

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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Try to cultivate the bodhicitta mind which is the aspiration to achieve full enlightenment to benefit all beings, and make sure that this bodhicitta mind is your motivation for listening to these teachings. Also generate the genuine intention to put these teachings into practice in order to achieve full enlightenment.

422.323.126 The Eighteen Pledges of Thought Transformation

སློབ་བྱུང་གི་དམ་ཚིག་ལ་བཅོ་བརྒྱད།

Concerning the commentary on *Seven Point Thought Transformation* we are up to the sixth section or theme, which is The Pledges Of Thought Transformation. It says in the root text:

1. Always practise the three general points.

First general point: Not going against the pledges of Thought Transformation.

In following this Thought Transformation practice you are following Mahayana practice which is a very profound and high practice. This does not mean regarding your Thought Transformation practice as superior to all the other practices, such as the practice of moral ethics: it is wrong to ignore all the other lower forms of practice. In fact we have to realise that it is only by maintaining all the other practices on the Mahayana path, that we can make progress on the Mahayana path with this profound Thought Transformation.

The ultimate spiritual goal of the Mahayana path is the state of complete enlightenment, which is the perfect state, free of all faults and possessing all excellent qualities. To reach that perfect state of enlightenment we have to both realise all the excellent qualities, and purify all faults. So we have to make an effort to remove every single fault, even the tiniest one, while making an effort to achieve even tiny qualities.

It is said in one sutra that one should not think it is acceptable to commit a minor negative action, considering it to be trivial. Similarly it is wrong to think that there is no point in creating very small virtues. After all, small misdeeds are like the spark which can produce a great fire, and virtuous actions, even very tiny ones, are like a drop of water, which when accumulated can fill a large container.

We have to understand that no spiritual practitioner is exempted from the need to avoid committing negative actions. There are no exceptions. We see some people who, regarding themselves as highly realised practitioners engaged in some high spiritual path, claim that they do not accrue negativities if they do not follow

the rules of morality, and that they can, for example, drink alcohol. Someone checked with Geshe-la if this was correct. Geshe-la replied, “I do not need to explain, you can check with your own eyes. If a person has been drinking, and is affected and drunk then it is not OK, but if they are not affected then it may be a sign of some spiritual feat.”

The sign of us making progress in spiritual practice is applying ourselves at whatever level of practice we can do, and making progress. Having done well in that practice, then approach the next and practise that one, and in this way progress from lower to higher forms of practice.

In relation to our own practice and life, this Thought Transformation teaching involves transforming our ways of thinking, talking and doing things. It says that we should not think that some negative actions are so minor that they do not require restraint. For example, by using these Thought Transformation teachings to change our daily speech we can bring great benefit to our life, and to the lives of other beings. If however we do not pay attention to our speech it is very easy to speak abusively and harshly to others, and as a result of this we create misunderstanding, confusion and problems in our relationships. As a result we might in return receive very harsh speech from others. This might be so hurtful, and such a source of misery in our life that we cannot forgive it for many years. We might think our own speech is a joke, or for fun, but it might be harmful or malicious to the listener. Therefore there is more benefit if we try to apply more restraint to our speech, so that it is as gentle, courteous and as honest as possible.

The people with whom we [most often] interact with in our life are those closest to us, and if we do not control our speech then those people closest to us are on the receiving end of anything bad that we say. Therefore we receive the very direct and immediate consequences of our bad speech.

When your speech is harsh it can distort the point being put across in the mind of the listener, so that they receive the wrong impression, and will regard it as provocative. Therefore their reply will be unrelated to what you said, and likely to be harmful.

Geshe-la has said in the past that it is very important for parents to pay careful attention to what they say to their children. The parent’s motivation might be to always teach and help their children. However if when the child is misbehaving, the parent says “You are a very naughty child!”, the child will not understand the parent’s

motivation, and will be hurt. So the child learns the power of speech. Then later the child will use speech to hurt their parents. This could occur in public, and cause embarrassment and cause other people to say "Your child lacks discipline". This is the effect that speech can have on people. So using Thought Transformation to transform even a small thing such as our speech has tremendous benefits.

Teaching children how to behave is a question of skill in communicating. If children misbehave, for example, there is no benefit in pointing at the child and saying "You are bad". Rather it is better to focus on their actions, and show them that the action is wrong. Then the children learn that the action is bad, and as they grow up they will remember what their parents taught them.

This way, the advice you give to children is very constructive, and like Buddha's word, something they will always remember. Even in our own life we can remember things taught by our parents to us.

Second general point: Your Thought Transformation practice should not become a pretext for you to do whatever you feel like doing.

This means, for example, thinking that you have been following Thought Transformation practices and, having overcome self-cherishing, you can now do whatever you want, even if it means harming humans or non-human beings or spirits, and becoming very erratic in your behaviour.

Third general point: Thought Transformation practices should be impartial.

It is not right that you only practise and show love, patience and tolerance to those close to you such as your friends, but not to your enemies. It is not right to only show respect to those people who are high, while abusing and disregarding those who are low. It is said that in your practice you should show love, tolerance, respect and compassion to all beings without any discrimination.

The root text next says:

2. Change your attitude while remaining natural.

This line explains how, if your mental attitude has been one of self-cherishing, then through these Thought Transformation teachings it must be changed into bodhicitta mind, or into renunciation, or into death impermanence awareness. In order for such a change to take place you need to make a continuous effort, whether it takes a day, a month, a year, or if necessary year after year. 'While remaining natural' means that despite [the fact that it takes an effort] to change your old attitude of self-cherishing to one of compassion and love to others, you should try to create actions of body and speech as if they are natural actions which flow from a mind of compassion and love.

3. Speak not of the shortcomings of others.

This advises us not to criticise, or point out faults in other beings. If someone is physically handicapped in some way you do not comment on it to that person, and in terms of spiritual downfalls, for instance if someone has transgressed their vows you do not point it out to them.

4. Think not of what is seen in others.

Even if you see faults in others, try to understand that

these faults that you see are not actually faults, but that you see the faults because of the impurity of your perceptions. So try to practise seeing other beings as perfect rather than having any faults.

Here we learn about the right way to see others, which is from the perspective of their positive qualities, rather than from the perspective of faults and weaknesses. Without this mental habit of focussing on qualities rather than faults, then when we get to know anyone closely we seem to always see them with many faults and weaknesses, even if that person is a completely enlightened buddha. If we are not careful we do not realise that the faults we see in others are just our mental projections. If we do not realise this then we shall start to criticise that person, [not just to ourselves] but to others. So because of our own mental projection we generate an extreme view of faults, which others in fact do not possess. Or we may say that they do not have certain qualities which they do in fact possess. So we generate this wrong view in our mind.

We know from our own experience that the moment we see a fault in a person we forget their good qualities. Seeing faults acts like a blind-fold to seeing good qualities. For example when you first meet a person you do not know their minds. Initially you see them as a wonderful person but later as you get to know them you see a fault, and then more faults, until your attitude towards that person changes. Looking for faults in others is not necessarily spiritually bad or negative, but in a worldly sense people do not like it. The true Dharma practice is to develop love, compassion, gentle speech, honesty and good social behaviour. In following the spiritual path we must develop these qualities.

Geshe Doga has noticed that outside there are people who do not claim to be followers of a religious practice, but they are very admirable in their way of talking. They are kind hearted, generous and tolerant in their way of living and doing things. As spiritual practitioners we should see such a person as an ideal example to follow.

5. Purify first whichever affliction is heaviest.

This is quite clear. The mental affliction or delusion which is the most intense or powerful is the one which we should counteract first. When it says 'heaviest mental affliction' we are talking about whichever mental affliction most deprives us of joy and happiness, and which serves as a cause of continuous unhappiness and misery in whatever we do such as walking, going, eating or drinking. When that delusion is present then you cannot feel happiness. In our spiritual practice this is the affliction which must be first overcome.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

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