

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལམ་གྱི་ལམ་གྱི་བཅའ་བུ་བཅུ་དཔལ་



17 October 2000

Try to reinforce the bodhicitta mind by generating the strong wish to achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings. Think that one is receiving these profound Mahayana teaching to achieve that state of buddhahood. Also make sure that this motivation is associated with a strong intention to put this teaching into practice.

## 422.322.22 How to Maintain Engaging Bodhicitta

This heading refers to the practices related to the engaging bodhicitta mind. Here we find out about the Bodhisattva Vows, which consist of refraining from the eighteen root downfalls and forty-six secondary offences.

### Classification of Vows

According to the Vinaya or ethics scripture, vows are explained in terms of the different groups of moral misdeeds to which they are related. The misdeeds are classified into five groups and two groups and so on. When they are classified into two they are called *pham pa* (moral defeat) and *tung-wa* (downfall) in Tibetan.

The Bodhisattva Vows are in the *pham pa* category. More precisely in the Vinaya, when talking of transgressing Bodhisattva Vows, the term *nye wai pham pa* is used, which means resembling or near *pham pa*, rather than actual *pham pa*.

Literally, *pham pa* means defeat so the implication here is that when one's vow is stained with *pham pa*, it is destroyed and defeated. Since the Bodhisattva Vows can be restored after being stained by root downfalls, the term *nye wai pham pa* (near *pham pa*) is used to describe them. Whereas Pratimoksha (individual liberation) vows cannot be restored once they are lost, so the term *pham pa* is used in that context.

### Who Breaks the Vows?

First of all we have to consider the prerequisites that the person who breaks the vow should possess. They must already have received the vow of the engaging bodhicitta mind, which is the bodhisattva's vow. The vow should not have been allowed to degenerate and still be present. Furthermore the person should be of sound mind and not mentally insane.

### The Eighteen Root Downfalls

#### 1. Praising Oneself and Criticising or Belittling Others.

##### The Action(s)

There are two actions in this transgression. First there is 'praising oneself' and secondly 'criticising others'. 'Praising oneself' is done out of the desire to receive wealth, material gain, or praise from others. Criticising others is done out of the same motivation, and refers to the criticism of those who, because of various qualifications, are worthy of praise. Instead of praising their qualities you criticise them.

Obviously this root downfall involves another person, in the

sense of an object of your criticism, or audience for your self-praise. This is any other person who has a separate continuum from oneself. Furthermore, it says, the person has to be in the same class of migrating being as oneself: that is the other person has to be human. They should not be another form of life such as a godly being and so on. They must be also be mentally sound, and have the capacity to hear and understand what you are saying to them.

The theme or subject of the first root downfall is to praise oneself and criticise others.

### Motivation

We can also go into detail about the motivation behind this first root downfall. It is generally one of strong self-interest to receive either what are called in Tibetan *nye pa* or *kur ti*. (I have to use these Tibetan terms because they have no direct English equivalent here). *Nye pa* includes receiving food, clothing and a means of transport. Whereas *kur ti* refers to receiving items like shelter or a throne, which inflate the status of the recipient beyond what it actually is. The term *kur ti* refers to ostentatious items, which feed pretentious desires.

Whatever *nye pa* you desire to receive should be something which belongs to another, and in which you do not hold any share. This is similar to the action of stealing in that the object or property you are stealing has to belong to others, and not be something in which you have a share. If you have a share of the thing that you take, then we do not call that stealing.

It is also said that the motivation for this first downfall arises from self-interest, and is completely based on strong craving or desire for those objects. It excludes the motivation of receiving objects in order to make an offering to the objects of refuge, the three Supreme Jewels, or in order to give it away to others who are desperate for those objects. The motivation has to be completely based on self-interest and desire and craving for those objects.

If out of the desire to receive *nye pa* or *kur ti* merely for your own self-interest, and personal benefit you praise yourself or criticise others, that is the meaning of the first root downfall, which therefore can be sub-divided into two: praising oneself and criticising others.

#### 2. Not Giving Dharma and Wealth to Those in Need

##### The Action(s)

This refers to not giving Dharma and wealth to those who are afflicted with pain or suffering, or those who are without any protector or any spiritual guide, and who are very much in need of Dharma and wealth.

This downfall is committed when someone comes to beg for Dharma or wealth and so on, and you do not fulfil their request.

### Definitions

The type of person who comes to ask for help is afflicted with some problem or suffering because of the lack of wealth or material conditions. For instance, they beg for food and drink and so on, because they suffer from hunger or thirst.

The person may also be requesting you to teach Dharma because they are very keen, and they are a fit vessel to receive the Dharma. However they lack a spiritual guide or any other person with the qualifications to spiritually assist them.

As someone with Bodhisattva Vows you possess all the resources and capabilities to fulfil the need of that person.

We also have to consider the person who comes to beg for things. They are very desperate and genuine, and have come to beg you for those things with genuine hope and some expectations. Under these circumstances if you do not give Dharma or wealth, then this is the downfall of the second root vow.

The exceptions here are if the other person asks for harmful objects like weapons or poisons. Of course you are not advised to give these things, and this circumstance is excluded.

Also we have to possess whatever object, or wealth, or skill the other person requests.

### **Motivation**

If because of your stinginess and miserliness you do not give to a person who begs for help out of desperation, and you and he possess the above qualities, then you are staining your vow with the second root downfall. Like the first root downfall, it can be also sub-divided into two: not giving dharma, and not giving wealth.

### **3. Not accepting an apology from others**

#### **The Action(s)**

The third root downfall is not accepting an apology from others even if they acknowledge the faulty or harmful actions that they committed. Through a lack of forgiveness you hold strong resentment and hatred, and so verbally or physically abuse or harm the other when they offer the apology. This third root downfall has two elements, not accepting the apology and harming others.

#### **Motivation**

The downfall of causing harm to others depends upon specific thought and actions. The thought or motivation has to be a hostile thought of hatred towards others. For instance if they have said something very bad or hurtful things you feel hatred because you cannot tolerate what they said. Therefore in your thought there is a strong hatred and strong ill thought towards that person, accompanied by a desire to retaliate and harm them. The result of such thought is the action of actually injuring them by hitting them or abusing them.

Here we could perhaps exclude actions arising from thoughts of genuine love and care. For example, parents can physically show some aggression to children in order to help discipline them. They do this out of love and care. Therefore when you talk of the motivation behind committing this third root downfall there is no love, or care, or thought of helping and benefiting others. The motivation is just hatred and harmful thought towards other beings.

#### **Definitions**

The first part of this third root downfall is not accepting an apology or not forgiving. In order to commit this downfall there are some points to consider.

The person who makes the apology has, of course, inflicted

some harm on you, the bodhisattva. The other person should genuinely ask for forgiveness properly, making a very appropriate statement of apology, in an appropriate manner.

To commit this downfall, someone has apologised and requested forgiveness, but all your thoughts are of harm and resentment. In fact, when the person makes an apology, your resentment and hatred becomes reinforced by remembering the harm that you received from them. When it takes place the nature of this downfall is such that your mind is boiling with hatred and resentment, and so your speech is very unpleasant. Then you say to yourself that you are not going to forgive the other person. When this happens, it is the transgression of the vow of not accepting an apology.

Although we learn about this transgression as part of the bodhisattva's vows, it is not a question of maintaining this vow only because we have taken the bodhisattva's vow. Regardless of or not whether you have taken this bodhisattva's vow it is a very beneficial practice to integrate into our lives.

Tonight we could finish only three of the vows, which means we might have to go a bit faster in the next teaching.

#### **Summary**

In fact of the eighteen root downfalls, each one of the first four consists of a set of two vows, so the first four are really eight vows. This might appear to be a contradiction but if we examine each of the four primary vows we find each has one motivation.

The motivation for transgressing the first root downfall is mainly the attachment. For the second root downfall the motivation is miserliness, and harmful thought was the motivation behind the third root downfall. There is only one motivation for each root transgression.

However when you talk of the actual actions or the deeds, then each root downfall has two separate actions. With the first one there are the actions of praising oneself, and of criticising others.

Likewise with the second one, there are the actions of not giving Dharma and not giving wealth.

The third one too has the actions of not accepting an apology from others, and actually harming other beings.

So really it in terms of the actions, the first four root downfalls become eight.

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

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#### **Note on authentication**

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