

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

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In cultivating the bodhicitta motivation we should generate a genuine wish to achieve complete enlightenment in order to benefit all beings, and at the same time develop the strong thought of putting these teachings into practice in order to achieve that bodhicitta goal of full enlightenment.

It is said that just remembering or thinking of this state of buddhahood or complete enlightenment purifies enormous negativities accumulated over thousands of aeons, and that it also leaves a seed in our mind to actually achieve buddhahood.

How To Avoid Being Discouraged About The Practice Of Patience

Last week we discussed how important it is to overcome anger before it arises, or at the time it arises, or when it has already arisen, in terms of the disadvantages to both others and ourselves.

Whenever we confront any adverse or unpleasant situation we lack enough courage or spirit to apply patience because we think, “How can I practise patience when there are so many causes that stimulate anger, and so many objects of anger to confront.” Then we feel that we are not capable of continuously practising patience. To overcome this narrow way of thinking Shantideva said,

We cannot find enough leather
To cover the whole ground
So it is better to put the leather patch on the sole of
our shoes
Then it is like covering the entire ground.

What we understand from this analogy is if the whole ground is covered with prickles and we have to walk on it, we cannot find enough leather to cover up all of the ground. If, however, we cover only our feet then we are fully protected, and this is the same as covering the ground. Similarly, if in order to overcome the causes of dissatisfaction and anger, we always try to defeat outer enemies then we shall never be successful. Rather what we should do is to extinguish the anger in our own continuum. By doing this we [effectively] remove all our enemies.

Persevering with the practise of patience depends upon having knowledge of why we should practise it, and also of what happens if we do not practise it. We have to relate these teachings to our daily life, so that there is a real benefit from them. We need to fully understand that the teachings are meant to be practised, and that we cannot afford to allow anger and frustration to dominate

our mind whenever we face some adverse situation¹. Rather we must break out habit of passively accepting the presence of anger, and we can do this by actively practising patience. [It is just the same as not leaving our hand on something which is burning it; we would be regarded as stupid if we left our hand there, saying there was nothing we can do about it. Anger is like the flame, and we have the same obligation to keep away from it as we do in not allowing ourselves to be burnt.]

It is also important to understand that even if we find this practice difficult, or we cannot practise it in all situations, we can at least make a continuous effort to try to practise patience whenever we confront adverse situations - then over a period of time we can make gradual progress. Apart from the benefits of this practice for future lives, the practice of patience can change our life and our relationships with other people in this present life.

The Relationship Between Patience And Love And Compassion

The practice of patience is a very effective one, and to practise it we must look at situations in a different way - from the perspective of the needs of the other person. From this point of view, the practice of patience is a means of cultivating true compassion and love for all those people with whom we have some form of close relationship, such as partners or relatives. Without the practice of patience we cannot truly share our love and compassion with others. Therefore as said earlier, we have to think of this teaching in terms of our practice, and in terms of how we can cultivate a more positive mental attitude to others.

We all have some form of compassion and love for people who are close to us, but is it genuine love and compassion? If we examine it closely we find that we have love for a person because of a selfish interest, or a selfish reason or a selfish thought. So what we feel is not true and genuine love and compassion. As we have studied, with genuine compassion our mind has a true understanding of the likes and dislikes of the other person. The indication of our compassion is a strong sense of responsibility to remove any unhappiness they feel. Since this is the true meaning of genuine compassion, we can see how this practice of patience is so [strongly] linked to the practice of compassion. Without the practice of patience such compassion cannot

¹ Editor: The meaning of the transcript for this paragraph was clarified with the translator, and this is the result.

be sustained; without the practice of patience we do not consider their situation, so we cannot tolerate even minor ways in which we receive harm from them, and then we become angry with them.

The Benefits of Practising Patience And Overcoming Anger

In regard to the benefits of practising patience and overcoming anger Shantideva said in *A Guide to The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*,

With a very diligent mind if you eradicate anger then you find happiness in this life and in the other life.

As Lama Tsong Khapa said,

With the practice of patience inner happiness will never degenerate. The result of this is happiness in this life and all lives; you can prevent bad future rebirth, and attain higher rebirth and the state of liberation.

The practice of patience is the source of all mental peace and happiness. It is important for us to realise that although learning about the practice of patience will implant a seed in the mind, without practising patience now you will not see the direct result of your practice in this lifetime. If we do not practise patience, our mind will be influenced by the anger we generate, and for as long as that anger remains in our mind we shall lack peace and happiness. If anger remains in our mind for an hour we must put up with the lack of mental peace for an hour; if it lasts for a whole day, there will be no peace for the whole day. If we do not gain much from our practice despite our study and training, it is because we are not practising enough.

We should not think that Dharma focuses only on the benefits in future lives, and that it has no place in this life. The reason why the teachings emphasise the benefits in future lives is because the benefits of Dharma in this life are so apparent, and need no explanation. We have to understand that if we put it into practice there is no doubt about the benefits of Dharma in this life.

Why We Should Not Direct Anger At The Cause Of Harm

The next topic is the reason why we should not direct anger at the cause of any harm to us, whether it is a person or an object. This is explained in the commentary text by means of the example of when someone hits us on the head with a stick, causing us injury and pain. Why do we direct our anger to the person who hits us? Here the text asks, why if it is the direct cause of pain, do we not feel anger towards the stick? The reason is that we know the stick does not harm us of its own volition, but that it is the person who wields the stick who is motivated to hurt you. They do not act like this by themselves, rather they do so [under the direction] of the delusions in their mind. So just as we do not direct our anger to the stick, similarly we cannot [reasonably] direct our anger at the person. [Rather we should direct our anger to the real enemy – the delusions in their mind].

We should try to realise that when any person acts aggressively or harmfully, it is because they lack self-control. Try to imagine yourself in that same situation, when you are under the strong influence of mental

delusion, and you are very unstable with no inner peace and happiness. Here we must think of the true situation of the other person, which is that they are controlled by their mental delusions to the point that they are deprived of peace and happiness and self-control. We can understand this from our own experience of being under the control of mental delusions.

This way of understanding patience paves the way to developing true sympathy, love and understanding for others, because it relates their situation [to our own experience].

Patience And Karma

We should also try to think of practising patience by understanding our own involvement in the cause of the situation. The reason we usually receive harm from another is because probably we have harmed them, or done some wrong to them. We should realise that the root cause of receiving harm from others is the cause and effect of our own karma. We receive harm from others because in the past we have harmed them, and the harm which you now receive is an indication of the ripening of the result of our own harmful actions in the past. If we acknowledge the consequences of our own past harmful actions it is the same as when we cut our hand, and yet we do not become angry at our hand. So understanding that the cause of our harm is our own past harmful actions gives us more encouragement to practise patience.

We have just related the practice of patience to our knowledge of the law of karma, and this is [another] example of how we can integrate one teaching with another.

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.
