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

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Ensure that your motivation to study and practise these teachings is bodhicitta - the altruistic mind wishing to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Before beginning any spiritual practice it is important to make sure that our motivation is pure, and not tainted with any selfish purpose or reason. Rather we should make sure that our motivation is wholeheartedly to benefit other beings.

Perfection of Giving (cont.)

In the lam rim commentary we are up to the topic of the Six Perfections, the first of which is Giving, or generosity. There are three types of Giving:

- 1. Giving material objects
- 2. Giving Dharma
- 3. Giving fearlessness, or protection to those whose life is threatened

1. Giving Material Objects

In the last teaching we briefly covered the first two types of giving. We could go into in great detail about each of these types of giving. For example, in the giving of material objects there are ten classes of recipients of generosity. However what is important for us is, to know how to practise this Giving properly and effectively.

Although we can study this topic extensively, what we really have to understand is that we have the opportunity to practise giving at all times. To practise Giving Material Objects we do not have to be rich, nor do we need to find someone begging for such material objects. Rather what is most important is that our thought to give has to be pure: we have to have this intention of giving in order to benefit others.

As mentioned in the last teaching, to make our practice of giving even more profound and complete, we can incorporate an understanding of the emptiness of the three circles of giving.

You should also understand that our actions of giving even offering someone just a cup of tea - can be a true practice of giving if, when offering the tea, we do so from the depth of our heart, seeing it as an opportunity to serve and benefit others. Even if there is no obvious being to whom we can give, it is also said that whenever we eat or drink we can transform that into an act of giving, by thinking that we offer the food and drink to the countless living beings (such as bacteria) in our body. As said before, what counts is our mental intention of giving to benefit others. As we give to the living beings in our body we can think: "Right now I can at least fulfil the material needs of these beings in my body by this act of giving, and I pray that in the future I may fulfil their spiritual needs by giving them Dharma."

2. Giving Dharma

Giving Dharma is benefiting others by giving spiritual teachings, or helping them in their spiritual practice.

It is said that Giving Dharma particularly suits celibate monks and nuns who live in monastic orders. Whereas Giving Material Aid suits the householder, or lay person. This does not mean that as a celibate monk or nun you do not have to practise Giving Material Objects, nor does it mean that as a lay person you do not need to practise Giving Dharma. However, generally it is the case that celibate monks and nuns do not have many material possessions, and spend their time in spiritual study and practice. So generally they have more experience and knowledge of spiritual matters. Whereas the lay people generally have more wealth, and have less time to devote to spiritual learning and practice.

3. Giving Fearlessness (or Protection)

This generally means protecting others from various types of fears, such as the fear of threats to their life. For example if you could help a thief facing execution to be free of that fear of execution, then that is Giving Fearlessness. This form of giving is also protecting all other beings from threats to their life, such as saving an insect from drowning, or protecting a living creature from scorching heat by moving them to a cooler place.

Giving Fearlessness also includes saving people from fire, flood or other natural disaster. We hear stories of very brave, courageous people who do not have spiritual knowledge of the benefit of giving, but because of their compassion, they put their own life at risk in order to save other beings. These are highly admirable people. We can only say that they have performed these acts of bravery, because they have become accustomed to giving sometime in the past.

To practise Giving Protection or Fearlessness we have to do whatever we can, within our capabilities. If we have the capacity to save someone's life, such as a prisoner or any other being whose life is at risk, then we should do so. However if we do not have a such capacity, even thinking of alternative actions that we can do to help that person to be free of that situation is also said to be the practice of Giving Fearlessness. As part of that practice we must not cause harm to any other living being: we have to refrain from any actions that cause harm, or even death to other beings, for example, by not slapping and



killing an insect which is biting our body. So this practice of preventing harm to other beings is also the practice of Giving Fearlessness.

Now we can clearly see the benefits which this practice of giving can give both to our own life, and also to the world. It is a great cause of securing peace and harmonious conditions in the world. So we should try to do whatever we can to practise it.

We should not allow ourselves to be discouraged if we cannot practise something that is very difficult because we are not ready, and then not do any practise at all! Rather we should think "If I cannot do one aspect, then what else can I practise?" and then do that. If, in day-today life we cannot always act according to the spiritual teachings, we should at least always have an appreciation of them, and some wish to practise them. We should pray at all times "May whatever actions I do in this life benefit other beings, and never be a cause of harm to others", as it is important to remind ourself not to create any harmful action, and create only beneficial ones.

We do have the potential to always engage in actions of benefiting others. It is just that we have not yet familiarised ourselves with such actions, or the thought of helping others. We can look at other beings for examples of lives of dedication to the service of others. They may not be religious-minded, yet they have this incredible compassion, and the determination and courage to undertake acts of bravery.

Geshe-la saw a television report about a flood in South Australia. There was a small child being carried away by the current of the flood. There were many onlookers, but one large, strong man put his life at risk, jumped into the water and rescued the child. Many of those who were watching may have had compassion, but they did not have enough determination and courage to actualise that compassionate wish, and jump in the water.

We can understand that to achieve a worldly goal we need courage and determination. In spiritual practice too, not only do we need to generate compassion and the thought of benefiting others, but at the same time we need to develop the courage and determination to actually put our thoughts into action.

In the text it says that the 'Perfection of Giving' means a practice of Giving which has reached its fullest development. The practice of Giving mainly refers to the intention to give, such as giving one's body, one's material possessions or one's root virtues, and to give from the depth of one's heart, without any sense of miserliness. It becomes the Perfection of Giving when such a thought of giving is fully developed, and perfect.

Our practice of giving reaches to the state of perfection when this thought or intention of giving reaches perfection. Then we have fully developed the capacity to give. For example, if we have the thought to give in relation to our body, then we would have the capacity to actually give our life and body. Until we actually have the capacity to give our body, we have to mentally train ourself. In other words, until that time, for us the practice of giving means to develop and intensify this thought or intention of giving for example, our body. How do we develop our intention to give? For example in relation to the practice of giving our body or material objects, we meditate on the impermanence of these things. Not only are they subject to decay and disintegration, but at the time of death we have to leave them all behind. They become useless, and we are even separated our own body.

So before you have the actual capacity to give, the main practice of giving is training the mind. However at the same time we should not think that our only practice is [restricted to] developing this true intention to give from the depths of our heart. We should also think of giving any object we have the resources, capacity and desire to give. So our practice of giving is training the mind in the practice of giving, as well as giving the things that we can give.

As said earlier, it is the motivation of giving which is the most important factor in giving. A student once told Geshe-la about how he had given some money to a beggar who said that he needed money for a train ticket. The student was unsure as to whether the beggar would in fact buy alcohol. Whatever the intention of a beggar, as a way of familiarising yourself, it is important to get into the practice of giving. Even if it is something small, it shows that the action you have done is a worthy one.

Geshe-la said once, as he was returning from India, he stayed in an upper Tantric college hotel in Delhi. As he walked out of the restaurant late in the evening, he saw someone sitting on a flat stone looking very sick. This person's friend said that he desperately needed the money to travel to Rajpur. As he was about to leave India, and would not need Indian currency, Geshe-la gave the beggar his last 65 rupees. On returning to the hotel, a Gyuto monk told Geshe-la that that person would only use the money to buy drugs. On a subsequent trip Geshe-la thought he met the same beggar asking for money, and when Geshe-la said that he had given him money last time, the beggar said "No it was not me." Who knows? The point here is that it is still worthwhile from your side, as long as you maintain a pure motivation, to not let the person who begs to go away empty handed.

Of course there are certain exceptional situations. You do not give poison or weapons to a suicidal person, with which they could kill themselves.

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

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