

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་བཅུངས།



27 July 1999

Try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation generating the thought, “ I shall attain the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings, and put these teachings into practice to achieve that goal.”

Patience and Karma (cont)

We have been discussing the patience of being indifferent to any harm inflicted by others. One technique to help us to put this into practice is to understand the law of karma.

It is said in the text that the Buddha understands deluded beings, and said never to show any hatred towards them. This refers to any living being whose mental continuum is overpowered by mental delusion, as a result of which they are driven to commit negative actions, with the consequence that their the inner continuum becomes very unruly and negative. Therefore these beings are not suitable objects of hatred. This is saying that understanding the destructive potential of delusions to those who are possessed by them prevents any feelings of hatred.

To further clarify this there are the two examples of the patient and the child who become insane. If a doctor tries to give him medicine, the patient might try to harm the doctor, and the child may also try to harm its father. In such a situation the doctor would not become angry but would continue their effort to help the patient, trying to get to the cause of the problem. Likewise the father would not hold any resentment or hatred towards the child, but would feel very sympathetic and try to do whatever is necessary to help his child.

We should adopt the same attitude of making an effort to think how we can help those who cause us harm, and try to overcome their mental delusions. When other beings cause us harm we should try to adopt the same attitude, and respond as the doctor does to the patient.

When we receive harm from others there is always the moment where we could lose our emotional control. If, in that circumstance we generate anger or hatred and so lose our mental peace and happiness, or even worse if we hold a grudge or resentment, then we know how very painful that experience is. So we have to try to think what we can do to maintain our own inner peace and happiness when we face such circumstances.

It is said in the teachings that in situations where others cause us harm, the mental attitude which will best help us to sustain our inner peace and happiness is the mind which desires to help them. It is important to develop our understanding of this through practice and experience, rather than just learning about it.

We learn how mental delusion can drive people completely insane, making them undertake negative destructive actions, which in a normal situation they could not even imagine. It is important to personalise this teaching by thinking of the times when we have experienced these delusions of anger, and then think of the effect of those delusions on our mental attitude and judgement, and of the kind of actions they made us do. The power of mental delusions is such that one has no control, and the resulting actions can be very harmful not only to others, but also to oneself. In the same way we also now understand how others experience such mental delusion. Just as we have experienced, their mind is overpowered and completely controlled by mental delusion. We see how they are helpless and have no other choice but to commit those actions - even if those actions are very harmful to you.

By thinking in this way it is possible that we can cultivate love and compassion instead of hatred. This understanding helps us to overcome and prevent anger and hatred from arising in response to their harmful actions towards us. If we apply the practice of patience, there is the benefit of sustaining one’s own inner peace and happiness, as well as transforming a situation, which is normally unpleasant into a cause to generate and develop love and compassion. Thinking like this means that you achieve the result of controlling and subduing your mind. So this situation has given you an opportunity to practise Dharma. By practising patience you have diminished delusion, and a true Dharma practice is one which diminishes delusion or increases love and compassion.

Basically the reason why we study and practise the spiritual Dharma is to create the right causes to bring about mental peace and happiness and to remove the cause of the suffering and pain we experience in our mind. There is no need to mention how important it is to have some sense of peace and happiness within our mind. Without it any action we undertake, whether it be meditation or some other mundane activity, will be very difficult. It will be difficult to find enjoyment even in eating and drinking.

Achieving mental happiness is very important for any being to live a happy life. Finding the right means of reducing the mental suffering, unhappiness and problems we undergo in life is in fact a very important issue. In our materially very well developed country, we see how that mental suffering which people go through in this life has not been reduced by material progress.

The spiritual teaching is about understanding the true

cause of suffering, confusion and problems, especially the suffering within our mind. In many ways we can learn just by observing other people. There are so many people with these problems in their mind. If you examine the cause of their problems, then you can see the main cause always relates to some form of mental delusion.

Here we are talking about the delusion of anger. We can see how other people suffer and go through a lot of confusion and hardships because they hold anger and hatred in their mind. They are unhappy and suffer just because they are not able to overcome this anger, even though they may possess all other suitable conditions. Someone who holds anger and hatred for a long period can be a very restless person; for them it is very strange to have even a moment of rest. So it is important to use real-life situations, and look at the people you know to see the shortcomings of the anger and hatred in their life.

We have to apply what we have learned from other people to our own life. We have observed the pain and suffering being experienced by others, and we could also end up in the same situation. You may have difficulty in overcoming a mental delusion such as anger. If you take no action to control and reduce it, then it is possible that in future due to some condition, anger or hatred may arise within your mind. You might hold it there for a long time, and then find your life is miserable, because it is extremely difficult for you to get rid of that anger.

It is important to have some sense of responsibility with respect to how to reduce the causes of mental confusion and unhappiness for oneself. When we talk about mental unhappiness or suffering, we have to understand that if we do not do something about it ourselves then there is little chance of getting any help from outside to solve our mental problems. Forget about help from strangers, there is hardly any hope of getting it from those close to us.

So we must always maintain our motivation to apply the practice of patience and not allow anger to completely take over our mind. Even if we cannot apply patience in every given situation we can at least not be forgetful of both the benefits of practising patience and the shortcomings of anger. With a little bit of effort remembering this helps to control anger and stop it igniting. By being consistent and putting a little bit of effort into our practice of patience, we can at least not become a victim of anger for the rest of our life. For a long period of time, for just an hour or perhaps a day we do not have to suffer from anger as we see other people do. So apply the practice to diminish mental delusion which you know is the source of this suffering.

It is important that we think about both the benefits of practising patience and the shortcomings of anger now, so that when we face anger in some situation, we can apply the practice of patience. If we are not used to it, or lack the knowledge then it is not easy to think about applying it [at that moment when anger arises].

When we receive any harm from others, such as abusive words or even physical harm, then one way of thinking is that this amount of harm we receive is very small compared to the amount of harm received as a result of one's karmic actions of harmfulness towards other

beings. We have to think, as Shantideva said in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*,

If you cannot even tolerate this suffering,
How can you tolerate the suffering or pain
Which would ripen on you
As a result of your harmful actions towards other
beings.

In most situations we receive verbal harm rather than physical injury, but whatever the cause of harm we feel hurt. Since we do not want this we lose our temper and normally we begin to feel hatred towards the person who caused us that harm. We feel that our anger is natural, and that the best response is to return that harm. Somehow that seems to be the only way to view the situation.

The result of our retaliatory harmful act however, is to take rebirth in the lower realms, with the result that we bring the suffering of the lower realms upon ourselves. When we think like that we see that it is worthwhile to tolerate the amount of harm we receive from others, because we see that the immediate suffering is very small, compared to the alternative future suffering result. For example, looking at the animal realm we can not imagine ourselves experiencing a large amount of suffering of that lower realm. So tolerating a smaller harm has greater personal benefit in the long term. This way of thinking helps us to prevent anger and to remember to practise patience. If one is able to use the harm received from others in any given adverse situation as an opportunity to practise patience, then that adverse situation becomes a very favourable situation for ourselves.

Of course this whole teaching should not be a cause of misunderstanding of Buddhist teaching as something where you always have to take the loss upon yourself, and allow others to exploit, manipulate or torture you. It is not like that at all. When we understand the teaching very precisely and completely, then the practice you do, and the reason why you do it with great enthusiasm and delight, is because you see great profit. You have to work hard and make some sacrifice in the present but in the long term you see great benefit for yourself. So as spiritual practitioners you are not just doing the practice for others, but also for yourself, as there is no better way of gaining personal benefit. Geshe Doga has often mentioned in the past that those who educate themselves see the benefit in the long term, so that when they are young they apply themselves to their study, sacrificing their leisure time for that study. Others do not see the long-term benefit but see only the immediate time frame as being more important, and they do not work for long term goals. Then in the future they regret not having any qualifications and so forth.

Next week the compulsory question for the discussion night is based on the verse from the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*,

When others out of jealousy
Treat me badly with abuse, insults and the like,
I shall accept their hard words
And offer the victory to others.
