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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

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15 June 1999

As you did before when you cultivated the bodhicitta motivation, try to reinforce your thought of benefiting as many beings as possible.

If we could always maintain a good heart within us in our daily life, then we would find more happiness, as well as contributing to the happiness of all those people close to us, and to the society in which we live.

With a good heart, then automatically all our outward physical and verbal deeds are very beneficial and meaningful; we also become better human beings. It does not matter [who we are], or what we do, or where we live, maintaining a good heart and doing good deeds brings happiness to our life, and creates the same for other beings.

We can gradually cultivate this good heart, or the mental attitude of benefiting and showing care towards other beings, by training our mind. Cultivating this caring thought, or good heart, is very important - not just for the sake of others, but also to secure personal peace and happiness. With a good heart we can make the best use of our life, and whatever we achieve in this life. Without this good heart, our achievements such as wealth or education will bring harm and trouble to ourself and others, rather than bringing happiness and security.

The best way to produce this good heart is to firstly understand our own life situation, by knowing how precious our life is to us. We have this strong desire for personal happiness, and a strong aversion to personal suffering and dissatisfaction. Generally speaking we think that our own life is our most precious possession. It is only under the influence of intense delusion that we inflict harm upon ourselves, sometimes even intentionally. However this is very rare.

If we think about others, then we can understand that they too have the same strong thought of only wanting personal happiness, and not wanting personal suffering. Then we shall cherish them like we cherish ourselves, and seek happiness for them; we can then be sure that at least if we do not bring them happiness, then we shall not harm them.

You have just meditated on cultivating bodhicitta mind. In practice bodhicitta means cultivating the same sense of benefiting and caring for others that we have for ourselves. We can develop this in a step-by-step process. First train your mind to extend this caring thought to two or three selected beings, then gradually extend this thought to all other beings. It is said that when we do

this, all other beings become our supreme friends, and benefiting them becomes the supreme purpose of our life, and that gives us satisfaction.

Once we have cultivated this genuine thought of benefiting others, it will occur to us to actually benefit them in whatever way we can. Then our knowledge, our education, our material possessions, or whatever we achieve in life will serve all sentient beings in some way.

We have compared our own needs and the needs of others, and found them to be the same. Just as we want as much personal happiness as possible, and make an effort to achieve that happiness, and just as we do not want suffering, and try to avoid suffering, we must also make the same effort for other beings.

If we go further, we need to know why we need to love and benefit other beings. In the Buddhist teachings there is an extensive elaboration about the kindness of other beings towards us, like the teaching on recognising all other beings as one's mother. Even in worldly terms it is considered very polite to repay any kindness or support given by others. Once we have realised the kindness other beings have shown us, then naturally we shall wish to repay that kindness.

Another reason [for knowing why we need to cherish others] is that our survival and development, indeed our very existence in life, is dependent upon other beings. The reason we live safely is because of the compassion of other beings. The necessities of life - food, clothing, drink - all depend upon other beings. At the beginning of this life, if it were not for the love and affection we received from our parents we would not have survived - we were totally dependent on others. At the end of life we are also dependent upon the care and support of others. As well as at the beginning and end of our life, even in the middle of life, our survival depends upon others; it doesn't make any sense to think that we are independent of others. In this way we can develop a good heart, by understanding how much kindness we receive from other beings, and how throughout our life we are dependent on them.

What we are discussing here is creating the right internal conditions for finding more happiness, and hence the betterment of our life. However suitable external conditions are also essential for securing our happiness. For example, we cannot be happy if we do not have enough to eat, or adequate clothing, or a place to live, or good friends to accompany our inner conditions. Therefore we must think about suitable external

conditions and these come down to one word – money! So we have to realise that we must work, and that work is important.

Happiness needs external conditions, but we must also make internal progress. We have to realise that external conditions alone will not fully satisfy our needs. By directing all our effort at external factors, we may make good external progress, but without the right internal conditions these external conditions can actually be a source of more suffering.

External conditions alone cannot satisfy all our needs, and will not automatically bring happiness. Therefore even at an early stage of life we should try to be aware that not only should we seek good external material conditions, but we should also seek good internal conditions. This means cultivating and developing positive states of mind.

We also have to realise that we have to do those spiritual practices which best suit our capacity. Not all practitioners can be like those who, in pursuit of their goal, renounce the world and are completely careless of their outer needs. For such practitioners, whatever they have is enough, and outer needs do not cause any problems. For most beings however, however, this is an extreme approach to practice. Therefore in general, it is better for us to do our spiritual practice, while at the same time not losing sight of our material needs. Both spiritual practice and material needs are necessary for us to secure happiness and freedom.

By cultivating the caring thought of benefiting others, then a lot of the unnecessary problems and suffering we experience can be removed. With this mind we can find more joy, and more reason to feel happiness and delight. If we have trained our mind with this thought of benefiting others then even the way we work in our job will be different. If we work with the same care that we would if we were working for our own business, then our job becomes an opportunity to fulfil the wish of another being - our employer.

With this mind we can prevent most of the unnecessary problems and suffering which we create in our own mind. For example, the problem of jealousy can arise and trouble us when we see another person wearing better clothing or having more money. For no other reason, as soon as we see someone making more money, or wearing better clothes we feel bad, and become mentally very disturbed. The only cause is our own jealous mind, and the only reason why there is this thought of jealousy is because we lack the thought of benefiting others, wishing for them to have happiness.

If we did have this thought of wishing others to have happiness then instead of feeling jealous, we would be delighted to see others enjoying such good circumstances. Of course it is not very hard to understand this [intellectually], but normally this is not the way we think. However if we do think like this, we can understand very clearly that when we see people we love and care for having success and happiness, then this brings us happiness as well. This is all because of having this kind-hearted attitude to other beings.

For the discussion evening, discuss the five main sub-headings under the subject of cultivating conventional bodhicitta mind. They are:

1. Meditation on Equalising and Exchanging Self with Other
2. Thinking about the disadvantages of Self-Cherishing in various ways
3. Thinking about the advantages of Cherishing Others in various ways
4. The Actual Method of Exchanging Self with Others
5. Depending upon this, the Meditation on Giving and Taking

These five headings are for discussion. The compulsory question for the test, taken from Maitreya's *Ornament for Clear Realisation*, regarding the meaning of bodhicitta, is:

“Bodhicitta is a mind which wishes to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all other beings.”

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.