

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation thinking “I shall achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings, and it is for this purpose that I am listening to this lam rim teaching, and that I shall also put this teaching into practice.

The Patience Of Voluntarily Accepting Suffering (cont)

We have studied the patience of voluntarily accepting suffering, and how that patience can help us whenever we confront any problem or any suffering situation, so that the problem or suffering situation is no longer a cause to discourage us, making us feel that everything is hopeless. With patience we are still able to continue to make progress along the path.

Types Of Suffering To Be Endured

In addition to what we have already studied, we can also list here the various types of sufferings that should be endured with this patience of accepting suffering.

1. Enduring the suffering or pain which we go through when we are being abused or disparaged by other people. Without the patience of accepting it this harm can be very painful and hurtful form of suffering, which can affect our way of thinking, our self-esteem and so on.
2. Enduring the suffering or hardship that we face in our spiritual practice, specifically in meditation. For instance there is the hardship of sitting in the correct meditation posture with a straight back. We need to have the patience of accepting such hardship so that we do not allow these difficulties to divert us from practising meditation.
3. Enduring the hardship we face in other practices such as making offerings or performing prostrations and so on. Needless to say, if we lack patience we shall neither continue nor succeed with these practices.
4. Enduring suffering because of the lack of adequate food, clothing and also the lack of a good physical appearance. Here we also have to apply patience so that these things are neither a hindrance to our practice nor a cause of problems for us. We have to learn how to be contented with a simple livelihood and way of living.
5. There is also mention of enduring the suffering or hardship one has to face in benefiting and serving other beings.
6. Enduring the difficulties of sustaining our perseverance in practising virtue. For instance, we even have to put up with harm that we receive from others, such as threats to our life.

As Shantideva said, there is nothing which will not become easy if we become familiar with it. So the most effective way

of developing the patience of accepting all forms and degrees of suffering is that we first should try to train ourself in accepting smaller amounts of suffering or hardship or difficulty. This becomes an armour which we gradually strengthen by gradually increasing the degree of suffering. Then we shall gradually be able to endure a greater amount of suffering, and even enduring the greater amount becomes very easy. As Shantideva said, how much we can cope with all depends upon our degree of familiarisation with it.

422.331.133 The Patience Of Definitely Thinking About Dharma

The third type of patience is the patience of definitely thinking about Dharma. To understand this patience we first need to recognise the Dharma about which we should be thinking.

Aspects of Dharma

1. Dharma as an object of pure faith, which refers to the qualities of three objects of refuge or the Three Jewels.
2. Dharma as an object to be realised or actualised, which refers to the two types of selflessness or suchnesses.
3. Dharma as an object of longing, which refers to the powerful empowering qualities of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, which are the six perfections and the attainment of the miraculous powers and so on.
4. Dharma as an object to be accepted and to be rejected, which refers to the teachings on positive and negative karma, and the respective results of each.
5. Dharma as an object of meditation which refers to the ultimate spiritual goal of complete enlightenment, as well as the method, which is the skilful means and wisdom to reach that complete enlightenment. In other words we can talk of the path of both the result and the method which leads to that complete enlightenment in terms of the three-fold training.
6. Having contemplated all of the above, the patience of definitely thinking of the Dharma also includes trying to gain a definite understanding and a firm conviction in the Dharma such that there is no element of doubt in your mind, and you do not see any contradictions in your understanding of the Dharma. This practice of patience means trying to maintain and sustain the conviction which you have gained in the Dharma.
7. Dharma as an object to study and to contemplate, which refers to all the teachings of the Buddha. You practise this patience by engaging in the study and practice of the teaching of the Buddha.
8. It is said that even trying to remember the words in the teachings on the Dharma is also an example of this

patience of definitely thinking of Dharma.

Through learning the meaning of the Dharma and so trying to gain the firm conviction in the teachings, not only do you gain knowledge, but you also make an effort to try to maintain and safeguard your knowledge at all times.

When To Apply The Three Types Of Patience

In terms of practising the three types of patience, it is said that practising the first type of patience, the patience of being indifferent to harm which you receive from others, is the type of patience which is appropriate to specific circumstances. Whereas practising the other two types of patience is not dependent upon any such specific circumstance.

For instance, in order to listen and concentrate single-pointedly, you need to practise these two types of patience when you are receiving teachings from the lamas which last for many hours.

This completes the Perfection of Patience.

422.221.14 The Perfection Of Joyous Effort

Next is the Fourth Perfection of Joyous Effort. It is said that joyful effort is taking joy and delight in virtuous actions. The sign that there is joyful effort in our actions is when we engage in virtuous practice taking delight in that practice.

The main benefit of cultivating joyful effort is achieving success in our life and in our spiritual practice. It is very obvious that all our effort and enthusiasm, and even our patience and tolerance comes from having a genuine interest and delight in whatever tasks we are undertaking.

Of course it is very important to know that it is not just beginning a task that is important, but it is the completion of the task which is the most important part of the action. We have all begun a spiritual practice and it is very important that we gain some benefit from our practice and that we see the end result. Completing our practice is dependent upon sustaining our interest, and it is joyful effort which helps to provide that sustenance. It is of no benefit to us if we discontinue our spiritual practice in the middle of our life, and do not continue with it to the end of our life.

In order to maintain this genuine interest and joyful effort in the spiritual practice we should, as much as possible, try to put a high value on our practice both now and in the future. By value we mean benefiting oneself, benefiting other people and benefiting society.

Try to see that before we talk of the benefit of spiritual practice, we have to be very clear about what that spiritual practice means to us. As we have heard over and over again, spiritual practice is essentially cultivating a positive state of mind such as a good heart. Try to see that when we talk of the importance of maintaining our spiritual practice over an entire lifetime, and that when we talk of Dharma as being beneficial to oneself and to others, both now and in the future, then this means cultivating a good frame of mind within ourselves.

What cultivating joyful effort means is taking great delight in personally cultivating and sustaining this very positive state of mind at all times, as well as diminishing our negative aspects. The more we develop an understanding of how much we gain from practising this Dharma of cultivating positive states of mind, then naturally the more joyful effort we shall make with the Dharma; greater joyful effort then guarantees the continuity of our practice; and with continuity in our practice there will be a completion of

our practice.

We need to cultivate joyful effort in addition to knowing about the benefits of practising Dharma, which as we said is knowing the benefits for one personally, for one's life and in terms of benefiting others. We need to practise Dharma because cultivating a positive frame of mind is indispensable to finding happiness even in a mundane sense. Without that positive frame of mind we cannot even find worldly happiness, let alone spiritual progress.

Dharma practice must be integrated into our daily life. It is wrong to think that we can practise outside of our normal life style, or apart from where we live, or at special times. We must apply the practice which gives us the greatest benefit, peace and happiness in the world in which we live, and which also brings about harmony in our relationship with those with whom we share our life. Therefore, the best practice is to cultivate positive states of mind within us like the good heart.

In addition it is also important to make sure that you are very relaxed about your efforts, and that you are not over-zealous. If we begin a task over-zealously it is very likely that we shall soon become exhausted, which can affect our effort. We should not try to push ourselves onto greater efforts, nor should we become too lazy; we should make the right amount of effort consistently, depending upon our own individual capabilities and resources.

How do we know if we are making any progress in Dharma? Has it resulted in any benefits to our life or not? [These are normal questions], and if we do not see any gain, then we begin to think that it is of no use, and that there is no point in practising Dharma. Here we have to consider that Dharma refers to the qualities to be cultivated within our mind, and that the result of Dharma is positive feelings and a positive way of viewing things. The question of whether or not we are gaining any benefit of Dharma refers to whether we have developed more positive feelings and qualities inwardly.

Let us say you have been practising and following the Dharma for the last five years, and you now want to assess your practice. The way to do that is to compare your feelings and mental attitude over the past five years, with the previous five years when you didn't follow Dharma. It is very obvious that whether or not we gain benefit from, or make any progress in Dharma, depends mainly upon how effectively we practise. Practising Dharma so that it has an impact means always completely relating our practice to our mind.

We are so used to judging things externally, and to looking for tangible benefits that we can see or feel. Dharma is different because we have to focus within us and not judge by external factors. The aim of Dharma is not to exhibit supernatural powers or miracles, and we should not expect to see a physical result from our spiritual Dharma practice.

If, say, you have taken the Kalachakra initiation, you may wonder about the benefit you have gained. That benefit is not necessarily something that can be recognised by others just by looking at you. Yet, Geshe-la says, many people who have taken the initiation say that they have experienced very positive feelings as a result. So you have to talk about the benefit of Dharma in terms of some positive feeling that you experience within your mind. Why we emphasise this is because it tells us that we have to practise within our mind, because our practice relates to our mind.