

Study Group - “Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*”

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལམ་གྱི་ལམ་བཅའ་བཅུ་དཔལ་



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Try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation for listening to these teachings by thinking that you are receiving these lam rim teachings in order to achieve full enlightenment, or the state of Buddhahood, to benefit all beings. As well as this, also think that for this reason not only will you listen and learn, but you will also sincerely put this into practice to train and calm your mind.

In the last teaching we finished by listing the six types of wrong orders [or inverted actions]. Following on from the line referring to these inverted deeds, the next line of the root text says:

Do not be erratic.

So rather than practising sometimes and not at others, try to be consistent and undertake to practise continuously.

If, instead of taking our time and making a gradual effort on a consistent basis, we become overzealous, trying to progress rapidly to achieve a quick result, then the final result will not be very fruitful. This line advises us that we should try to practise at our own pace, and not hurry with our practice.

We must realise that we live a very busy life with many unavoidable [commitments and responsibilities]. It creates difficulties if, when we generate some interest in spiritual practice, we become overzealous and put aside everything else for our spiritual practice. Such a rushed and sudden decision is called 'hairy renunciation'. With this instantly generated motivation we might practise like this for a month or a year, then suddenly we may become so tired and frustrated that it is easy to give up our spiritual practice.

As the famous master Gonpa Rinchen says, we should look into the very long distance with a very courageous mind, with a very relaxed and restful feeling. Relating this to our practice, our aim is to achieve the state of the omniscient mind of a buddha. The courage and determination, which we should possess, should be the courage of the spiritual practitioner who follows the greater vehicle or Mahayana, and in our practice we should always be at ease and relaxed.

Instead of thinking that our practice is for our whole life, on a day-by-day basis, we may have the mind that wants to see quick results. We may think of putting aside a period, of say three years, to devote to our practice, but this only creates pressure, causing stress and anxiety. Then, let alone making stable spiritual progress, even in mundane life it is hard to make progress in activities such as work and study.

For long term spiritual progress we should see that there is more benefit in applying our spiritual practice on a regular daily basis, even if only for half an hour a day. In the long term we make more progress and our practice is more

effective and beneficial, than if we make a lot of effort over a short period, even say a three year retreat. If you break down a three year retreat into the days and hours in which you actually practise, it is not much in comparison to a whole lifetime of practising for only thirty minutes a day. Over a whole lifetime there is more, and better quality practice in that half an hour each day. So there is more benefit for you with that approach.

Therefore we have to practise at the right pace - neither too relaxed and too much at ease, nor too hard and forceful. Practice can include all the practices we do, beginning with waking - the Yoga of Arising - and onwards. We should try to integrate all these practices not in a rush but step by step, one by one making gradual progress. If we are unused to it, we cannot put into practice all the spiritual teachings and types of practice when we first start. It is said that we should try to practise whatever we can, and what we can do we should do regularly and consistently, not taking it seriously on one day then forgetting it the next. Then as you progress you will find more time, so that you can add more practices and gradually make progress.

In making progress the difference between someone who does it with ease and someone who does it in a rush is like a race between a louse and a flea. Which would win such a race? The louse wins, because although the flea makes big jumps, it must rest after each jump because it no longer has any energy. Whereas the louse moves more slowly and does not need to rest, so it gets to the goal before the flea.

We can also understand how in school courses some students might be sharp-minded and quick at learning. There are some who are slow learners but who continue their course without a break, whereas the sharp-minded ones take a break of a year and so finish later. The result is that the slow learners finish their course earlier, are more qualified and may already have a job, whereas the sharp minded ones have not finished and still have to look for a job!

Also the reason why we have to make a continuous effort in getting oneself used to spiritual practice and this practice of mind-training, is that familiarity with a practice makes it much easier to perform it. Spiritual practice not only brings great benefit during our life, but also gives great benefit at the time of death. At death, nothing else but spiritual practice has the potential to benefit us, in the sense of helping us to die peacefully with a positive state of mind. It also helps to overcome fear - the fear of suffering at that time, and the fear of not knowing about the after life. Spiritual practice also benefits us in future lives, since it is said that dying in a very calm and peaceful state of mind is a good cause for us to find a better future rebirth.

We really have to become very familiar with spiritual

practice, which not only brings peace and happiness to our minds, but which also brings control over our mind, so that it is not influenced by any kinds of mental delusion such as anger, attachment, jealousy and so on. We must not just learn about the shortcomings of delusions, but we have to put it into practice from this moment on, to help us to gain more control of our mind.

Our aim is to be able to do this practice whenever we want, so that even at the time of death we are able to control our mind, not allowing any delusion to be present or to influence our mind at that time. If our mind is not influenced by the delusions then it is guaranteed that at the time of death our mind will be peaceful. It is important to realise that 'practice' is more than just bringing immediate short term pleasure or peace to the mind. If this were the only goal, then it can be achieved by other worldly things which can also bring us pleasure. However we have to realise that these worldly things are not reliable because although they are a cause of happiness now, they can be a cause of suffering later. So it is important to understand the deeper meaning or purpose of spiritual practice, and to achieve that purpose in our practice.

The next line [of the root text] is,

Do not underestimate your ability.

In the commentary this line implies we should be placing our whole mind on this practice of Thought Transformation - completely entrusting ourselves to, and relying upon this practice. We should not see it as something to be just outwardly studied or observed - it must be integrated into our mind, so that there is no gap between these Thought Transformation teachings, and our continuum. If we do not wholeheartedly put these teachings into our practice then, it says, no matter how long we follow them, these teachings will have no benefit for our inner continuum.

Be liberated by two: examination and analysis.

This line means that firstly we should observe which one of all the types of mental delusions within us is the strongest. Having recognised that, we should first engage in specific meditations which counteract that specific delusion. Then afterwards we should always examine and check whether through this meditation practice we have overcome that delusion. Is it still strong? Is it still arising within us? If so then we have to continue to counteract that delusion by continuing to engage in meditation.

Do not be boastful.

This is also in relation to what one does for others. The line is saying that, for instance when you help other people, you do so through your own wish and motivation as part of the spiritual commitment you make to benefit all living beings. So the meaning of this line is to not be boastful in the sense of reminding others at every opportunity of the help and benefit you have given them. After a while this boastful behaviour makes them feel bad about having received help from you.

Do not retaliate.

This [line from the root text] refers to not retaliating to others who cause you harm, for example someone who embarrasses you in front of people whom you know. It is saying that we have to understand that our main spiritual practice is to overcome the self-cherishing, self-centred mind. Whenever anyone abuses us we should not get into a temper; rather we should control our anger, and in this way not retaliate.

Do not be fickle.

We should not be someone who is easily pleased and upset over even tiny and minor causes. In the commentary text, it says we should not be like the spring weather. Here spring is not so bad, but in Tibet it brings very bad weather. Geshe-la says that it is probably more relevant to think of Melbourne's changeable weather!

The last instruction is,

Do not wish for gratitude.

We should not have any hope of receiving any rewards from our spiritual practice, or from any help we give to others. Having a sense of receiving rewards comes from the influence of the self-cherishing mind, which is a fault in one's Mahayana practice.

So if we do others a favour we should try not to expect anything in return, as it is part of our Thought Transformation practice. If you are teaching Dharma your motivation should not include any thought of receiving praise or admiration. It is also wrong to give something to others in order to get a reward. Of course you should be polite and show your appreciation by saying "Thank you" to others for the things that they have given you, or for their help. You should not however, do so in the hope of receiving more from them in the future.

Hoping for such rewards shows the weaknesses we may have in our Mahayana practice, and shows that all our actions are under the influence of the deep-seated self-cherishing mind.

We leave the teaching here and recite the Heart Sutra, mainly for the purpose of purifying negativities.

We shall begin by saying the Refuge Prayer three times. Before we go for refuge you visualise an infinite number of buddhas, bodhisattvas and so on in front of you. As we recite this refuge prayer we take refuge in the infinite number of enlightened beings, and at the same time generate the bodhicitta mind inside us

When we talk of purifying all our negativities in terms of the forces of purification, then this refuge prayer is the application of the **force of the object or base**. Having taken refuge, quickly think of all the karmic negativities we might have accumulated from beginningless time. Knowing that the effect of these negativities is absolutely undesirable, feel remorse and regret for having created these, which is **the force of regret**. Then, promise yourself not to repeat these negative actions again, which is **the force of resolution**. Finally we recite the Heart Sutra which is **the force of remedy, or antidote**. As we recite the Heart Sutra, if you are familiar with its meaning of emptiness and ultimate truth, think of how all phenomena lack true or inherent existence.

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.