

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་བཅུང་སྤྱོད་པ།



13 July 1999

Let us begin by cultivating the proper bodhicitta motivation, thinking “I am studying this lam rim teaching to attain the state of full enlightenment so as to benefit all living beings”. Think also of putting this teaching into practice in order to achieve this aim.

Last week we defined patience as the state of mind which stays tolerant and indifferent, and which displays a non-retaliatory attitude towards the harm which you receive from others.

One of the factors which discourages us from practising patience, is that there are numerous reasons which make it difficult to succeed with this practice. For example, how can we always practise patience when there are such vast numbers of ill-natured people? To overcome this wrong way of thinking about patience we should recall this verse from Shantideva’s text *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*:

“The number of ill-minded sentient beings is like space
So there is no way that you can pacify all beings.
However if one pacifies one’s own angry mind,
It is equal to pacifying all these angry beings of ill-nature¹.”

It is important that right from the beginning we understand why we practise patience. It is not to pacify all those other beings who cause us problems; it is impossible to pacify them all because there are so many. Rather our aim is to pacify our own mind and stop the anger there, and to understand that if you do so then you will [effectively] remove all the causes of anger.

It is important that we correct our view of the cause of the problems and disturbances which we experience. The real causes are not external ones. In situations where someone shows us an unhappy face, or says unpleasant abusive words, or in some way is not pleasing [or irritating] we generate anger about those external conditions, because we consider them as unwanted or undesirable.

Are all these external factors the direct source of our discomfort and dissatisfaction? When we investigate we can see that they are not. Rather than those external factors, it is mainly because anger and hatred have arisen

within our mind, and we have allowed this to occur because we have been unable to practise patience and tolerance.

In fact, instead of directing our hatred towards external conditions, we should direct it towards the hatred and anger which we generate in our own mind. We should try to see that anger as the enemy, in the sense that it is our own anger which causes us unhappiness. So it is important to understand that anger is the real source of our problems and unhappiness.

We should try also to see the consequences of this anger. For instance, the moment we allow anger to germinate, our mental attitude immediately changes to the extent that we begin to hate even close friends. Normally we are proud to have that person as our friend, but with anger we begin to hate them.

It is important to see how practising patience and overcoming anger can be of benefit in sustaining peace and happiness in the mind. If we fully understand the benefits of a practice we can be confident that it is worthwhile.

Furthermore it is important that we make some effort to pacify anger and to practise patience instead, because as Shantideva said in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*,

“There is no sinful action like hatred.
There is no endurance like patience².”

The Three Types Of Patience

There are three types of patience.

422.331.131 The Patience of Non-Retaliatio

གཞོན་བྱེད་ལ་ཇི་མི་སྐྱུ་པའི་བཟོད་པ།

The first type of patience is non-retaliation. As we discussed in the last teaching, patience is a quality that we have to generate in our mind. Under what conditions should we generate this quality of patience? It is whenever we receive any form of harm from others, such as from our enemies. As we said in the last teaching, when conditions are very favourable then there is no real need to practise patience. Therefore, to say that you are practising patience in favourable situations means nothing. It is important to understand that the time to practise patience is in the context of disagreeable or adverse situations, such as when we receive harm from

¹ Chapter 5, Verse 12, which in the Library of Tibetan Works version reads,

Unruly beings are (as unlimited) as space
They cannot possibly be overcome,
But if I overcome thoughts of anger alone
This will be the equivalent of vanquishing all foes

² Chapter 6 Verse 2

There is no evil like hatred
And no fortitude like patience

others. If, in this situation our mind remains undisturbed, then that is the practice of patience.

In order to practise patience we need to have some understanding of the disadvantages of anger, and also of the advantages of patience. With this knowledge we can then internalise this practice of patience, [blending it with our mindstream].

If we are aware of all of the faults of anger we are better able to remain very vigilant about it. The most effective way of avoiding the downfall of anger is to try to make some effort to recall all the faults of anger while actually in the grip of anger. Think, "Of all the non-virtuous states of mind, anger is the worst one". Why? Because even one moment of anger can be a cause to lose all the merit accumulated over thousands of years, and that is just for the invisible aspect of anger.

Now let us consider the visible faults of anger. As it says in the text, if we can see our own face in a mirror when our mind is boiling with anger and hatred, then we seem quite frightful. It is exactly the same as when others show us strong anger. It is very unpleasant and you do not feel secure if it is very threatening, especially if there is a facial expression of violence or aggression. So Dharma is like a mirror by which we can understand ourselves better. It is good to experiment to see the difference between when we are in an angry mood, and when we are in a cheerful mood; you can obviously see the difference. The bottom line is that outwardly we look horrible with anger in our mind, and neither jewellery nor make-up can conceal that.

We can also think that with anger we cannot control ourselves, and we become very restless, finding little to comfort us. Lying in a comfortable bed we cannot go to sleep. We cannot enjoy tasty food or drink.

As human beings we have a good human nature, a creative side as well as this bad nature and destructive side. Anger encourages the bad nature, and influences us towards becoming very destructive and ill-natured humans. Not only does anger obscure our mind, but we lose our normal sense of judgement, and we forget many good things. For example, the moment we generate anger towards a particular person we forget all the good things which that person might have done for us. Influenced by anger we can cause problems to those such as our parents to whom we are very grateful. Of all the kindness and support we have received, our parents have given us the most, but influenced by anger we harm them.

In a way we are practising within our mental continuum. We must understand that anger is a negative side of our mind, whereas patience is a positive quality. Whether we call it Dharma practice or meditation or a practice to control one's mind, it is all about developing more positive qualities of mind, and as much as possible diminishing the negative ones. The outcome is that as we make gradual progress with our mind, we gradually diminish our anger and develop patience, and so transform ourselves from a very aggressive, ill-natured person into a more peace loving and gentle one.

Anger is a destructive force, which can destroy our virtues, so we have to take more precautions to not

generate it. In the texts it is said that if we (who have not yet entered on the Mahayana path) generate anger towards a bodhisattva (someone entered on the Mahayana path) then such anger destroys the merit accumulated over one thousand aeons. This means that the most skilful method is to transform our mind, viewing all other beings as perfect, pure beings. The reason we must train in cultivating this pure perception is because we can never be sure who is a bodhisattva and who is not. We cannot trust the way that other person appears to our mind. So therefore the advice is that we should cultivate this perception of all others as perfect because of the risk of generating anger towards a bodhisattva.

The text also specifies, however, that if a bodhisattva on a lower level of the Path of Accumulation shows anger towards a bodhisattva on the medium level of the Path of Accumulation, then the lower level bodhisattva loses the merit accumulated over one hundred aeons.

All these teachings are based on Shantideva's text, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

We can regard practising patience as a preparation before anger is actually generated. What we can do as preparation is to develop our knowledge of the practice of patience; we can develop our knowledge about dealing with situations with patience; and we can develop knowledge about the faults and disadvantages of anger. We have to try to consolidate this knowledge until our understanding merges into our mind. Without control, anger can lead to suicidal behaviour, and do much outer damage to our life. Think of practising patience to remedy anger, so that when we confront a situation, which upsets us, we can then try to develop the tolerance and strength to endure, and accept that situation.

We also have to consider how we should practise patience when anger is actually present in our mind. When this is the case, try to be aware of the presence of anger, and that if you are losing your self-control; be aware that somehow you must maintain your sense of responsibility, otherwise this anger will bring you more and more destruction.

After this, in Shantideva's text there is a verse, which is an instruction to inspire us to practise patience, especially when we are disheartened because we are overwhelmed by the vast number of causes of anger. We shall expound on this in the next teaching.

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

© *Tara Institute*

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.