## Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand" Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga Translated by Sandup Tsering

## **७** यम रेम द्वार्यिय यग वर्ष



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Cultivate the bodhicitta mind of wishing to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all beings. With this motivation generate the thought of wanting to listen to these profound Mahayana teachings and put them into practice.

In order to make sure that whatever spiritual practice we do is influenced by this bodhicitta mind, we have to generate as strong a bodhicitta motivation as possible before engaging in any practice. In other words the stronger the bodhicitta motivation, the greater the influence of this mind on whatever actions follow it.

7. We are up to the seventh root downfall of the bodhisattva vows, which is taking away the saffroncoloured robes of ordained monks or nuns.

The object of committing this root downfall is either a Sangha who is endowed with complete, unsullied Sangha vows, or a Sangha who has an incomplete or broken vow. However, the number of Sangha should not exceed four ordained Sangha, because if the same action were committed against more than four fully ordained Sangha then it would be classified as the fifth root downfall, which is stealing the property of the Supreme Jewel

The kind of thought that motivates one to commit these actions is a harmful malicious thought towards the Sangha. The action is something that results in the removal of the

The action is something that results in the removal of the Sangha's saffron-coloured robes. It also means disrobing them, in the sense of reducing their status to that of a lay person.

8. The eighth root downfall is committing any of five immediate negative actions. These are the five extremely negative karmic actions of killing one's own father, killing one's own mother, killing an Arhat (i.e. one who has achieved the state of liberation), causing the shedding of blood of a buddha, and causing a schism or division within the Sangha community.

The reason why these five actions are called immediate negative actions is because their severity is such that, if they are not purified, they will bear their result of taking a bad rebirth in the immediate next lifetime. There is no gap of another rebirth between the time of committing the action and the ripening of the result.

9. The ninth root downfall is generating wrong view. This wrong view refers to the loss of faith in the law of white and black karma, and the wrong view that there is no life before or after this one.

This wrong view of the karmic law of cause and effect is more than just saying that such a law does not exist. Rather it refers to falsely believing that if you create white or positive karma then the result is not happiness. Likewise, if you falsely believe that the result of negative or black karma is not suffering, this also is a wrong view.

In our day-to-day life this topic of the law of karma is one of

the most essential parts of our practice. This is because if in our daily life we create more positive actions and less negative ones, we are progressing in our spiritual practice. If our understanding of this topic of the law of karma is accompanied by a deep faith in it, it will become deeply entrenched in our mind. Then it can be a continuous source of motivation for our spiritual practice.

Generally speaking, practising the law of karma means being a good, honest person with both yourself and other people. Therefore we can see how, when we talk of spiritual practice, and make progress in that practice, it is not just simply knowledge which is important. Rather, that knowledge has to be thoroughly and deeply integrated within us, with a strong faith in the value of that knowledge.

There are some people who have probably never heard this word 'karma'. Yet as a matter of principle they live their life very much according to the point of view of the spiritual teachings, and particularly this teaching on the law of karma. In effect they are practising true Dharma in their life. Of course their actions are also very beneficial to their life, as well as being very satisfying to them. They see that the principles on which they live their life are very constructive and beneficial both personally and to others.

Because the results of positive actions are very desirable they are wholesome white actions. Whereas the results of negative actions are undesirable, so therefore the actions are called black unwholesome karma.

We have to realise that the law of karma is not something to be practised solely to gain some benefit in our future life. Rather we also have to see that it is crucial for living a very good life in this lifetime. Indeed the law of karma is almost indispensable for finding more happiness within this lifetime. If you do not practise it, then there is no hope of finding happiness, let alone minimising suffering within this lifetime.

Basically this law of karma says to us that positive actions result in happiness, whereas negative actions result in suffering. When we say we have faith in the law of karma we believe in this causal link between positive actions and happiness, and between negative actions and suffering.

If we have gained faith in this deep down in our heart, then it becomes so natural for us to practise it very seriously in day-to-day life. This is because there are no questions in our mind that what we seek in our life is happiness, which is a very pleasant and desirable state in which to be. The cause for that is creating positive karma or positive actions. We can understand this link between positive actions and their desirable result just by observing all our actions and their results in our everyday life. Likewise if you observe the causes and results of the actions of other people you can understand this law.

If you have faith in this law of karma, it also becomes natural that if you happen to create some negative actions, then you immediately feel bad about them. You know that unless you do something to purify those actions you will have to pay for them in the form of suffering. You know that your negative action is going to bring something that you do not want, and which you always try to avoid. So therefore faith in the law of karma inspires us to prevent negative actions, and to purify any negative actions that we have already created.

There are, of course, many levels of understanding the truth of this law of karmic cause and effect in our life. At one level we can see that the happiness we seek is not just a matter of enjoying good material conditions. Likewise unhappy events are not always related to poor material conditions. In other words it is hard for us to know the complete causes of our experiences unless we consider the topic of the law of karma.

With the law of karma, even though the actions that we create cease to exist with the completion of that particular action, we say that they leave some imprint in our mindstream. This imprint, which will be retained in our mind stream, has the capacity to produce the result of that action in the future. Therefore many things happen in this lifetime, which are not necessarily the result of karma that we have created in this life. Rather they could be the result of karma that we have created in past lifetimes.

What this means is that even if in this life we find a great deal of happiness, we may possess within our mind stream a vast number of karmic imprints of negative actions created in the past. Therefore we have to realise that it is important to engage as much as possible in the practice of purifying those.

Of course this has been just a general introduction to the importance of this topic of karma in our day-to-day practice. The best way to approach the Buddhadharma is to first try to apply all those teachings and practices which are most personally relevant. These are the ones that can be understood and practised in the immediate time frame. One tests, as much as possible, the Buddha's teachings in the context of one's own immediate life. If, as it says in the teachings, through this testing the Buddhadharma proves unfailing, particularly with respect to the law of karma you will find that positive karma brings happiness and negative karma sufferings.

The teaching of the Buddha mainly relates to our thoughts and our actions. It shows the path to achieve happiness and to eliminate suffering. By applying these teachings to our own mind and actions, we learn that the source of our happiness, from the immediate present to lasting peace and happiness, is in our own mind. Likewise the source of suffering, restlessness, difficulties and confusion also lies within our own mind.

If the source of happiness lies within our mind, then what is that source? It is generating loving-kindness, compassion and a good heart towards others. Whereas generating any harmful ill thoughts is the inner source of suffering, and hence the source of our problems. Through our everyday actions we have to try to test whether the peace and happiness that we seek really does come from this positive state of mind of showing love and compassion to other beings?

If we relate the teachings to our own daily actions we can understand the meaning of the teachings. We know how we feel very inwardly disturbed if our mind is under the control and influence of some harmful thought like hatred. Not only that, but if we check our outer actions, there is no peace in creating any negative, destructive actions like physically showing aggression to another. We can also see the effect in our life and also in the life of others of sincerely putting into practise all these teachings of showing love and respect to others.

Sincere, genuine faith in the Buddha's teachings on the law of karma or other whole aspects of the teachings has to be based on our own immediate experience. With some knowledge and faith we can develop an even deeper faith in the Buddha's teachings. Without relating the Buddha's teaching to our own experience, our knowledge becomes very abstract rather than something that we can immediately apply to our life.

This is even more the case for the higher, more profound teachings such as the existence of life before or after this one, and its relationship to the law of karma. Then the teachings become even more abstract, and appear to be very subtle to grasp. Therefore it is said in the teaching that in order to logically prove these facts, then we also need to use very abstract, subtle logic, because basically there is no other way of understanding these facts.

First of all we need to make sense of the Buddha's teachings in terms of our experiences in this life, and so gain some faith in the validity of the teachings. Then we are in the position to say that, having tested the teachings and not having found any fault with respect to this life, we can infer that the teachings on the law of karma with respect to previous and future lifetimes are true.

By testing and examining the Buddha's words we confirm and authenticate them as fact. On the basis of this we gain a deep faith in the law of karmic cause and effect, and then it becomes so natural to always feel motivated to create virtuous, positive actions. Creating negative actions on the other hand becomes so frightening that, unless you take some action to purify that negative action, you can find it difficult to sleep. Faith in the law of karma can be a great source of continual inspiration to practise Dharma and purify negative actions.

Faith in our practice of Dharma is strongest when it is derived from our own knowledge and experience. Faith can be so strong that we shall be prepared to forsake our own life for the cause of Dharma. Whereas a faith that is just based on saying that whatever you learn in Dharma is true because it is the word of the Buddha, can be very fleeting faith, in the sense that you can lose it very easily.

The Lord Buddha himself said to his followers, "Do not honour my teachings just out of your faith in me. Rather you should honour the Dharma by examining the teachings for yourself, just as you would assay the quality of gold."

As the Buddha said, it is very important for the stability of our own practice to test the ways in which teachings relate to our own mind and actions.

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