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# Study Group - "Buddhist Tenets"

## Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

### Translated by Sandup Tsering

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As is always the case cultivate a proper motivation for engaging in this spiritual practice. Generate the genuine bodhicitta mind, which is the genuine aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Then think that it is to fulfil this aspiration of enlightenment that you are undertaking this study of Dharma, and will follow it up by putting the Dharma into practice.

Having cultivated the right motivation consider the situation in which you now find yourself. It is the best situation to be in, because you have all the suitable conditions for living your life, and for achieving any goal that you have in mind for your life. What a dreadful waste if this good situation and these good conditions are not used to advantage to achieve your goal. No one could have better or more suitable conditions than these.

One thing which is very clear is that whatever actions we have undertaken in our life, whether they are very mundane ones or spiritual ones, our hope and goal is to bring happiness in our life, and to solve all the problems or sufferings of our life. If we look further and think about it we realise that it is not enough to achieve only a temporary happiness, or a temporary relief from our problems and suffering.

We should try to realise that when we talk in terms of Dharma practice we understand that we are trying to achieve a permanent or everlasting state of happiness, as well as looking for a permanent solution to all the problems in life. Just being satisfied with achieving some temporary or immediate happiness, and the elimination of immediate sufferings, does not accord with Dharma practice.

If we decide to try to remove suffering permanently the only possible way is to cut the root cause of the suffering. If the root is not cut and harmed, then no matter how much we try [the branches keep growing and we have to keep cutting them back.] We cannot rid ourselves of our suffering. When we consider the root cause of suffering, or in other words consider what we have to do to achieve the everlasting state of happiness, then we realise that we have to achieve the state of liberation. To do that we have to overcome the root cause of all our sufferings.

When we consider the root cause of suffering then it comes down to some form of ignorance within us with respect to our view of the way things exist, the nature of the reality of things. We can realise the importance of clearly identifying exactly what that ignorance is. We call that ignorance 'self-grasping', a wrong view of self-grasping. If we examine that further, we can recognise that there is an ignorance of self-grasping in a gross form and in a subtle form and so on.

For this years study group we shall study the schools of tenets. Studying this topic is essential in order to be able

recognise all the different levels of self-grasping, and conversely to realise the wisdom of selflessness, which is the direct antidote to this self-grasping. We are trying to see that the final antidote to the root cause of all our suffering of our life is the wisdom realising selflessness.

Without studying a topic such as the schools of tenets, and meditating on this topic on selflessness, we cannot gain the realisation of selflessness. We have to make the effort to personally realise and therefore gain this wisdom of selflessness. Otherwise no matter how much progress we make in any other practices that we do, such as the practice of developing love and compassion for all beings and developing bodhicitta mind, without that wisdom we are not counteracting the root cause of suffering. Therefore we have to try to understand that all the other practices, such as generating bodhicitta and compassion, are the method which supports us in gaining this wisdom of selflessness.

As we study the schools of tenets we should realise that everything that we study here is all for our practice. It is important to always try to relate our learning to our practice, and also to apply even the learning of these tenets to counteract the delusions within our mind. If we approach the study of tenets in the right way - in a practical way - then we can see that the more we learn about the various schools of tenets, then the more we develop the faith in the Lord Buddha's teachings, and in his qualities.

In our study of the schools of tenets we shall learn of the various views asserted by different schools of tenets, and we shall see the reason why there are so many views. These various views in the Buddhist teachings show how skilful and kind the Lord Buddha is in guiding other beings.

We might think why did the Lord Buddha not just reveal the one view, which accorded with his own view. In the schools of tenets you find that there are many views which were taught by the Lord Buddha, but which did not necessarily represent the Buddha's own ultimate thought. He presented those different views because that is what is necessary for the listeners. The Buddha taught according to the need, or the spiritual temperament, or the spiritual predispositions of his listeners. He did not impose on others what he believed to be the truth. Rather he taught what accorded with, and which best suited the mentality of his listeners.

Not only that, but we also find as we study these schools of tenets that where there is a difference between the lower school and the highest school of tenets, it is essential for us to gain an understanding of the view of the lower schools in order to gain a complete understanding of the school above that. So all that we learn in the lower school helps us to understand the view of the higher schools.

As said before our approach is not just to stimulate our intellectual knowledge, so as to be able to teach, or to be able to talk about more belief systems to others. What is most important in making progress in our study is to see what we have learned as something to be applied to our practice. For example in terms of philosophical view, they help us to understand the right view that we should

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hold, and the wrong view that we should overcome.

In Tibetan the term for 'tenet' consists of the two syllables *drup ta*. '*Drup*' means to establish and '*ta*' means the conclusion or the end. So *drup ta* or tenet means something which you establish in your mind after subjecting it to a vigorous analysis. It is the examination of subject matter using your reasoning power and scriptural sources, so that after going through all this in your mind you come to a conclusion that you believe is the truth.

Take for example the view of selflessness of person, which is a realisation whereby you clearly ascertain that the true nature of the person is that it is empty of inherent existence. To gain that kind of view in our mind we have mentally completed an analysis applying reasoning and scriptural sources, so that finally we overcome the misconceptions concerning the way the self or the person exists.

Not only that, but after gaining this view, when you become so certain that what you have realised is a truth, then you hold that view as a truth and you also become the promoter, or a proponent of that view. Then you can be called a proponent of a school of tenets.

Likewise we can talk in terms of whether this glass is permanent or impermanent. If you ask this question of yourself and conclude that it is impermanent, then in your mind you have to have some reason for your conclusion. Say that our reasoning is that because it is subject to momentary changes we conclude that this glass is an impermanent phenomenon or we may conclude the opposite. We have counteracted the thought or perception of the glass as being permanent. With such a realisation you can be proponent of a school of tenet. If you start to assert to others the view you have gained then you become a proponent of a tenet.

We are trying to follow the example of the Lord Buddha. We know about the Lord Buddha's skill in teaching others, and also what he actually taught. We know that the motivation behind his teachings was always the thought of love and compassion for other beings. The actual teachings were always something that was suitable and truly beneficial to others. Not only did the Buddha have the right motivation, but also it is said that even his outer gestures that the other people saw were also very delightful and pleasant for them.

We can use this example of the Buddha as a model for our daily life. Let alone putting the entire teaching of the Lord Buddha into practice, we can see the importance of even such a small quality such as the Buddha's outer gesture, and the expression that he showed to other beings. Practising like this is something that can completely change us into a very good person. This means that we always try to be watchful of our manner of speech and our actions. We should always check the effect of our words, or actions before we go ahead with them. Are they beneficial or harmful? If it is something beneficial then we use that speech; otherwise we should try to prevent ourselves from uttering those words.

Likewise we should also be watchful of our facial expressions and body language when we are interacting with others. In a way the practices of pleasant and

correct behaviour that we learn from the Buddha's teaching are something which accord with the codes of good conduct in which societies and worldly people believe. When we follow such a practice it can naturally transform our personality into something very good-natured. Also as a direct result of our actions and the manners that we show to others, we shall find more happiness and joy in our life.

Next week we shall start on the actual teaching.

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**Note on authentication**

Transcribed from the tape by Kathi Melnic

Edited by Adair Bunnett and Alan Molloy

Checked by Alan Molloy