

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

༄༅ ལམ་རིམ་རྣམ་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅངས།



7 September 1999

Set the bodhicitta motivation by generating the thought “I shall attain the state of buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings, and in order to achieve that state of buddhahood I shall listen to the teachings and put them into practice”. We have to make sure there is no selfish interest in our motivation for generating this bodhicitta mind.

## The Perfection Of Joyful Effort (cont)

We are currently discussing the perfection of joyful effort, which is defined as the state of mind which takes delight in undertaking virtuous actions. It is said that in order to generate such joyful effort we need to gain an understanding its benefits, as well as the disadvantages of not generating this joyful effort.

## Benefits Of Joyful Effort

1. In his text, *An Ornament to the Sutras*, Maitreya Buddha says “Joyful effort is the supreme of all the collections of virtues, because by depending upon it you will achieve your spiritual attainments.” So a benefit of joyful effort is achieving a set goal.
2. Obviously very mundane goals also depend upon making an effort: without effort we cannot even complete ordinary tasks. Therefore to complete our spiritual journey, and to achieve all the spiritual realisations and attainments joyful effort is a most important cause.
3. Furthermore, the benefit of making a joyful effort includes achieving spiritual feats or attainments like siddhis, and also attaining the state of happiness within cyclic existence, and also beyond this cyclic existence, which is nirvana.
4. By depending upon joyful effort we can free ourself from extreme views such as the view of transitory collections.
5. By depending on joyful effort we can also achieve the supreme state of enlightenment, or buddhahood. Therefore it is said that joyful effort is the supreme virtue.
6. In the text *Supplement to the Middle Way*, Chandrakirti says that all the excellent qualities follow from joyful effort. This means that you have to make an effort if you want to possess any excellent, admirable qualities. On the other hand without making an effort we shall not achieve any [special] quality at all, because without an effort at the beginning we shall not even bother to perceive such [special] qualities. If we begin but do not maintain our effort in the middle, or if we are not consistent with our effort,

then we shall not see the end result, or goal of our actions.

The more we understand the benefit and importance of generating joyful effort in our spiritual practice, the more we shall be motivated to actually do something with respect to our spiritual practice.

As we discussed in earlier teachings one of the things we have to remember in terms of developing this joyful effort, is that we cannot expect to generate a great deal of joyful effort instantly. Rather it is something we have to develop gradually, bit by bit. At first we have to try to make the amount of effort that suits our own mental capabilities and resources, trying to make sure that we are consistent with that effort so that we become used to that effort. Then once we are used the amount of effort with which we started, we can slowly add to it and build up that effort over time.

It is important not to force ourself to do too much in spiritual practice because achieving spiritual goals takes time. In spiritual practice the goal is to develop particular qualities within our mind, and such mental development does not happen instantly, quickly or rapidly. Rather, it is something which can only happen through making gradual progress. Even the development of material technology takes time. For instance it took generations for the aeroplane to be invented, as men progressed through all the stages necessary [to create the aeroplanes we know today].

Whether or not we are going to achieve our goal and make any progress in our spiritual practice, depends upon whether or not we are making a genuine effort in our practice. If we compare our practice now with our practice in previous years, we can judge whether we are making more or less effort this year. Making more effort means that we are in fact making more progress. If we are not making the same effort as in the past, then that is an indication that we are not going anywhere with our spiritual practice.

Whether it is spiritual or worldly activities, success largely depends upon making an effort, which in turn depends upon our motivation and determination. In other words the main cause of success is our own motivation and the power of our mental determination. It is not as if the [mere] act of cherishing or desiring is enough to accomplish what we desire. For success, a wish to achieve has to be accompanied by a very strong intention to achieve. When we have joyful effort then naturally there is very forceful determination in our mind, and there is no room for any laziness to hinder our

activities.

In a way joyful effort is the antidote to laziness. If as a student we fall into laziness in our study, then we cannot finish our course [and so we fail to achieve our goal]. We can talk of different forms of laziness. In the context of lazy students, it is said that it is laziness if you desire to do any other activity rather than your studies, because this serves as a hindrance to study.

So it is very obvious that to anything of benefit to us in this life or future lives, we have to physically and mentally depend upon the efforts of our three doors of body, speech and mind. However, we have to understand that making an effort in our mind is the most important element because our aspiration has to come from the mind. Only then can we make some physical effort.

As we said earlier we need to understand the importance of both making an effort, and the way we make that effort. We are making an effort to develop qualities within our mind. This means that we have to understand our mind well by observing it, and by trying to recognise all the faults that we need to remove. In fact the faults that we see within our mind are our own faults too. Of course when we make an effort with our practice, our primary focus is on our mind, and on trying to understand what we can do within our mind in order to achieve all that we wish, and to overcome all that we do not want.

Of course we also need to examine our mind when we want to undertake some physical or verbal action. In other words, we cannot afford to just follow the instincts in our mind. If we can, we have to examine the intentions of our mind, to see whether it is something driving us to do positive, virtuous actions, or whether it is driving us to do non-virtuous, negative actions. If we do not examine our mind before putting our intention into practice, then we may be driven to perform some negative action. Of course if we accumulate negative actions, they leave some negative seeds in our mind which then serve as a cause of some future problems and suffering.

We cannot just act out of a strong desire, or even a sense of delight in our mind, because we can also take a delight in negative actions. Joyful effort is a state of mind which takes delight in **virtuous** actions, not just a state of mind which takes delight in doing things. This means that all delightful thought is not necessarily positive or beneficial. So if we feel some sense of joy, or happiness, or pleasure within ourselves, it is important to check, because we cannot assume that what we are experiencing is something very beneficial or positive. Sometimes we can have that sense of joy or delight when we are pondering about doing all sorts of negative actions.

To add to the benefit of joyful effort and the destruction of laziness we also need to consider what the great Lama Tsong Khapa said "One who is overpowered by laziness has no chance of finding happiness in the immediate or the long run."

#### **422.331.141 The Laziness Of Procrastination**

The opposite of joyful effort is laziness. The first type of laziness is Procrastination. This is the form of laziness which causes one to lose interest in undertaking any practice. It is also a cause to delay practising. In other words, when you have this form of laziness you never actually undertake your practice, always thinking that I shall do it tomorrow, or the next day. Due to the laziness of procrastination you never actually undertake your practice. In order to overcome this type of laziness, the most effective meditations are on death and impermanence, and on the precious human life and its rarity.

When we talk of meditating on death and impermanence it has to have some deep affect on us, rather than being limited to a theoretical understanding about the topic of death and so on. A theoretical understanding is not going to help to remove this particular form of laziness. On the other hand if you have gained a deep experience on the subject of death and impermanence, then you know that you cannot postpone spiritual practice. You know that every moment is valuable, and you understand that the only meaningful thing to do is the Dharma, or spiritual practice. Then there is no room for any laziness to hinder spiritual practice.

Meditating on the rarity of the precious human rebirth is also very effective in impelling one to undertake spiritual practice. We have already covered this topic in the past so we shall not go over it again. However if we think about this precious human body like Shantideva did, we see that in addition to the various qualities which make this human life precious, we give so much to this body throughout our whole life: how much food goes to our body, and how much clothing acquired at such effort goes to the body. As Shantideva says, when we consider how much we sacrifice to this body, then don't we have to take some advantage and meaning out of this body? Somewhere we have to make good use of this body. Then you think 'What is the meaning of this life?', and when you understand the meaning of life, as well as all the other preciousness of this human life and so on, then naturally you can generate a strong motivation to undertake spiritual practice.

According to Geshe-la, next week will be Discussion night. The compulsory question for the next study group test will be on differentiating the three objects of refuge in terms of the stages of the path for the person of great, medium and small scopes.

---

**Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.**

---

© *Tara Institute*

**Note on authentication**

Transcribed from the tape by Kathi Melnic  
Edited by Adair Bunnett and Alan Molloy  
Checked by Sandup Tsering and Alan Molloy