

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

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Just make sure that your motivation to practise lam rim is bodhicitta, which is the altruistic wish to attain full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

We should make every effort to try to understand the meaning of bodhicitta, in order to ensure that whatever form of spiritual practice we undertake is a cause to achieve the fully enlightened state of buddhahood. Bodhicitta converts our actions into a cause to attain buddhahood. This state of buddhahood is not something distant from us, rather it is the actualisation of our full potential to become a fully enlightened being; bodhicitta is the main cause which predetermines our actions so they become a cause to attain buddhahood.

## Understanding our Buddha Potential

When we hear the term “buddha” or “buddhahood” we should understand that it is the highest attainable personal spiritual goal. With a proper understanding of the *Perfection of Wisdom* scriptures the first thing with which we begin in our practice is generating bodhicitta motivation. This includes the entire stages of the path to enlightenment. The conviction that the buddha nature or buddha potential exists within is strengthened when the bodhicitta mind is generated. One becomes very certain of the fact that all faults can be removed and all excellent qualities can be attained, and that the path to attain this state is mainly method and wisdom. These are the main subjects of the *Perfection of Wisdom* teachings. By relying on both the method and wisdom which can be gained through understanding the *Perfection of Wisdom* teachings, the buddha nature or buddha potential within can be nourished and ripened.

## Relating Spiritual Practice to the Mind

In essence spiritual practice is directly related to one’s mind. We hear about “state of mind” over and over again. This is because we cannot live without it - the mind always accompanies us.

What is the effect of the type of mind which is present in us? In the teachings it says that if the mind is one of bodhicitta which is a kind mind, then our physical and verbal actions will also be kind, and bring happiness both to ourselves and to others. On the other hand, if the type of mind within us is very negative, then not only will it destroy our own happiness and peace, but also the peace and happiness of others. Therefore in spiritual practice it is essential to watch our own mind and actions. This watchfulness and mindfulness will confirm the direct influence of our mind on our own and other peoples’ lives. We have to understand that while a positive state of mind has many advantages, negative

states have even more disadvantages.

We must cultivate these positive states of mind for ourselves, and be fully responsible for our own attitudes and way of thinking. This is the only way, because there are hardly any outer factors which are suitable for developing positive states of mind. In fact outer factors are more of an obstacle to developing a positive state of mind. For instance, the various people we meet and the various material possessions we own, are hindrances to developing a positive state of mind. So it is not easy to cultivate a positive state of mind, but once cultivated it is priceless and very precious. The negative or untamed states of mind should be recognised as something harmful, and as a cause of restlessness. Such negative states of mind are like the filth, so make every effort to cleanse the mind of them.

For most of us the main fault is not knowing enough about dharma rather than not practising the dharma. Knowledge of dharma is just a matter of looking into our own mind. There we can see both wholesome and unwholesome states of mind. Wholesome states of mind need to be increased and developed, whereas unwholesome states of mind need to be removed or diminished. So spiritual practice is engaging in the practice of abandoning the negative states of mind and adopting the positive ones. Not only will this practice automatically reduce the faults within us, but it will also increase our spiritual qualities.

Of course it is different if, when we turn our mind inwards, we are not worried about spiritual practice. However if we want to follow spiritual practice, this turning of the mind inwards clearly shows what our practice should be. It is all there within the mind. There are positive qualities and to make these increase we should rejoice and feel that it is great to possess such qualities. But it is a bad thing to have negative qualities, and so we feel regret and seek a method to remove them, and we resolve not to acquire such negative qualities in the future.

In this way if we practise within the context of our own mind then our study of spiritual teachings will mix with our mind, and automatically as a result of that we shall see the calming of our mind. Then we shall see more peace and happiness within.

Whenever we cultivate any spiritual quality within us we are counteracting some negative attitude or force at the same time. So when we develop any positive states of mind we are at the same time removing negative states of mind. Take the example of cultivating love or

compassion for other beings, which is said to be the most essential teachings of the buddhadharma. When we cultivate love, it is more than just wishing happiness for other beings; it also counteracts our own hatred and anger. It is a contradiction to say “I wish you happiness and send you my love”, and yet inwardly hold anger and hatred towards that person.

Love is not just something which affects other beings and contributes to their happiness, but it also affects our own happiness by reducing our hatred and anger. Likewise when we cultivate compassion wishing that no harm falls on others, simultaneously we diminish our own negative thoughts towards other beings.

### **The Mind at the Time of Death**

We have finished the causes or conditions by which death occurs. Now we discuss the type of mind at death. This primarily refers to the two states of mind, or the mental factors called craving and grasping which mature the propelling karma to take future rebirth.

We may have stored within us both white and black types of karma. The mind, at the time of death, will nourish one of them. Whether it is black or white karma will depend on:

1. the one which is most powerful or **forceful** will be nourished at the time of death.
2. if the force of the white and black karmas within us is equal, the determining factor will be the one with which we are **better acquainted**.
3. if our acquaintance with both these karmas, and the force of both these karmas is the same, then the next factor which will nourish this karma is the **time** of that karma's creation. That is, whichever is created first will be nourished and ripened first.

So at the time of death whichever karma is ripened depends upon firstly force, then the degree of familiarity or acquaintance, and lastly the time of creation of the karma. This will then take us into the next rebirth.

This further detail shows us that we should act to practise virtuous karma as much as possible, and make ourselves as familiar as possible with virtue, since this type of karma can determine our future rebirth. Similarly we should try to refrain from negative karma which is powerful and also diminish our familiarity with such karma.

These teachings are not just about our time of death, but also concern what practice we should do now. This is because the practice we do now can be the most important cause to ensure that we have the most favourable state of mind at death. Next week we study what happens at the time of death.

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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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### ***Edit methodology***

*The initial transcript is prepared from Alan Molloy's notes. These are checked with Damien Busby's notes by Alan Molloy and any differences noted.*

*Adair Bunnnett then compares her notes against the typed transcript and prepares this edited version.*

*Edited version checked by Alan Molloy*

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