

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུང་སྟེ།



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Cultivate the bodhicitta motivation, thinking “In order to benefit all sentient beings I shall attain the state of Buddhahood, and it is for this purpose that I listen to these Lam Rim teachings, and that I shall put them into practice to fully calm my mind”.

Types Of Laziness (cont)

There are three main obstacles to the generation of joyful effort. We have finished the first, which is the laziness of procrastination.

422.331.142 The Laziness Of Being Attracted To Worldly Activities

བྱ་བ་དྲན་ཞེན་གྱི་ལེ་ལོ།

The second obstacle to joyful effort is the laziness of being attracted to inferior worldly activities.

This form of laziness is caused by our involvement in activities which are ultimately meaningless, and which we engage in because of distractions in our mind, or because they give us some immediate pleasure. We are talking here of meaningless worldly activities such as working to become wealthy, or reading very worldly texts.

We have a strong attachment towards all these worldly activities and never tire of pursuing them. The fact is that they are a hindrance to our spiritual practice. It is due to our pre-occupation with all these meaningless worldly activities that we don't engage in spiritual or Dharma practice. Therefore engaging in all these worldly activities and being attached to them is regarded as a form of laziness, because they directly hinder us from practising Dharma.

Remedy: To overcome this form of laziness we should contemplate the fact that all these worldly and inferior activities to which we are attached, and with which we pre-occupy ourselves, are a cause to take lower rebirth.

It is said that to understand our situation we need to realise that although there are a great many ways of finding happiness, the supreme one is the holy Dharma. Our daily actions are Dharma if they are positive. So if they are not positive this means that we have abandoned Dharma.

If we check our daily actions we may find that they do not accord with Dharma, and that they are the result of some form of mental distraction. If we check the result of these actions we see that they are leading us to lower rebirth, and this makes us realise there is no benefit in pursuing them. However, even if our actions look very worldly or mundane, we can make them a bit more positive, virtuous and wholesome by acting out of the right motivation.

In *The Great Exposition of the Stages Of The Path*, Lama Tsong Khapa says that there are two main obstacles to our spiritual practice.

1. The first obstacle is not engaging in spiritual practice, even if you have gained the knowledge of Dharma and see the possibility of achieving the state of Buddhahood.

This is obviously caused by the first two types of laziness: procrastination and being attracted to inferior activities. With the laziness of the procrastination we are always postponing our practice, and with the second laziness we are too pre-occupied with other inferior activities.

2. The second obstacle is to think “I am not able to practice Dharma” which is the third form of laziness of discouragement.”

422.331.141 The Laziness Of Discouragement

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Discouragement Because Of The Result

With this type of laziness we do not engage in spiritual practice because we feel that it is impossible for us to achieve the goal of the practice. For instance we may think “How could I possibly achieve the state of Buddhahood, and how can I possibly benefit all sentient beings?”

The state of Buddhahood means that all your faults are exhausted but all the excellent qualities are attained. Thinking of how difficult it is to remove even a single fault, and how extremely difficult it is to perfect one good quality, you feel discouraged by the thought of how impossible it is for you achieve this state of Buddhahood.

Remedy: To overcome this form of laziness, we need to inspire ourselves by contemplating these lines from Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattvas Way of Life*,

The Buddhas only teach the truth.

The Tathagata (or Buddha) said that even ants

Have the potential to achieve the state of Buddhahood.

There is no doubt that a human with a discriminating mind,

Knowing what is beneficial and what is harmful,

Can achieve the state of Buddhahood ¹

We can encourage ourself by thinking that the Buddha's words are always true, and that he said that all beings have the capacity to achieve the state of Buddhahood. This thought can overcome laziness.

Discouragement About The Path

This is where you do not practice Dharma because you feel that the spiritual path is too hard to traverse, and requires too much sacrifice.

In order to achieve the state of Buddhahood you have to engage in the Bodhisattva's deeds, which include the practice of giving, such as giving parts of one's own body, giving ones body and so on. We are discouraged because we think “How can somebody like me give away parts of my body like my hands or legs?” This is discouragement about the spiritual path, which leads to the ultimate state of Buddhahood.

¹ verses 17-19, chapter 7, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*

Remedy: Although Bodhisattvas' deeds are difficult to follow, we must realise that they yield a great result: they fulfil the welfare of oneself and of all other beings.

Giving away the parts of one's body seems to be very difficult, however one has to see that it yields a good result in the end, and that through this practice one can accomplish both personal goals as well as what you seek for all other beings. You also have to understand that giving one's body is a matter of familiarity with the practice of giving. So initially you can make yourself familiar with giving some small object within your own capacity and build on that. It is said as you make progress and develop higher spiritual realisations, then even the practice of giving one's body becomes easier.

If you make gradual progress in the path then when you reach a certain level of realisation the practice of giving the limbs of one's body, or even one's body, becomes no more difficult than giving away ordinary objects like vegetables. When you reach a certain level of high realisation your mental capacity, and even your mental courage also becomes greater, so you can easily reach that goal of giving away your body.

We may think there is pain and difficulty with spiritual practice, but in fact we should also think of how much pain and difficulty we have to endure within this cyclic existence without spiritual practice. In cyclic existence, without any choice, time and time again we have to lose parts of our bodies, lose our limbs, lose our head and we have to undergo a great deal of pain and suffering. Let alone benefiting others we are not benefiting ourselves. On the other hand if we engage in the spiritual practice with all its hardships, it is more meaningful and fruitful.

These days there are a lot of people who generously give their organs to other people. I know that monks in the Sera Monastery have been requested by some patients to donate blood which they have done. I know of a recent case where one of the monks, aged 26, gave his kidney to a young girl who had been hospitalised for a long period of time, and who otherwise had no hope of recovery. The transplant has been successful and now they both are recovering very well in hospital.

Discouragement About Place

There is also the discouragement, which arises in association with place in the cycle of rebirth. This arises by thinking that completing the path to the state of buddhahood is going to take a long period of time, during which one has to be born over and over again in cyclic existence. One is discouraged because of the repeated cycle of rebirth, along with the sufferings one has to experience before achieving the state of buddhahood.

Remedy: To counteract this form of discouragement think that bodhisattvas do not find the cycle of being born and reborn in rebirth to be very painful. Rather they find it very joyful, and do not show dislike towards this process of rebirth. As Shantideva said in *A Guide To The Bodhisattva's Way Of Life*

Because bodhisattvas have abandoned negative evil actions

They do not have to face the suffering result because they do not create the cause.

Because Bodhisattvas have wisdom about the lack of inherent existence of cyclic existence

Their mind is always full of joy.²

This concludes the three types of laziness.

422 331 144 Armour-Like Perseverance

གོ་ཚུལ་གྱི་བརྩོན་འགྲུས།

The first type of joyful effort, called armour-like joyful effort means to armour one's practice with great mental courage and determination. In order to cultivate such a kind of joyful effort the mind has to be trained to be very courageous about practice. For instance you have to train the mind to be prepared to remain in hot fires for aeons and aeons of time, for the sake of each sentient being.

If you follow the secret mantra vehicle, then even if from your part you have courage to remain in cyclic existence as long as need is there, thinking of the other sentient beings and their suffering gives you the strong urge to ever more quickly achieve the state of Buddhahood. Just like a mother out of her affection and love would have no hesitation in jumping into the water to save her drowning child, you feel the need to achieve the state of buddhahood to rescue all other beings as quickly as possible.

There is one question here. When a Bodhisattva engages in the stages of the path shared by the person of medium scope he generates a wish to achieve liberation from cyclic existence. This wish appears to contradict the Bodhisattva's commitment to remain in cyclic existence to benefit other beings. However, there is no contradiction here because when a Bodhisattva takes a rebirth in cyclic existence it was his/her choice due to his/her compassion and prayer for other beings and not a result of karma and delusion. Because it was not a result of karma and delusion, a Bodhisattva dwells in cyclic existence but is not affected by its suffering. Even in cyclic existence he/she will only find absolute peace and happiness. Moreover just like a practitioner of medium scope, a Bodhisattva abandons the wheel of rebirth turned over by the force of karma and delusion. Hence, Bodhisattvas seek not only the liberation from cyclic existence but also the unsurpassed liberation of complete enlightenment.

When you are lazy or have no motivation to engage in spiritual practice to benefit other beings, then you must apply this armour-like joyful effort.

422 331.145 The Joyful Effort Of Gathering Virtue

དགོས་ཚུལ་སྤྱད་ཀྱི་བརྩོན་འགྲུས།

The joyful effort of gathering virtue refers to ascetic practices of accumulating merits, purifying negativities, making offerings and engaging in the six perfections.

422 331.146 The Joyful Effort Of Benefiting Others

སོལ་སེམས་ཅན་དོན་བྱེད་ཀྱི་བརྩོན་འགྲུས།

The joyful effort of benefiting other beings refers to engaging in the practice of the four means of gathering disciples, and also all the practices, which are similar to the practices of the morality of benefiting other beings.

It is said in the commentary that, the perfection of joyful effort, the perfection of morality, and the perfection of patience may seem to be very similar. However they can be distinguished by their different mental attitudes: taking delight in actions, the motivation of the action, and the thought to refrain with the opponent object.

Next teaching we shall begin the perfection of concentration or calm abiding.

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² verses 27, chapter 7, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*