Study Group - "Liberation *in the* Palm *of* Your Hand" Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga Translated by Samdup Tsering

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15 September 1998

First of all establish the bodhicitta motivation by thinking, 'I shall achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings, and for this reason I am receiving these lam rim teachings, and will put them into practice.'

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Tonight we begin the topic Transforming Adverse Conditions Into The Path. It is obvious that if we are not able to transform adverse conditions into favourable ones, then those conditions are not only an immediate source of difficulties, but they are also an obstacle to practising Dharma. Adverse conditions such as suffering a disease, or confronting an enemy, or receiving harm from a non-human or evil force or any other undesirable event makes practising Dharma very difficult.

What we firstly need to understand is the way in which we view such adverse conditions. Totally lacking both an understanding of the law of karma, and an understanding of how our own mind can serve as the source of problems, what we do is totally blame our situation on outside causes. We also have to examine the consequence of this view, which is that when we blame external conditions our mind becomes very disturbed, and we generate anger and hatred. This way of seeing things only makes the situation worse, and so it becomes even more difficult to even think of practising Dharma.

If instead of incorrectly viewing the situation in this way, we follow the teaching of the law of karma as presented in the lower scope teachings, then we shall understand that all the adversity in our life is the outcome of our karma. By 'outcome of karma' we need to understand that we created this karma by ourselves, and that the karma created by others cannot ripen on ourselves. The real source of the adverse situations that we experience is our own karma, and we must try to recognise this. Since these products of our own karma can have such a detrimental effect on our life then we also need to consider what motivated us to create this karma. It is the self-cherishing attitude which is the ultimate cause of all our difficulties.

We also need to consider the effect it would have on our mind if we understand that based on the law of karma, the self-cherishing mind is the root cause of our problems, rather than seeing outside conditions as the cause of them in our normal way. If we truly cultivate this understanding then the message is very clear: if we



want to be free from problems we must refrain from creating negative karma, and try to overcome or diminish this self-cherishing mind.

If we are able to do this then whenever we face any adverse situation, we can utilise it to develop our understanding of karma. As a result of our understanding, the lesson we learn from experiencing this situation is very positive and it will give us more motivation and a stronger interest in practising Dharma.

We are not just talking about some ideology when we discuss the law of karma, or when we talk of our own mind. Rather, what we talk of here is a mental skill we have to use to deal with the difficult situations which we face in our life. Of course we may not be facing such a situation right now, but there is no guarantee that any of the problems that we see or hear about cannot happen to us. When it does happen, we need to have a lot of understanding to enable a broadminded approach, so that the problem does not become too disturbing, or bring too much misery to our life.

If we have faith in the law of karma, and in the teaching of Lord Buddha we have the opportunity to prove this faith whenever we face an undesirable situation. If there are two people, and one is a believer in karma and the other is not, there is a difference in the way they view problems in their life. If the cause of the problem is that some wealth has been stolen, the non-believer would blame the whole thing on the thief, hate that thief and undergo great mental suffering because of their attachment to that wealth. They would consider what has happened as being totally unacceptable, having no cause other than the thief. A believer of the Lord Buddha's teachings of karma would, depending on the level of their faith and understanding of the teachings, have a different way of viewing the same event. They would accept that the loss of their wealth occurred because of karma, rather than being solely the result of the action of a thief. If you can adopt this way of thinking about the law of cause and effect, then depending on your level of practice you can see adversity as being a very positive circumstance. A very good practitioner can even feel delight about a bad situation such as illness, since they see it as the purification of their own past negative karma.

It is the same as when a business person faces some hardship in the short term in anticipation of great profit in the future. That short term hardship can then even becomes a joyful experience. If we are able to see all adverse situations as a ripening of our own past negative karma, then as human beings we also have the opportunity to find a remedy to lessen the pain, and cope with the situation. If that negative karma ripened in a future life, rather than this present one, the result could be rebirth in a lower realm where there is even greater suffering. If you can understand that the outcome in that instance could be much worse, and that what you undergo now is very minor compared to what it might be, you would feel happy to take a loss in this present life. This teaches us to cultivate a broader and more positive way of thinking.

Of course we cannot expect to integrate this profound practice immediately and to make rapid progress. First of all we just have to try to understand the benefit of this teaching, and try to apply these methods as much as possible whenever difficulties or problems arise in life. Problems, as we all know, are unavoidable. Usually things go as we wish with friends and possessions, but at other times things go in the opposite direction. We must endure these bad times, and in such circumstances it is very easy to lose interest and to forsake our spiritual practice. However we do know that some people when they face serious problems such as a threat to their life, turn to spiritual teachings hoping that this can help them.

We also have to think that problems are a very good opportunity to practise Giving and Taking meditation. In the past you might have imagined taking on the suffering of others, and giving them your happiness. Here is an even better opportunity. Now you can imagine that the actual suffering you are enduring is the suffering of other beings. You can gladly accept that suffering and hope that no other being will have to undergo that problem. Not only this but you can also pray that all the other problems that sentient beings face will come upon you. If you use this meditation when you face any adverse conditions, then rather than forgetting about practising Dharma you are reinforcing your practice. So in this way problems are actually favourable cause to practise Dharma.

Benefits of Suffering

According to Shantideva's text *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life,* the benefits of undergoing misery and difficult situations in life are that they can be a cause to eliminate feelings of pride. Suffering can also be a cause to cultivate compassion for other beings, based upon one's own experience of suffering. It can be a both cause to refrain from negative actions, which serve as a cause of all unwanted things, and a cause of encouraging the practice of virtue which is the cause of all that you desire.

What we always have to remember is to practise Dharma at all times: in times of both pleasure and pain, and not to lose your practice of Dharma. In times of pleasure we must ensure that our mind is not completely distracted by pleasure. Rather we should think of increasing the bodhicitta mind, and understanding that all the pleasure found in life is the fruit of all the virtuous actions we created in the past. Then when we find such favourable conditions we are inspired to create more positive actions, which is the very cause of the conditions we enjoy. Similarly when you undergo pain or difficulty, which is the result of negative actions try not to see it as an obstacle to practice. Rather try to apply these Thought Transformation teachings to see the situation, and thus bringing the practice of Dharma more alive in your mind. These unfavourable conditions then become a favourable cause to practise Dharma. We have to find a way to ensure that the spiritual practice we have begun is carried on continuously, on a very consistent basis.

The compulsory question for the written test is to explain the verse from *The Guru Puja* on giving and taking:

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Kind and venerable guru Grant me blessings that all sufferings Of sentient beings ripen upon me And all my virtues be given to others.

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.