

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As is always the case, we should begin with the bodhicitta motivation which is the genuine thought that “I shall achieve the state of buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings, and it is for this reason that I am listening to this lam rim teaching, and that I also resolve to put it into practice.”

422.331.132 The Patience Of Voluntarily Accepting Suffering

We are up to the second type of patience which is the patience of voluntarily accepting suffering. This means accepting any harm or any problems that confront us.

This practice of patience is summarised in the text in this way:

You practise patience if, whilst remaining unattached to happiness, you regard suffering as being like an ornament to adorn your body, and a medicine to heal yourself.¹

This clearly shows how a bodhisattva practises.

Benefits of Patience

We need to know both the reason why it is appropriate to accept suffering as well as the benefits of this practice. Firstly, what are the benefits? As spiritual practitioner, the benefit for us is that any suffering that we experience does not hinder our spiritual practice. Whether the suffering is physical or mental, through the practice of patience we shall be able to cope, and endure and accept that suffering, and it does not become a cause to discourage us from our practice.

The practice of patience helps us to be successful whatever our goal. Even if the goal is a very mundane success, it depends upon us being able to cope and handle any difficulty or obstacle that arises. In his text Lama Tsong Khapa quotes these lines from Shantideva’s text, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*:

The causes of happiness are very scarce
Whereas the conditions for suffering are many.

Lama Tsong Khapa also quotes these lines from Shantideva’s text, *The Synthesis of Instructions or Advice*, “If we are not able to take the suffering that we confront as a path, then these conditions can serve as a cause to increase hatred, and also be a cause to discourage one’s meditation practice. So it prevents one from engaging in

virtuous practice.” If we contemplate these quotations we can clearly see how, as Shantideva said, there are very few conditions for happiness. If you think about that, then you can understand the conditions for happiness are so scarce because even those conditions which we normally consider as conditions for happiness, can also become conditions for suffering and misery. When we think about our situation and the conditions in which we live, then we can see how many causes and conditions for suffering and unhappiness there are.

If we understand this very clearly then we can see that the most effective way of bringing happiness and overcoming suffering is to transform our own mind. If we know the technique of mind transformation, then though there are many causes of suffering they will not affect us. The practice of patience is one such method of mind-training, and through it we can lessen or even prevent the causes of suffering, despite their [vast] number.

Why Suffering Is Inevitable And Appropriate To Accept

Lama Tsong Khapa also said that while some of our suffering is caused by others, some is also caused by our previous-life karma. When there are immediate conditions present in addition to one’s previous karma, the combination of these two causes us to experience some suffering, or form of problems from which there is no escape, at least in the immediate time frame. Some suffering will also be experienced depending on whether or not we practise Dharma, and this will be explained later.

As there is no way out it is essential to apply the patience of accepting this suffering situation. Why? Because if, for instance, the suffering is to do with physical illness or pain, and you do not accept it, then on top of your physical suffering you will mentally suffer because of your physical suffering. Therefore when suffering is not accepted there is additional suffering, because of the lack of acceptance.

Conversely, if you have learned to accept suffering, then by the virtue of this practice of acceptance there is no additional mental suffering on top of your physical suffering.

It is important to try, as much as possible, to train the mind in being able to accept any suffering and any undesirable or unwanted things that happen in our life. There may not be any specific problem to worry about

¹ *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, page 639 reads, “Not only should you be unattached to happiness, but you should regard suffering as a form of adornment and use it as a medicine”

right now, but it is quite possible, indeed inevitable, that some day undesirable or unwanted things will happen to us.

We might think that we have received a wealth of spiritual teachings, and feel that we know how to apply the practices to various situations. However if we have not trained ourselves well in the practice of patience, then when we actually confront these sudden, unexpected, unwanted situations, then we can easily completely lose all hope and allow ourselves to be completely shocked and disturbed by that situation.

By putting the teaching on patience into practice, and trying to broaden our knowledge and our view, then somehow that situation becomes acceptable, rather than horrible or very shocking, and we understand that it is something that was probably inevitable anyway, and is part of life. If we do that, then even if the situation is such that we have to physically experience a lot of suffering and pain, or some material loss, we can mentally cope with it, and not be continually worrying and over-concerned about it.

The cause of what we call mental suffering and problems is worrying too much, and it is this continual over-concern which brings us our mental pain and misery. If we think more realistically then we do not waste our energy with worry. Most importantly, try to understand how that worry or mental suffering is [merely] adding further causes of suffering on top of the existing suffering, it is [certainly] not solving or reducing the problem. Try to understand that worry is not going to bring mental happiness, nor will it decrease the problems in one's life. If worrying about the problems which existed in our life was the solution, then we should have solved all our problems by now!

It is especially important to realise that now is the moment which provides the ideal opportunity to learn about, and to familiarise ourselves with this practice of patience. Unless we have already familiarised ourselves with this practice, it is extremely difficult to do anything when undesirable things actually happen to us.

To inspire us to practise this patience of accepting suffering it is good to remind ourselves of what Shantideva said in his text, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

If there is something that can be changed then why should we worry about it, for it can be changed,
If something cannot be changed then why should one worry because it cannot be changed?

We have to understand that it is in fact mainly the way we view a situation that determines what we experience. If our view is very negative, then with that view even a very minor unfavourable or undesirable situation can become a very major cause for unhappiness. It is important to understand how the practice of Dharma is so relevant to our daily life, and to understand how, just by applying this practice of voluntarily accepting suffering, we can bring a great deal of happiness in our life, and solve or [even] eliminate a great deal of the suffering in our life. If we understand the benefit of the Dharma well then we can see that it is indeed priceless,

and that it can be the best refuge and protector in our life.

Transforming Suffering

The practice of patience should be applied to the various circumstances in which we experience physical suffering, or difficulty in perceiving spiritual practice, or in situations where we receive harm from our enemies, or it is said, even in dreams. Whenever we experience anything undesirable or receive any harm, we should try to apply the practice of patience in such a way that integrates with Thought Transformation and recognise that it is all an outcome of one's own previous karma.

Try to see that it is worth accepting this result now, and see it as a fortunate result in the sense that the result of one's karma can be even worse. Through applying Thought Transformation one can generate the feeling of joy and delight instead of seeing this as a bad event and hating either it or the other person. Rather try to see it as the best thing that has happened in your life, and celebrate it as if you had received the death sentence, but you have been reprieved and instead sentenced to have your hand amputated. Try to understand that this situation is in lieu of falling into lower rebirth, and that it is positive in the sense that it is a good opportunity to learn about suffering, not only your own, but that of other beings. So through this you cultivate compassion towards other beings. Through applying the Thought Transformation teachings, and the practice of patience, we can see how a bad event in our life can be transformed into a positive one.

Here it is also suitable to contemplate the benefits of suffering.

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

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