

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་བཅད་སྤྱོད་



8 June 1999

Try to reinforce the bodhicitta motivation which you have just generated, and try to think that you are studying and practising this lam rim with this same motivation.

422.331.12 Perfection of Morality:

Having finished the Perfection of Giving we shall now discuss the second perfection - the Perfection of Morality.

What is morality? It is the thought of not harming other beings and the thought of abandoning all the causes of harm to others.

Given that the meaning of morality is the thought of refraining from harming other beings, achieving the Perfection of Morality means fully developing the thought of non-harmfulness, and becoming completely familiar with this thought. So the Perfection of Morality is not achieved by simply ensuring that others are actually free from harm.

Let us look into this meaning of morality as the thought of abandoning the very basis of causing harm to other beings. It is also said that abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions is the main practice of morality. What is the relationship between this and the definition of morality as being both the thought of abandoning harm to other beings as well as the basis of harming them?

The definition [of morality in terms of the ten non-virtuous actions] has two parts which we need to know.

1. What is the harm which we cause to other beings? In terms of the ten non-virtuous actions, the harm refers to the actual harm that we cause to others by our three non-virtuous actions of body, and four non-virtuous actions of speech.
2. The three non-virtuous actions of mind (covetousness, harmful thought and wrong view) are the basis, or cause, or driving force to harm others.

As we learn more about the practice of morality, and its three types or divisions, then we might ask questions about the definition of morality as the thought of abandoning harm towards others. Of the three types of morality, neither the Morality Of Gathering Virtuous Dharma, [nor the Morality Of Working For The Sake Of Other Beings] is implied by the definition of morality [in terms of abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions]. So that definition of morality is principally based upon the first type of morality which is the Morality Of Not Harming Other Beings or the vow of not committing any negative actions. Furthermore the reason why this definition is based upon the first division of morality is that the first type of morality is the main one, which

serves as the basis for the other two types of morality.

422.331.121 First Type of Morality: Refraining From Negative Actions

The topic of morality mainly focuses upon the first type of morality, the Morality Of Refraining From Negative Or Harmful Actions. Therefore, what we need to study is the negative harmful actions which we should abandon in our practice of morality. This question then raises the morality practices which relate to the different types of vows that we have taken, such as Individual Liberation¹ vows or Bodhisattva vows.

Generally it is said that the negative or harmful actions which we must abandon are the ten non-virtuous actions, and that this is the main practice of morality. We have to understand that if we abandon these ten non-virtuous actions we are abandoning all harmful negative actions.

Here we must also be clear in our mind that practising the morality of abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions is not a lesser practice, just because it is presented in the teachings on small stages of the path in the lam rim. Even though this teaching is presented in the small scope of the path it is something which spiritual practitioners of all three stages of the path must follow. The only difference between practitioners of each of these three scopes in the way they practise [abandoning] each of these ten non-virtuous actions, is that their motivation differs; in the lower scope the motivation is to prevent lower rebirth; in the middle scope the practice of morality is to achieve personal liberation from cyclic existence; and for a spiritual person of great scope the practice of the morality of abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions is motivated bodhicitta, or the wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

It is important to understand generally, the importance of the practice of morality in one's spiritual path, and how this practice of morality comes down to abandoning the ten non-virtuous acts. It is important to see this as the primary practice of morality. This can benefit us, because there is no [great] difficulty in understanding and learning this, as it is not a practice which is beyond our capabilities. Some practitioners take no notice of those practices which they know, and which they can do, and which are so beneficial, relevant and essential to their spiritual growth. Rather they apply themselves to practices which, let alone practising, they cannot even comprehend!

¹ Editor: the vows of Individual Liberation are also known as the Pratimoksha vows

If we refer to the first type of morality as a form of vow, then there are three main types of vows.

1. Individual Liberation Vows
2. Bodhisattva Vows
3. Tantric Vows

Regarding the Individual Liberation vows, it is said in Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, "Without possessing any one of the seven types of Individual Liberation vow one does not have the merit to take Bodhisattva vows". However, in the commentary the meaning of this is not viewed as literally as this verse might suggest. Rather the implication is that anyone who possesses any of the seven vows of Individual Liberation has the most suitable form of life basis to possess the Bodhisattva vows. It is not saying that possessing Bodhisattva vows is subject to the possession of any [or all] of the vows of Individual Liberation. Furthermore, it is also said that to possess Tantric vows, the most suitable form of life is the celibate life.

For those people who possess any of these three types of vows, protecting their vows means refraining from the negative actions which they [have vowed to] abandon. This is the meaning of protecting the vows. In everyday life this means always staying mindful and conscientious about safeguarding those vows, and checking as to whether one's actions concur with or contradict one's vows. Whereas for those who do not possess any of the Individual Liberation, Bodhisattva or Tantric vows, the practice of morality means abandoning the ten non-virtuous acts.

We should try to emulate the way in which the early Kadampa masters diligently observed the practice of moral ethics. Whenever they committed a non-virtuous action they gathered a black pebble, and for every virtuous action they collected a white pebble. At the end of the day they reviewed their day by counting whether they had more black or white pebbles.

In daily life we are trying to abandon negative actions by applying mindfulness and alertness. Just as the Kadampas collected black and white pebbles, at the end of the day we should also review our actions. If we have created positive actions we should rejoice and feel positive, which is a further cause to multiply the virtuous merit we gathered from that action. Also we should pray to accumulate even more virtuous actions.

It is also important that we do not forget about all the negative actions we have created. We should feel bad, and regret them and even more importantly resolve not to repeat that same action again. To purify any negative action, we apply the four means of purification². If we are prone to any particular negative action, or desirous attachment, or any other strong and forceful delusion within us, we should make a special effort to counteract that delusion, by using whatever meditation we can learn.

As we mentioned earlier in the discussion, the meaning of morality is a sense of restraint from harmful actions. It is not just preventing physically harmful actions such as killing other beings. Of course this is a positive thing to

do, however developing the practice of morality means not just developing the actions of non-harmfulness, but also developing, increasing and strengthening the thought of non-harmfulness. It is said that progress in the practice of morality comes mostly from developing the thought of restraint. By generating thoughts of restraining from killing more sentient beings, then we accumulate even more merit. So if one cultivates the thought of not killing all sentient beings, this accumulates merit towards all sentient beings, and in an instant we can accumulate enormous merit. Likewise if we do not restrain our thoughts, then in an instant we can generate enormous negativities.

422.331.122 Second Type of Morality: The Morality of Gathering Virtuous Dharma

It is said that the Morality Of Gathering Virtuous Dharma includes basically all the virtuous actions we perform with the bodhicitta motivation. This includes the virtuous actions we perform by doing prostrations, making offerings, listening to, contemplating or meditating on the meaning of Dharma, any virtuous effort we make with our actions of body, speech and mind, or any of the Six Perfections which serve as a cause to ripen our own mind, or the minds of other beings. These are all the Morality Of Gathering Virtuous Dharma.

422.331.123 Third Type of Morality: The Morality of Benefiting Others

In fact all the deeds of the buddhas and bodhisattvas can be included in all three types of morality. Of the three, the first two (the Morality of Refraining from Non-Virtuous Action and the Morality of Gathering Virtuous Dharma) fulfil the purpose of the bodhisattvas.

The Morality of Benefiting Others fulfils the welfare of all other beings, because all the bodhisattvas' deeds are fulfilling their own purpose, and fulfilling the purpose of other beings.

This [type of morality] is obviously understood by the purpose of the bodhisattvas' deeds, which is to benefit others. There are eleven different ways in which a bodhisattva can benefit others. These are listed in the lam rim text. We can list those eleven next week, but if you have a commentary you can refer to it to understand the meaning for yourself.

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.

² Editor: The four means of purification (also known as the four forces of purification are: Base, Regret, Antidote and Resolve