

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Cultivate the bodhicitta motivation by generating the thought that these profound lam rim teachings which you are studying are to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. At the same time generate the thought of putting these teachings into practice in order to achieve that ultimate goal of complete enlightenment.

422.331.332 The Four Means of Gathering Disciples

Tonight we begin the teaching on the four means of gathering disciples in order to ripen the inner continuum of other beings. These four means are:

1. Giving what is necessary
2. Speaking pleasantly and skilfully
3. Leading others to practise Dharma
4. Setting a good example by practising what you teach to others

As part of the training in the bodhisattvas' deeds these Four Means are said to be the most effective way to ripen the continuum of other beings, in the sense of making them a very suitable vessel for Dharma.

1. The first means of gathering disciples is giving what is necessary, which mainly refers to giving material aid. When you engage in the bodhisattva's deeds to benefit others the very first and most important factor is to please other beings. They have to feel pleased about you. It is said that giving whatever material things that they need is a very effective way of pleasing ordinary beings in particular, and a very effective means of fulfilling their wishes and needs.

However, when you talk of the giving, this also includes giving Dharma as well as material aid. Although giving material aid is the main reference here, we should also know that if we see others are ready to receive it, then we should give them the Dharma of fearlessness. This is especially the case when someone faces a threat to their life. What they most need, and would most appreciate, is having their life protected. In this case, the most effective means to benefit, and through this to please that being is giving the dharma of fearlessness.

2. The second means of gathering disciples is speaking pleasantly. This is placed second because once other people have been pleased through the gift of material aid, you next satisfy their mind, by practising this means of speaking pleasantly.

After you have won the heart of the others through the first means of giving, then practising the second means of gathering disciples concerns the way you talk and communicate, and the kind of outer gestures that you show to others. These are all very positive to the minds of others. Speaking pleasantly means that you are very skilful in leading others, and helping and benefiting them.

In teaching others you have to teach the Dharma that is most suitable and effectively beneficial to them. For

example, if you directly criticise someone who has been very recklessly engaging in negative actions without any regard to moral values, saying that what they're doing is evil and negative, then of course they are not going to like hearing that.

Therefore it is also important to know that speaking pleasantly means choosing the right words which sound very pleasant and eloquent to others. When speaking to others it is also important to exhibit pleasant facial expressions, rather than frowns or some other unpleasant expression. If you show a smile when speaking, this is generally regarded as good manners, which is also very important.

From this point of view the teaching on the lam rim or the stages of the path to enlightenment is not just a teaching about very long-term goals. We can also understand how it is a teaching in accord with what society considers to be good manners and a civilised culture.

So we have to understand that we are trying to adopt, integrate and practise all the things which ordinary people generally regard as good manners. We are to understand that these good manners are also part of our spiritual practice, our Dharma practice. This encourages us to always be polite and very pleasant when talking with other people.

We can also understand that it is our spiritual practice to try as much as possible to do the same thing at home. This includes speaking pleasantly to our partner. You know that it is good manners to always ask, "How are you" and "How are you feeling" and when they come home from work to ask, "How was the day? Was it too tiring?" and then to say "Can I make tea or cook the meal? You have a rest." This kind speech is pleasant to others, and generally in accord with common knowledge of what is good to show to other beings.

Even for those who are mentally very dull and those who are always creating negative actions, with pleasant skilful speech related to their level it is possible to gradually bring about some change. As long as what you say does not completely contradict them, it is possible that the other person will listen to the message, and through that then they can slowly make progress.

3. The third means of gathering disciples is the means of leading them to put the Dharma into practice. After you have assisted others according to their needs and capacities through practising the second means of speaking pleasantly, it is also important to cause them to follow the practice of Dharma. Here, what is important is to cause others to think 'I must practise Dharma'. Practising Dharma ranges from the very small practice of a virtuous action, up to practising all the dharmas through which the state of liberation is achieved. Through this third means you have to be able to motivate others to put the Dharma into practice,

and to seek the state of liberation.

4. The fourth means of gathering disciples is setting an ideal example by practising what you teach to others. If you do not practise this fourth means then the other three means will not be very effective. For example the third means is motivating others to undertake spiritual practice. It also means showing them the different stages of spiritual practice that they could and should undertake. If however, after doing that you do not practice the same thing yourself, any practical spiritual advice that you give to others is not going to be inspiring. The others might even criticise you saying, "Why should I listen to you, because you are not living up to your own words?"

They might turn your words back on you saying, "Instead of giving me this Dharma lecture you need this lecture yourself! You too need to overcome your negative states of mind, and to subdue your own continuum". So it is important that as a teacher you should be doing far more practice than your students, so as to be a further cause to inspire them in their practice. However it is said that if you practise at least at the same level as those to whom you teach the Dharma, then you accord with the meaning of this fourth means of gathering disciples.

How The Four Means Can Be Included Within The Six Perfections

It is said these Four Means of Gathering Disciples can be included within the Six Perfections. Obviously the first means of giving can be included within the Perfection of Giving. Speaking pleasantly is also included in the Perfection of Giving, with particular reference to Giving the Dharma of fearlessness. The next two means of gathering disciples can both be included into the Perfection of Morality. There are three aspects of the Perfection of Morality. These last two means of gathering disciples are included in the morality of benefiting other beings.

Why Are the Four Means of Gathering Disciples Taught Separately?

The Four Means of Gathering Disciples taught separately from the Six Perfections to give the indication that first of all one should engage in practice to tame and subdue one's own continuum. After this, then one should engage in the practice of helping others to subdue their continuum. To help others one has to specifically engage in these four means of gathering disciples, as they are the most effective methods.

So we have now basically finished the main body of the lam rim teachings.

422.322 Developing Bodhicitta Through the Ritual Of Taking Vows

Earlier, in the teaching on the bodhicitta mind, it was said that this topic of how to generate bodhicitta through ritual ceremony would be discussed later. At that stage we finished the first method of generating bodhicitta. We are now up to the second method, which was deferred until later.

The topic of generating Bodhicitta through a ritual ceremony is explained under two sub-headings:

1. How to acquire the vows you have not yet taken.
2. How to safeguard and develop the vows which you have already acquired.

422.331 How to Acquire the Vows You Have Not Yet Taken

This ritual ceremony of generating bodhicitta mind is to further increase the bodhicitta mind. You engage in this

ceremony after gaining at least some experience of the bodhicitta mind as a result of following all the causes, for example the seven-fold cause and effect to generate bodhicitta mind. By following those six causes and their effect you cultivate love and then through this, special intention which then results in the experience of some form of bodhicitta mind. In order to increase this aspiring bodhicitta mind one engages in this ritual ceremony of bodhicitta. In order to increase one's engaging mind of bodhicitta, one then also engages in the ceremonies of taking the bodhisattvas' vows.

It is said that when you engage in this ritual ceremony of bodhicitta, you are trying to generate some form of bodhicitta mind not just by word (by repeating the prayers of this ritual ceremony), but by putting it into practice. It is clearly said in the text that if your ritual ceremony consists solely of just repeating the words of the ceremony then you cannot gain any experience of bodhicitta mind, and therefore you cannot receive this vow. However the lam rim text says that even if you do not actually experience the arising of some form of bodhicitta mind, it is still beneficial to engage in such ceremonies. This is because through such ceremonies one at least implants some bodhicitta seeds in one's mind. If one takes this ritual ceremony very seriously as a practice, then it is said that by virtue of the presence of all the holy beings in this ceremony it is possible to receive the vow.

There are three versions of the way to conduct this ritual ceremony. The very short version of the ceremony has no separate preparatory stage; there is just the actual ceremony. The medium version has both a preparatory stage and the actual stage, which are both done on the same day. The extensive, very long version is done over two separate days; on the first day you do the preparatory stage, and on the next day you do the actual ceremony. According to the late Junior Tutor to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, the lam rim explanation of the ceremony follows the long version.

We shall discuss this in the next teaching next week.

Geshe-la said that he received this bodhicitta ceremony, and this commentary on this lam rim teaching, from the late Junior Tutor to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in Tibet. At the time Geshe-la was around 20 years old. Thinking back, Geshe-la says that the conditions in terms of basic food, clothing and shelter were very harsh compared to today. However having an opportunity to give such a teaching to others, he always feels that those harsh parts of his life of rigorous studies have all paid off, and become a very worthy cause.

Of course 20 years is a very youthful age, but looking back Geshe-la feels that he was not all that youthful. He also remembers that at the time he received these teachings there was a nun sitting next to him who was probably from a very well off family. Geshe-la noticed that even the base of the mandala that she was using was fully gold-plated. Geshe-la says he received some *tsampa* or barley flour from her.

You would be quite shocked and would feel sorry if you heard all the details of the conditions under which I studied in the monastery, Geshe Doga said.

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