

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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Generate the bodhicitta motivation by thinking “I shall achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings, and to achieve that state of buddhahood I shall listen to these lam rim teachings, and put them into practice in order to fully calm my mind.”

The Patience Of Voluntarily Accepting Suffering (cont)

We are continuing with the teaching on the patience of voluntarily accepting suffering. To practise this patience we need to contemplate and understand both suffering, and the benefit of contemplating and understanding suffering.

Concerning the contemplation of the benefit of suffering, Shantideva’s text, *A Guide To The Bodhisattva’s Way Of Life* says that by understanding suffering one is inspired to seek the state of liberation. In other words, without recognising suffering it is not possible to have a genuine wish to be released from suffering, and therefore it is not possible to generate renunciation, which is the definite thought of seeking liberation.

Benefits or Qualities of Suffering

1. As stated above, the first benefit or quality of suffering is that it is a cause to generate the thought of seeking liberation.
2. The second quality is that it is a cause to eradicate, or diminish pride. For instance, as soon as suffering is inflicted upon a person whose mind is inflated with a great pride, that pride is diminished.
3. The next benefit of suffering is that suffering can be a cause for us to refrain from negative actions. Generally speaking, all beings have the natural instinct of wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. However they lack the knowledge as to what brings happiness and what brings suffering, and so their actions are not always the right actions. As a result, even if they do not wish for suffering that is what they experience, while the happiness that they desire eludes them. Our thought of not wanting suffering is much stronger when we are actually experiencing suffering, or when we know what it is like to experience it.

Under such circumstances we think more about what causes suffering, and if we have a knowledge of Dharma, then we realise that suffering is the result of our own negative actions, and so we develop a sense of refraining from negative actions. This is because we not only hate suffering, but also its causes. Therefore, it is said that understanding or recognising suffering leads one to refrain from creating the causes

of suffering.

4. Another benefit or quality of suffering is that it encourages us to follow virtuous practice. Why? Because it is when we are afflicted with suffering that our desire for happiness is even stronger and more obvious. Therefore the circumstance of suffering can compel us to find about the causes of happiness, because we know that the happiness that we so strongly desire (and of which we are now deprived) is dependent upon its causes. If we view the circumstances of suffering in this different way, then we can see how suffering can be viewed as beneficial, rather than our usual view of it as harmful to us. From the positive perspective, the experience and understanding of suffering can inspire us to engage in virtuous practices.
5. The fifth quality of suffering is that it can be a cause to generate compassion for those who, like ourselves, are undergoing suffering as they wander about in cyclic existence. Because of personal experience and an understanding of suffering, we have a better understanding of the suffering of other beings, and so have more feeling of compassion and sympathy for them.

Thinking about these *qualities of suffering* enables us to practise this patience of accepting suffering. This has the benefit of overcoming or diminishing the amount of suffering we experience, and as we discussed in the last teaching, it can also help us to at least ensure that we do not add to our existing suffering. For instance, without this patience of accepting suffering, then if we are inflicted with some physical pain or problems, we might mentally create more suffering to add to what we already endure.

The Importance of Contentment

This practice of accepting suffering is also very relevant and indeed essential for ordained practitioners to be able sustain their life of moral purity. For ordained people it is important to try to accept hardship in terms of shelter, food, clothing and so forth, with the understanding that accepting this hardship is very worthwhile, because it enables them to increase their practice of virtue and pure morality in the life that they have chosen. It is said that ordained individuals should learn to live a very contented life, bound by the four natures of Arya beings - contentment with very simple shelter, clothing and food, and taking delight in the practice of meditation and abandoning negativities. Applying this practice of patience also helps to develop this sense of contentment.

The text refers to practising by having less desire and more contentment. To do this it is important, first of all, to know how this practice can help to sustain more mental peace and happiness. In terms of pursuing spiritual practice, without some sense of contentment, we never stop looking for more and better things. Without contentment our life, at least from the spiritual point of view, can be easily rendered meaningless, because then we shall always be thinking about and constantly trying to increase our wealth, without achieving any satisfaction in our life. There is benefit if we practise having less desire, achieving some contentment, and trying to understand how this practice is of benefit.

What does this practice of less desire and more contentment mean? As we have learnt in the past, having contentment and less desire does not necessarily mean that we should materially possess less, or that we have to lead a very poor life. What it does mean is to be happy with whatever we possess.

With reference to living our life skilfully there is a saying that we have to know how to eat and drink, which means that we have to be adaptable to our living conditions. If we are wealthy then in terms of budgeting we can afford to spend more. If there are times when we do not have much wealth, then we have to be able to adapt to those reduced living conditions.

There are some people who have no control of their spending regardless of how much (or how little) they are earning, or how much money they have. When they have a reduced income, they still tend to lead the same life as when they were wealthy; they find it very hard to break their old spending habits. So in a sense they are not able to adjust to living in a different way from that which they led in the past. What we are saying here is that when we talk of contentment we have to have this skill of knowing how we should live when we are wealthy, and also of knowing how to live when we do not possess much wealth.

We are also talking about mind training, and about how the way we feel about our possessions is in fact dependent on our mind. Our mind can be trained and changed to different ways of thinking, and there are certain ways of thinking and certain views which we must change, otherwise we shall suffer as a result of them. From his own experience Geshe-la says that years ago he always used to feel more comfortable just wearing very simple robes. In fact, he used to feel embarrassed when he had to wear new robes. When you think about it, it was a way of thinking, a particular view that meant he used to feel happier and more relaxed in older clothes when he was out with the other people, even if they were all dressed in new clothes. Unfortunately, Geshe-la says, he has a bit of difficulty practising that contentment here because it often happens that if he goes out in a pair of old shoes, someone brings him a new pair!

We should also understand how it is the same view that makes us feel very bad about ourselves if, when we go out to some function, our clothes are not really up to the standard of all other people, or not as good in some way. Our feelings are due to our mind, which we can change and overcome by applying mind training.

Basically it is important for each person to know the type

of life they want to live. You always have to ask yourself what you value in life. Is it material possessions, or some inner wealth in terms of greater peace, satisfaction and happiness? If you had a choice between being externally affluent and materially well off but inwardly very miserable, and full of problems, or being outwardly poor, but inwardly very happy, with peace and stability, which of these would you choose? When we think seriously and deeply about the kind of life we want to live, we realise that we want to live a life of satisfaction and happiness. Therefore we have to realise that one of the most important things is a healthy body, maintaining a very good frame of mind which shows love and compassion towards others and living a life which as much as possible is helpful and kind towards others.

If we become very good with this practice of having less desire and more contentment then we shall find that we have fewer unfulfilled desires and thoughts, or even none; [because we desire less] then not only mentally, but also materially we shall never be short of any desired objects. There are no stories of early masters who practised having less desire and more contentment living a life with unfulfilled desires, or short of any desired objects.

Geshe Doga says there are a lot of people here in Australia and other developed western countries who suffer because of their lack of knowledge of the skill of eating and drinking. Geshe-la has been asked what he means by this. He says isn't it true that there are many people who rely on government benefits for their livelihood? Isn't it true that the government gives them the money say once every four weeks and then they use all that money in the very first week? As soon as they have got the money in hand they go to the hotel or gamble and spend it all, so for the next three weeks they have no money. There are so many people who, because they do not know how to manage their money, have their money managed for them by some other organisation or person. It cannot go directly to them because even though they are mature people, with money they are like children.

What we really mean is that in this developed country no one would face this problem of lacking food or clothing if we all had the skill of eating and drinking and so on. Geshe-la says he knows that even with a dollar or two you can buy very good long lasting clothes. The lack of basic conditions here is caused by the lack of money management.

Of course you have all observed how people can acquire great material wealth and then lose it all. There are many such examples. Geshe-la says, in the past he has met many people who have had great wealth and much property and so on, and then a few years later they have lost everything through bankruptcy. These examples can also be used to show the uncertainty of relying on material possessions.

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Note on authentication

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