

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

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1 June 1999

As usual we should try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation, by thinking that the reason for studying this Lam Rim teaching is to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient being. Then think that we shall put these teachings into practice by controlling the mind, and through this achieve complete enlightenment.

There is also benefit if, before any of our actions in everyday life, we try to set the right frame of mind or motivation, because our actions will be good if a positive state of mind presides over them.

Faults in the Practice of Giving

As to the teaching on the Lam Rim we have nearly finished the first of the Six Perfections, the Perfection of Giving, learning that there are three types of the Perfection of Giving.

In order to make the practice of Giving more fruitful we should be aware of, and avoid these faults:

- **Wrong view** or a disbelief in the results of the practice of giving, for example doubting that giving will yield all the fruits mentioned in the texts.
- **Directing our practice at an inferior cause**, for example focussing our practise of Giving upon protecting one single being, with the result of causing harm to many other beings. In other words ignoring the welfare of many other beings by focussing upon benefiting one single being reduces the scope of our practice.
- **Holding a very wrong view as the supreme view**, for example, believing that making animal sacrifices is a worthy cause. Such a completely wrong view about the practice of Giving should be avoided.
- **Using the practice of Giving to belittle or undermine others**. The implication here is that when we practise Giving we should try to please other beings in all ways. Physically we should give in a right manner with the right outer gestures. In both our mental attitude and manner we should not distinguish between those of low or high status.
- **Being influenced by competitiveness**, for example, giving in order to compete with other practitioners. Nor should we hold any **pride**, such as feeling proud that you have given to a particular charity, or to a large number of beings, or given a large amount of money.
- **Avoid the motivation of gaining fame and reputation** when engaging in this practice.
- **Being small minded**, thinking that we have over-performed this practice of Giving by giving more than

we should.

- **Avoid feeling regret** after you have given. It is said that to feel regret about the performance of any virtuous act is a negative action, whereas feeling regret about a non-virtue is a positive action.
- **Showing discrimination** in our practice of Giving, such as practising Giving to friends but not to enemies and others.

The Ten Types of Recipients of Giving

Lama Tsong Khapa's *lam rim chen mo*¹ lists ten categories of the types of beings who are recipients of our practice of Giving.

1. Friends or the class of people who benefit us
2. Enemies or the class of being who harms us
3. Strangers or the class of being who is neither friend nor enemy
4. Those beings endowed with excellent qualities such as moral ethics
5. Those beings not endowed with such excellent qualities as morality
6. Those beings who are equal to oneself
7. Those beings who are below oneself
8. Those beings who are above oneself
9. Those beings who are very well off in terms of material possessions and who lead a happy, comfortable life
10. Beings who are impoverished in terms of material possessions and who lead a very miserable life.

In terms of our practice, the reason why we engage in this practice of Giving is to benefit other beings, because we have previously generated bodhicitta, and with that mind resolved to devote ourselves to fulfilling the welfare of other beings.

Therefore we have to understand the ways in which our practice of Giving benefits other beings, and fulfils the aim of bodhicitta mind. We have to see how giving material objects can truly benefit others, by immediately solving their problems and fulfilling their needs. The giving of Dharma is an excellent guide for others in terms of what they should practice and what they should abandon or avoid. The giving of fearlessness gives other beings protection from the various types of fear.

We also learn here how all living beings, whether fully enlightened, or just ordinary sentient beings, can be an object of Giving, which shows us that we can practise

¹ Editor: The lam rim chen mo is known in English as “The Great Stages of the Path”

Giving to any other being.

The Four Characteristics of Giving

Shantideva's *Condensed Instructions* further explains the practice of Giving in terms of four characteristics. These are explained in the Lam Rim commentary². The four characteristics are:

1. Giving
2. Protecting
3. Purifying
4. Increasing

We shall discuss these four features very briefly. The four characteristics can be applied to each one of the three types of Giving, and they also apply to the types of object to which we give.

For example, in relation to the practice of giving of our body, our practice should incorporate these four qualities in this way.

1. The first feature is **giving** from the depth of our heart. Of course here our practice is more one of training our mind with the thought of the pure sense of giving, [rather than actually giving our body].
2. The second feature is **protecting**. We need some sense of protecting our body because at this stage we are only training our mind to give our body, and our actual body is not to be forsaken or given away. It also means protecting our body against engaging in any negative or non-virtuous action.
3. The third feature, **purifying**, is combining an awareness of or the emptiness of the three circles of giving:
 - the emptiness of the object of giving
 - the emptiness of the giver
 - the emptiness of the act of giving
4. The fourth feature is **increasing** which is dedicating our practice to the cause of enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. In this way we increase the merit of our practice of Giving, and we can also increase our merit by rejoicing in this practice.

To summarise it is said that if we include these three factors:

- motivation of bodhicitta
- dedication of bodhicitta
- realisation of emptiness

our practice of giving will be classified as the Perfection of Giving.

Combining All Six Perfections In the Practice Of Giving

Furthermore, there is also the method whereby we can include the other five perfections into our practice of Giving or in other words, there is the method by which we qualify each of the Six Perfections as an incorporation of the practice of all of the Six Perfections. In the past Geshe-la has taught the Seven Limb practices of Mahayana, where he explained how the limb of

prostration could include all of the six perfections.

Maybe you can discuss how the practice of the Six Perfections can be incorporated into the practice of Giving. If we can understand this in relation to Giving then we can apply the same logic to each of the other Perfections.

In the practice of **Giving**, our motivation to engage in the practice is the bodhicitta motivation, while at the same time restraining our verbal and physical actions from non-virtuous actions. This combines the practice of **Morality** with Giving. It is important to combine these two, because it is said that that if we do not, then the result of our giving will ripen in a bad rebirth. So therefore, it is important to practise Morality at the same time as Giving.

We must also apply the perfection of **Patience** to the practice of Giving, because without Patience we are easily disturbed or provoked by other people, or by outer conditions. When we practise Giving we may hear harsh or abusive speech, or see a poor response to one's generosity, and when this happens we might show them anger or hatred, and in doing this, it is said we lose the merit or virtue accumulated by our practice of Giving. So anger destroys one's virtue. Therefore in order to prevent such anger it is important to practise Patience in conjunction with the practice of Giving.

It is also important to practise the Perfection of **Joyous Effort** otherwise we shall practice Giving for a day or two, then fall under the influence of laziness, and stop practising. However with Joyous Effort we make continuous, consistent progress in our practice.

It is also important to apply the Perfection of **Concentration**. Combining single-pointed concentration with Giving is a great advantage as it allows us to maintain the virtue we are accumulating through our practice. Without single-pointed concentration, distractions will arise, just like a thief entering your house and stealing your wealth. Instead of practising Giving, your mind will be overpowered by mental delusion because you have allowed distractions to enter your mind. As one engages in the practice of Giving one develops full knowledge of the benefits of practising Giving, and the shortcomings of not doing so. With this sense of discernment one then tries to engage in the practice of Giving single-pointedly.

Finally the practice of Giving should also incorporate with the Perfection of **Wisdom**, qualifying the practice with the wisdom realising the emptiness of the three circles of giving.

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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.

² Editor: In fact the commentary text, "Liberation in the Palm" discusses four groupings of four! Each of these groupings has a different connotation to the meaning of these four features. The text implores us to practise all sixteen of these features of the act of giving.