it upon yourself is more than just imagining it, and you see it coming to you in the form of a black light. As this suffering dissolves into your self-cherishing mind you know you have freed them from their suffering. Thus you have effectively reduced self-cherishing as well as the suffering of other beings. This teaching of Giving and Taking is therefore very effective in quickly accumulating the two collections of merit and wisdom, or in other words it is very

effective in the accumulation of merit and the purification of obstructions. So do this formal practice very sincerely, and with full concentration.

Then in daily life be very mindful of maintaining as positive a mind as possible, showing good heart to others. Make an effort to keep a calm mind, then as a benefit you will find more happiness, peace and stability in daily life. If your mind is calm, then peace and happiness comes even if you do not actively seek it. However when the mind is not calm then you will not find peace and happiness even if you want it. If you maintain a good heart and even a little compassion in daily life it will lead to a more harmonious and happy life.

For the discussion night the compulsory question is the last verse of the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*, which concerns the eight worldly dharma or concerns<sup>1</sup>. His Holiness the Dalai Lama frequently says that this last verse has been very beneficial for him. So we should all make some effort to try to practise that last verse.

In the past Geshe Doga has recommended reciting the *Thirty-five Buddhas' of Compassion* prayer as a means of purifying negativities, but tonight we recite the *Heart Sutra* for the same purpose, as it incorporates all four forces of purification:

1. Visualise as vividly as possible in the space in front of you all the objects of refuge, before which we take refuge and generate bodhicitta. This is the application of the **Force of Base or Object**.
2. Remember all the negativities that have been thus far gathered, such as breaking pledges or vows, or causing harm to others. Then understand that the result of these negativities can only be suffering. Unless these negativities are purified suffering is the inevitable result. That suffering is going to ripen now and not in the distant future. There is an analogy used to explain this. There are three people who have taken deadly poison. The first has died, the second is about to die and you are the third. You have watched the others die and have become sick. You know what is in store for you! Similarly, consider how many beings have taken rebirth in lower realms, and who are suffering immensely. There are also other beings are about to fall into those suffering realms. Unless you purify the negativities that you have created then you too will certainly fall into the lower realms. Therefore feel great regret for having created these negativities. This is the **Force of Regret**, which comes from contemplating how this suffering result has already ripened.
3. Apply the **Force of Resolution** which is being determined not to commit such negativities again.
4. A remedy such as reciting a profound sutra on emptiness like this one is applied, wherein we contemplate the emptiness of our negativities, as their reality is their lack of true or inherent existence. This is the **Force of Remedy**.

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<sup>1</sup> The traditional listing is: Gifts or no gifts, comfort or discomfort, fame or notoriety, praise or criticism. *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, 1993, p.335.

They are listed as gain or loss, fame and disgrace praise and blame, pleasure and pain in *Advice from a Spiritual Friend*, 1996, n.17, p.141.