

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

༄༅ ལམ་རིམ་རྣམ་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



17 April 2000

Cultivate the motivation for listening to these teachings, which is to achieve the state of buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. Also cultivate the thought of putting these lam rim teachings into practice.

Before engaging in any spiritual practice we should remember the importance of always focusing on, and checking our mind, and then try to bring about some change as we engage in our practice. It is also important to remember that if in our daily life we experience some lack of stability within our mind then we do not always have to put up with it, as we can apply an appropriate spiritual practice to rid ourselves of this chaos. For example if one does a deity practice it might mean praying to that deity to be free of whatever immediate problem one faces.

## Relating Spiritual Practice To Our Minds

As part of our spiritual practice it is also important to understand how we can bring more peace and happiness in our life through understanding and changing our mind. It is very important to know that our spiritual practice concerns something we have to recognise within ourself. We have to recognise that everything we learn in our spiritual training relates to something within our own mind. For instance when we talk about the object of refuge as a protector and guide for both this life and future lives, then we see it as something to be identified within ourself. When we talk about what spiritual practice we should do, we need to try to identify and understand what we need to do to change and transform our own mind. In following spiritual practice whether we are listening to teachings, or contemplating their meaning, or meditating upon them, it is important to be aware that we are in fact focussing on our own mind.

It is important that we do not view our mind, or our daily actions, or our way of thinking as something apart from the spiritual teachings we are studying. Rather we always should try to remember that the spiritual teachings are all about our own mind. In this way it is possible to fully understand and appreciate the benefit and effectiveness of this spiritual practice in terms of bringing immediate happiness, as well as happiness in this life, and also in terms of securing a better future in the many future lives to come.

## Making Progress

We learn in the teachings that all our problems are caused by the negative states of mind such as the various forms of mental delusions. If we check it seems that these delusions are so strong, and so difficult to tame that our unruly state of mind is beyond our control. Yet it is said in the teachings that these delusions are not the true nature of mind at all, rather the nature of mind is a very clear state. Therefore, it is possible for us to completely separate our mind from those negative states and mental delusions. As said before if we constantly relate this teaching to our mind, trying to apply the teachings to change our mind, then we can slowly see the effect of the teachings. In the past our mind was

habituated to negative states, and now it is beginning to change from those habituated states. As we make some progress in our practice or spiritual training, then we gain more faith and more conviction in this spiritual practice, realising that the spiritual Dharma is an unfailing truth. Then we can adopt additional practices and make more progress.

Of main headings of the teachings concerning the topic of calm abiding, we have finished the first main heading which is The Gathering Of Suitable Conditions To Achieve Calm Abiding, the second main heading which is The Actual Means To Achieve Calm Abiding, and the third heading which is By Depending On The Actual Means, How To Achieve The Nine States Of Mental Abiding.

## 422.331.214 The Six Forces

དེ་སྟོབས་དྲུག་གིས་འགྲུབ་ལུགས།

We have already covered the topic of The Six Forces under the previous heading, however following the outline of the text, we shall list them here.

- The first mental abiding is achieved through the force of hearing.
- The second mental abiding is achieved through the force of thinking.
- The third and the fourth mental abidings are achieved through the force of mindfulness.
- The fifth and sixth mental abidings are achieved through the force of alertness.
- The seventh and eighth mental abidings are achieved through the force of joyous effort.
- Finally the ninth mental abiding is achieved through the force of familiarity.

We have already discussed the meaning of each of these six forces, so we do not need to discuss it again.

## 422.331.215 The Four Mental Attentions

དེ་ལ་ཡིད་བྱེད་བཞི་ཡོང་ཚུལ།

We have also discussed before the fifth main heading, The Four Mental Attentions, so here we shall just list them in conjunction with the nine mental abidings.

- The first and the second mental abidings rely upon forceful attention.
- The third to the seventh mental abidings rely upon interrupted attention.
- The eighth mental abiding relies upon attention with effort.
- The ninth mental abiding relies upon effortless attention.

## 422.331.216 The Way Calm Abiding Develops From This Point

དེ་ལས་ཞི་གནས་དངོས་འགྲུབ་ཚུལ།

The sixth main heading is about real calm abiding, where we learn about the special characteristics, which qualify single-pointed concentration as calm abiding.

Before achieving calm abiding, the highest level of concentration is the single-pointed concentration, which one achieves at the ninth mental abiding. At that ninth mental abiding we understand that the single-pointed concentration is completely free from the fault of the subtle forms of both the mental sinking and excitement, and one can sustain the single-pointed concentration of the ninth abiding for as long as one wishes.

Under this sixth heading we learn why the single-pointed concentration of that ninth mental abiding is not qualified as calm abiding, and what extra quality is needed in order to achieve calm abiding.

In the lam rim text it is said that in order to achieve the actual state of calm abiding, one needs to further familiarise oneself with single-pointed concentration, in order to achieve the special bliss of pliancy of body and mind.

The text by Kamalashila, called *The Middle Stages of the Meditation*, says that a person who meditates on calm abiding needs to experience the pliancy of mind and body, and that experience will empower their mind to focus on objects as they wish. Based on this quotation, Lama Tsong Khapa concluded that two things are needed in order to achieve actual calm abiding. These are:

1. To have achieved the full control and stabilisation of one's mind on the object.
2. To have experienced mental and physical pliancy.

#### **What Is Mental And Physical Pliancy?**

In his *Compendium of Knowledge* Arya Asanga says that pliancy is a state wherein one is purified of the mental and physical obstacles called *ne nya-len* in Tibetan<sup>1</sup>. This pliancy causes one's mind and body to become very functional. By achieving this exceptional physical and mental state one creates the basis to purify all types of obstructions.

Lama Tsong Khapa gives a further explanation about the meaning of this pliancy of body and mind, and the specific negativities or obstacles each one of them overcomes. Pliancy of body overcomes *ne nya-len* obstacles in our body and pliancy of mind is the remedy to *ne nya-len* obstacles in our mind.

Lama Tsong Khapa said that these *ne nya-len* obstacles in our body and mind are the specific causes, which physically or mentally discourage or prevent us from engaging in virtuous actions. For example, our reason (or cause) for not engaging in virtuous practice could be because we physically tire very quickly, or because we are physically tired, or because of some physical stress and so on. Or it could be because mentally we lack the motivation to engage in the practice. There is some obstacle in our body or mind which serves as a major cause for physically preventing us from engaging in virtue, or a mental cause which allows laziness to prevent us from engaging in virtuous actions.

It is said that we can know when we have achieved the pliancy of body, because there are no such obstacles. There is no physical factor, which can discourage us, or make us lose interest in pursuing meditation. It is said that with pliancy of the body then our body feels very fit, very light and supple. It is as if we have such full control of our body, so that it becomes very functional in the sense that it is very

conducive to engaging in virtuous actions.

If one has achieved the state of calm abiding, not only is single-pointed concentration achieved, but pliancy of body and mind has also been achieved.

The mental and physical obstacles we are talking about here are called *ne nya-len* in Tibetan. Specifically a physical *ne nya-len* is something which physically prevents our body from being very functional when we have to use it to undertake any virtuous action, and yet makes it easier when we try to engage in non-virtuous actions. This physical *ne nya-len* obstacle serves as an obstruction for us in our desire to abandon mental delusion, as a result of which it is said that we feel our body to be very heavy. The converse is that if we overcome these obstacles then our body becomes very light, very fresh and so on.

Basically what we have covered tonight is that to achieve actual calm abiding, one has to achieve pliancy of body and mind in addition to the single-pointed concentration of the nine mental abidings. We have also discussed what mental and physical pliancy means, and what specific *ne nya-len* obstacles of body or of mind each one of them overcomes. When we understand and overcome those obstacles and achieve that state of pliancy, we shall understand the benefits to the meditator.

Following this heading, in the text there is discussion of the indications of having achieved this pliancy. We shall talk about this next week, but beforehand you should read about it in the text.

#### **Order of Achievement**

When we talk of pliancy of body and mind then we are also talking of the physical and mental bliss which occurs. We talk of the bliss of the pliancy of mind, and the bliss of the pliancy of body. We should note here that, as the text says, one first experiences the pliancy of mind, followed by the pliancy of body. However, in terms of the order of experiencing the bliss of each, the order is reversed. That is, first you experience the bliss of the physical pliancy, and after that the bliss of mental pliancy.

#### **35 Buddhas Confession Prayer**

We shall now recite the 35 Buddhas Confession Prayer, which comprises all the four forces for purifying negativities. As we recite this prayer we should try to recall and apply those four means of purification which are:

1. The force of object which is the object of refuge
2. The force of regret or confession
3. The force of promise which is resolving not to repeat the negativities in future
4. The force of remedy

To give a brief visualisation to go with this purification prayer as we recite it, visualise or just imagine that all the 35 buddhas of confession are in the space in front of you. Imagine that at the centre of your heart is the syllable PAM, black in colour, which you can think of as the seed of all the negativities that you have accumulated. Then during the recitation think of receiving the blessings from the 35 buddhas in the form of a stream of nectars and light which enters through your crown aperture. As this blessing nectar and light fills you, imagine that it forces this black syllable PAM downward until it eventually bursts. As it bursts you imagine that a massive amount of all your accumulated negativities leaves your body in the form of all kinds of filth, such as darkish smoke or liquids. This is a short purification visualisation, which we should do as we say this prayer.

<sup>1</sup> Ed: The Tibetan term *ne nyan-len* has no direct translation. It refers to those obstacles acquired with one's rebirth. Tsepa Rigzin "Tibetan - English Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology" *gnas-ngan-len* = taking unfortunate rebirth.

---

---