

# 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་བཅངས།



2 March 1999

Today is the last of the first fifteen days of the first lunar month of the year. The significance of these auspicious days is that on each day the Lord Buddha manifested miracles in order to overcome evil forces. So we recite prayers in remembrance of the qualities and the life of the Lord Buddha.

Try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation, thinking that through receiving this teaching we can achieve buddhahood to benefit all living beings. Also think that this teaching is to be put into practice to destroy the self-centred mind, and to cultivate in its place the altruistic mind of enlightenment.

## 422.321.27 The Instructions On Thought Transformation

བསྐྱབ་བྱ་ཉེར་གཉིས།

In the commentary on the lam rim, *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, we are studying the famous Thought Transformation text *Seven-Point Thought Transformation*. This text has seven major headings and we are up to the last one, which is The Instructions on Thought Transformation.

The first line of this verse reads:

*Practise all yogas (or activities) by one*

This refers to the bodhicitta mind that we have just cultivated as our motivation. It says that we should make sure that the motivation behind whatever action or spiritual practice we undertake is the bodhicitta mind.

Including such a bodhicitta mind in all our actions, it is said, is effective in quickly gathering enormous merit, which can be a cause to achieve buddhahood. If possible it should be a genuine bodhicitta, induced through cultivating love and compassion for all beings. If it is not possible to cultivate such a pure spontaneous bodhicitta then it can even be an artificial bodhicitta: the thought of benefiting or showing some sense of care and responsibility for others.

As we studied early in the text, it is very important and beneficial to cultivate bodhicitta not only during the sitting meditation period, but also in the post-meditation period when we are engaged in different activities. It is instructed that we should train ourselves over and over again to cultivate the bodhicitta mind, whether it be genuine or artificial, in all our actions of body, speech and mind.

Many of you have heard the story of King Sergyel, who requested the Lord Buddha for advice. King Sergyel explained that as king he could not abandon his

responsibility for the busy affairs of state, and that he was in no position to do single-pointed meditation. However he still wanted to do the mahayana practice, so he wished to know how he could manage this without giving up his kingly responsibilities.

The Lord Buddha replied that it was true that the King had many responsibilities, and could not sit in meditative concentration all the time. So the Buddha advised King Sergyel that he should try to incorporate the bodhicitta into all his activities. He said, “By doing this then the actions you do serve as cause to achieve the state of buddhahood, yet you do not need to abandon your state responsibilities as a king”. Following these words of the Buddha, Shantideva also emphasised the importance and the benefit of including bodhicitta motivation in all our actions.

What we can understand from this advice is that there is an opportunity for everyone to practise the mahayana dharma through the bodhicitta practice. If we think about this teaching, then it is clear that achieving the state of buddhahood does not necessarily mean giving up the status, structure or activities of the life we lead. Even for a lay person every action provides the opportunity to include bodhicitta mind, so every action can be therefore transformed as a cause to achieve the state of buddhahood.

Even if we are in circumstances wherein we suffer physical pain or mental anguish, we could, as we have discussed in previous teachings, transform even these adverse circumstances into causes to achieve buddhahood. All we need to do in these circumstances is to engage in the meditation on Taking which involves developing strong compassion for the infinite number of other beings, and thinking how they undergo such physical and mental suffering. Then, thinking of their suffering, wish that your personal suffering will be a cause to free all other beings from their suffering. Try to feel strong compassion and sympathy for the suffering of other beings, and pray that you take upon yourself the infinite suffering they experience, so that they will be free of it. Likewise by engaging in the meditation on Giving we imagine, with genuine love and kindness, giving all our good qualities of mind and body, our wealth and possessions to others.

As every action we do can be motivated by bodhicitta mind, so every single action we perform can serve as a cause to achieve buddhahood for the sake of all beings. This is why the text says ‘Practise all yogas by one’. By practising bodhicitta all the time, we can quickly gather

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enormous merit.

As mentioned earlier we can practise bodhicitta mind if we are undergoing problems such as mental unhappiness, or pain in our body. As has been explained we can transform that experience into a cause to achieve buddhahood. Likewise the good health, abundant wealth and possessions that we may enjoy can be transformed into the path to enlightenment.

When we eat or drink this also can be transformed into the path. When we eat food and drink to nourish our body we do so in order to serve and benefit others. We can think that the food we eat goes to the thousands of germs and bugs in our body. There are said to be 84,000 germs living in our body, so we give our food to them, and so nourish and satisfy them. We also pray that in future we may please all these germs by giving Dharma to them.

When we sleep, we can think that we do so to rest and nourish the body. This is an important activity as there are certain elements of the body that can only be nourished and regenerated by sleeping. So we sleep so as to nourish our body in order to benefit other beings.

Each morning when we take a shower or bath we can think "I am cleansing the stains of delusions and mental afflictions of all other beings". Likewise when vacuuming or sweeping the room, think that you are removing the dust and filth of mental delusion in the minds of all living beings, which serves as the source of their bondage to cyclic existence. All actions can be used in this way, for example, switching on a light can be dispelling the ignorant darkness in the minds of all living beings. Opening a door is opening the door to liberation for all living beings, by liberating them from the lower realms.

'Practise all yogas by one' means trying to integrate the bodhicitta mind in all actions that we do. This practice of the bodhicitta mind is said to be the most effective and beneficial practice of all.

Generally speaking, our day-to-day practice according to these teachings is to maintain a very good heart towards others. This has many benefits even for one's own self. We may set ourselves goals such as buddhahood or liberation from cyclic existence, but can we actually achieve such a goal in this lifetime? Geshe-la does not know about you, but he says he cannot achieve this for himself. So that is why Geshe-la always emphasises the importance of happiness in our mind, and sound physical health.

We should try to understand how, if these teachings are put into practice, they can bring lasting peace and happiness in our mind. As we have just discussed, with this Thought Transformation practice we are able to see every circumstance which we encounter in life as acceptable, and not as a source of problems. The cause of problems is not necessarily adverse situations such as poverty or sickness, because even good conditions can bring us suffering. You have found a friend but this is not good enough; you have found wealth but this is not good enough; you must find more wealth or a different friend. So there is no end to suffering. If we try to see every situation as an opportunity to practise bodhicitta,

then no situation is bad. Even if you face some loss in life you do not become overly disturbed. At the very least if you try to integrate this bodhicitta practice, then you can minimise unnecessary problems from which you might otherwise suffer as a result of your mental attitude. We have to remind ourselves to utilise the good conditions that would otherwise distract our mind, and make full use of them.

Although we talk of "actual practice" we may not have yet generated bodhicitta mind. In theory it sounds good, but in practice we have not yet generated it. However it is important to cultivate some appreciation of this mind. When it comes to your actual practice, it is in relation to the attitude you have towards the people with whom you have direct interaction in life. Who are these people? They are a small in number and usually related in some way: your partner, your friends, your relatives. To make progress in our bodhicitta practice we have to actually produce bodhicitta; you have to start developing some close feelings towards those people and this must be perfected. You must also overcome and minimise ill-thought towards those people. If you do that you will find yourself in a position of lasting peace and happiness.

In other words due to this familiarity with bodhicitta practice, with consideration for others, and understanding of their needs you will have some joy and stability within yourself. Then you can enjoy peace and happiness regardless of where, or with whom you live - whether it be with others or by yourself. Regardless of all these factors you can enjoy and find this peace and happiness within yourself.

When addressing the Tibetan community, H.H. the Dalai Lama said the Tibetan community should understand the benefit of the living spiritual tradition existing in their culture, in terms of individual peace and happiness in the society. However people should not just have blind faith in Buddha's teachings and practices, but rather should learn about it. He said this because, he said, he had been told by many wealthy and famous western people who had lived in Tibetan communities that, despite the poverty of many Tibetan communities, these westerners had still learnt from these communities how to find lasting peace and happiness in their own lives. Many problems which exist in the West do not exist in the Tibetan community, because of the influence of Buddhism. The minds of Tibetan people are calmer and more peaceful, and so produce far fewer conceptual thoughts than people living in modern western cities.

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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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The original typescript is prepared by Kathi Melnic from Alan Molloy's original transcript, which has been checked against Damien Busby's notes. Adair Bunnnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.

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