

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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5 December 2000

Try to reinforce the bodhichitta motivation which you have just generated. Cultivate the thought of wanting to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and think, “for this purpose I am undertaking this study and practice of the profound lam-rim teachings.”

In the previous teaching we discussed the statement by the Lord Buddha, “I have shown you the path to liberation. Achieving that state of liberation is up to you.”

We have heard numerous times that the Dharma we learn should be integrated into our practice, by relating it to our mind and actions. Hearing the Dharma should not be like hearing the other things that we put in our mind and leave there, doing nothing with them. The Lord Buddha said that after you study the Dharma you should relate it to your mind, and through that you can achieve a better future. You should try to practise Dharma according to your own mental capabilities: small, medium or great.

The bodhichitta mind is our root Dharma practice. It should influence whatever other practices we do - meditation and so on. To enhance the bodhisattva mind, we should engage in the lam-rim meditation. We have to become very familiar with this stage-by-stage lam-rim meditation, which guides us in stages from the beginning of the spiritual path, which is to rely upon a spiritual guru, up to the attainment of complete enlightenment.

The first stage is to understand how a proper reliance upon a spiritual guru can lead us through all of the stages of the lam-rim. With such devotion, we shall sincerely follow the guru’s instructions. This would naturally generate a genuine desire to take the essence or meaning of this precious human life of leisure and endowment.

Not only that, but we would see how we have to begin to take the essence of this life of leisure and endowment immediately, because we shall clearly see that this life is not going to last forever. In fact death can come at any moment - we have no control over it.

If we do nothing, we may take rebirth in the lower realms, and there is no guarantee that we can avoid such a lower rebirth. The next step is to try to think of the suffering that would be experienced if one was to be born in the lower realms. This, plus the knowledge that death could occur in the next moment shows us the urgency of practising from this moment to prevent a lower rebirth. That means seeking refuge in the Three

Jewels, and following the practice of karma, the law of cause and effect.

The practice of karma may prevent a lower rebirth, however we should also understand that we need to ask if it is sufficient to merely take a higher rebirth. From our understanding of the lam-rim, we know a higher rebirth is clearly not sufficient, because there is also suffering there. In fact being born anywhere in cyclic existence entails suffering. Therefore it is necessary to seek liberation from cyclic existence.

Furthermore, we must also seek liberation for all sentient beings. We do this because there are no other sentient beings who have not been one of our parents at some stage. Thus, as our parents all sentient beings have been kind to us. So seeking only personal liberation is very selfish. It is not an appropriate wish because how can we leave all the other motherly and fatherly sentient beings behind in cyclic existence. Therefore, right from this moment, we have engage in the practice of the path of the greater vehicle, or Mahayana.

Furthermore, the type of bodhichitta which we should generate must be much stronger and more forceful than the one generated in the sutra or the common vehicle. Right from this moment the main practice that we should be doing is to begin to engage in the Mahayana path, by generating and developing the bodhichitta mind, to the point that it becomes spontaneous, arising without depending on any effort on our part. When we have this bodhichitta mind, we shall have very great determination and willpower to benefit all other sentient beings. It is said that with bodhichitta mind your thought to benefit other beings is so strong that you are determined to endure any hardship to save all other beings, even if it takes aeons to do so.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that the bodhisattva mind in Sutrayana shows a greater force of determination to benefit other beings, because you are prepared to benefit all other beings for as long as it takes, even if that means aeons of years.

Out of consideration for other sentient beings, your high degree of determination and thought of benefiting others gives you the urge to achieve complete enlightenment as quickly as possible. The more quickly you do so, the better for other sentient beings. So you realise the importance of engaging in the secret mantra path to quickly achieve the state of enlightenment within a single lifetime in this age of degeneration.

The beginning of the secret mantra path is taking the four initiations to establish the seeds of the four types of

bodies. These initiations also to create a ripening cause to cultivate the path of union of the clear light and illusory bodies, which lead one to achieve the ultimate state of union of a buddha.

The lam-rim text says that by meditating on the various stage-by-stage developments of the tantric path, one can see the state of union of a buddha, and how to achieve it. The immediate causes of it are the clear light and the illusory bodies. What are the causes to achieve that? The ripening cause is following the generation stage.

When we study the generation stage we see that it has various levels. We have to start from the gross generation stage. To engage in that, we have to take the necessary initiations as a ripening cause. This means that we have to meet a fully qualified Vajra Master.

The most important precondition of the tantric path is the common path, which is gaining some realisations from the Sutrayana. We can appreciate the importance of engaging in the common path of Sutrayana by understanding that within the various stages of the common path, the most important practice is the bodhichitta mind.

If bodhichitta is so essential to the common path, we must know the causes of the bodhichitta mind, and how it can be generated. The main cause is developing compassion and loving kindness towards all other sentient beings. The cause to generate this compassion and loving kindness is renunciation, the genuine thought or aspiration to achieve liberation from cyclic existence. Giving rise to such liberation depends on recognizing the suffering nature of cyclic existence.

It is important to realise that before one can gain the realisation of the suffering nature of all cyclic existence, one has to first realise the suffering of lower rebirth. To become aware of, and generate some thought of how to prevent the suffering of lower rebirth, one has to see the essence or meaning of this human rebirth. Such thoughts will only arise if we see the preciousness, rarity and impermanence of this human life.

When beginning spiritual practice the most important thing is to rely upon a spiritual guru. We engage in the lam-rim practice by undertaking a reflective meditation on the various stages of the lam-rim path, from beginning to end, from guru devotion to buddhahood. Or you can do the meditation backwards from buddhahood to guru devotion. We can also apply this to cover the stages of the tantric path as well.

To make substantial progress in our practice, we must try to focus on the level of practice which suits our capacities, and to practise that which we are capable of doing and understanding. We should try not to have the attitude of focussing on higher and profound practices, instead of the practices that we can actually do. Progress is achieved by working upwards from the base levels. Having made progress and achieved the lowest step, we can direct our focus onto the next step. The focus should remain there until we gain the realisations of that stage. Only then do we go to the next step. Although our main focus is developing our spiritual practice at whatever the level we are at, we can also do reflective meditations on the entire path of Sutrayana and Tantrayana. By doing a reflective meditation on the whole path we gain an

overall view, and at least implant the seeds of the entire stages of the path within our mind.

Now that we have met the stainless teachings of both sutra and tantra, we are also encouraged to take the opportunity of engaging in the highest yoga tantric practice, by receiving any of the initiations of the three main deities of Guhyusamaya, Heruka, and Yamantaka. Not only in sutra but also in tantra, one should at least plant the seeds by entering into the highest tantric initiations.

Through entering those initiations you engage in the generation and completion stages, traversing the entire stages of the path, and at least doing some reflective meditation on these stages. If, in addition to reflective meditation, we become very familiar with the tantric generation and completion stages, then based on the development of our bodhicitta mind, we can gain very high and profound realisations in this very lifetime. It is possible that even in this life, in a single meditation sitting, like the gyawa wen-sa-wa, the father and son, one can achieve the ultimate state of union of a Buddha.

This basically completes the teachings of the lam-rim. At this point it is customary to recite the dedication chapter from *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, which we shall do next week after our usual prayers and meditation.

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Note on authentication

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