

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

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Try to reinforce your bodhicitta motivation by thinking "I am receiving these teachings and putting them into practice in order to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings".

We have talked about how, prior to undertaking any action, it is important to ensure that our motivation for doing that action is the right one. There are many advantages in doing so, not just in spiritual practice but also in our other daily actions. With the right mental attitude, we shall cultivate harmony in our conversations with others, and so the conversation will be effective. We often have discussions with friends or family, and if we have the right motivation then it develops understanding of each other, making the relationship closer, and so develop more harmony.

There should be some differences in our mental conduct when talking with friends and enemies. If our motivation when talking to our friend is the same as we hold when talking to an enemy, the outcome will be to turn the friend into an enemy. With a negative attitude the discussion becomes a struggle for your own selfish ideas, with "I am right and you are wrong" assertions. Because you began the discussion with the wrong attitude you become deaf to what the other is saying.

## Instructions of Thought Transformation (cont)

The next instruction in the Thought Transformation root text is:

*Endure whichever situation arises - either good or bad*

The main indication here is to never lose sight of Dharma practice, and to never allow any situation, whether good or bad, to weaken your spiritual practice. This is a very important point to understand and remember since the usual cause of diminishing effort, enthusiasm and time for our spiritual practice is that our situation is either good and improving, or deteriorating.

Some people, when they become very rich, famous and educated lose all the good qualities which they possessed in their personality before, especially the quality of kind-heartedness. Wealth and fame can make people very arrogant and pompous, and then they mistreat and abuse others. Following some gain in their life they forget the value of spiritual practice particularly the attitude of kind-heartedness. [This instruction advises us] to maintain this attitude of kind-heartedness, whether we are rich or poor, whether our situation is improving or deteriorating.

If our situation is poor or deteriorating then we may find it very hard to endure the difficulties and problems we

encounter. The problems we face can be so overwhelming they can cause us to forget our spiritual practice and even lose faith. What can we do to find a way to maintain faith in our spiritual practice and our kind-heartedness in all circumstances? We need to keep the law of cause and effect or karma alive at all times in our minds, and to understand all our situations from the perspective of the law of karma. Showing kind-heartedness to each other is the core practice of Dharma. Remembering this we can overcome or prevent deterioration in our spiritual practice in any circumstance we face.

In good circumstances we see that our good conditions are the result or fruit of our own positive karma, or the merit we have accumulated in the past. These good conditions should then inspire us to do more practice, as they give us the opportunity to engage in actions to benefit others.

Likewise all the downturns we face in life are the indications of the ripening result of negative karma. Therefore we are encouraged to purify our negative actions, so that we do not need to undergo these same results in future. It is also a good opportunity to understand that there are many others undergoing far worse suffering than our own, and to cultivate some sympathy and compassion for them, based on our understanding of their suffering.

Kind-heartedness is a very valuable and precious quality which we should always possess. We all have some seed or even some degree of kind-heartedness in our mind, but we need to depend upon the spiritual teachings to recognise that this quality of kind-heartedness is the most beautiful thing to possess, [because] it benefits ourselves as well as others.

We also have to see the converse. If this quality of kind-heartedness diminishes then more problems of suffering and misery develop in life. You can notice that when people lack this kind-hearted quality, you do not see them as trustworthy, or as a friend. Some people, after acquiring a lot of wealth or fame, lose all their friends and are rejected by everyone. Because of their wealth they become arrogant and totally lack respect and concern for the needs and views of others. They may be rich and famous, but their situation is clearly worse, in that they suffer more loneliness and confusion than when they were poor.

We have to understand that we all have a mind which is with us at all times; there is no time when this mind is not with us. Because this mind accompanies us all the

time it shapes and influences all our experiences and actions. So the type of mind which goes with us shapes our nature, in terms of our humanity, and shapes our personality in the eyes of others. Try to understand the benefit of learning and integrating this spiritual practice into our lives [from this perspective]. This practice teaches us how to cultivate, and always possess the positive kind-hearted mind. When we possess this, we know from our own experience that regardless of our situation, there is peace and happiness within us and so we are in a position to benefit others, promoting peace and happiness in the outside world.

The spiritual practice emphasised over and over by such masters as Shantideva is taming the mind, and getting rid of all the negative states we produce.

The next instruction in the root text is:

*Guard both points more precious than your life.*

The two points indicated here are:

1. General things about Dharma and
2. The specific pledges of Thought Transformation [covered in section six of the root text, *Seven Verses of Thought Transformation*].

General things about Dharma refers to safeguarding any vows or spiritual pledges, and trying to understand that preserving those vows and pledges is the foundation for all your spiritual practice - the basis for studying Dharma.

If, however, you have not taken such formal vows or pledges, you have to understand that the basis for your spiritual practice is the moral practice of refraining from the ten non-virtues. Based on this practice of moral ethics you go about your Dharma studies.

After this the root text says:

*Practise the three hardships*

These three hardships are the hardships of challenging and counteracting any mental delusion or affliction.

1. In the first place it is very hard to prevent mental delusions from arising, and then hard to apply the remedy to remove them.
2. In the middle it is very hard to break the continuity of the presence of mental delusions.
3. Lastly, it is hard to uproot the cause of any mental delusion.

The instruction here is that because these three tasks are so difficult, we need to equip ourselves with the learning and training so that we can:

1. Right from the beginning prevent delusion from arising.
2. Counter delusion once it has arisen. In other words, apply the appropriate remedy.
3. Eventually cut the continuation of the delusion by completely uprooting it.

These instructions help us to consolidate our spiritual practice as a means of overcoming or purifying the negativities of mental delusion. As implied here, overcoming or challenging mental delusion depends on whether we apply a remedy.

Of course it is best if, right from the beginning, we prevent mental delusions from arising, and we need to

know how to achieve that. If mental delusion has already arisen in our mind we cannot relax and accept it - we have to counteract it. If we apply a remedy, by making an effort and by practising some meditation to overcome it, then the mental delusion (even a negative and destructive one) can be reduced or overcome. We have to remind ourselves that the teaching says that the sign of progress in our meditation practice is the reduction of mental delusions. So if we practise meditation then any mental delusions can be completely purified or eliminated.

How should we approach meditation practice? Meditation is the result of listening to, studying and contemplating the spiritual teachings. This all makes sense. When we actually engage in counteracting mental delusion, we must first recognise the mental delusion, and we must have a reason to overcome it. We shall only motivate ourselves to counter mental delusion if we recognise it, and if we see its great shortcomings. So we listen to and study Dharma to recognise mental delusions, their results, and their consequences.

However we can not just leave it at hearing about, knowing or studying mental delusion. At this stage our learning of Dharma is only based upon what we read or hear from others. Rather than relying on what you have learnt from others, the next step is to contemplate and reflect for yourself, trying to recognise your own mental delusions and through your own reasoning mind, see their faults and shortcomings. It is said that the knowledge gained by studying depends upon outer forces, whereas the knowledge gained by contemplating depends upon self knowledge. The most effective spiritual progress is made through hearing, studying, and contemplating, and then engaging in meditation. Then you are well equipped for your practice.

Question: What are the seven points of the *Seven Point Thought Transformation* text?

1. Preliminary teaching on the type of life basis
2. Actual teaching on the bodhicitta mind
3. Transforming adverse circumstances into the path
4. Consolidating all the teaching as one lifetime practice
5. Measurement of having trained the mind
6. Pledges of thought transformation
7. Actual instructions of thought transformation (of which there are twenty two).

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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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**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.