

# Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



30 April 1996

Everyone should make sure that they cultivate the motivation of bodhicitta. The reason why we study and practise Lam Rim is to attain the highest state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

## 422.221.133: 3rd Cause of Delusions: Bad Friends (Cont.)

ལྷོ་ལམ་།

Last week we discussed what we called ill-friends, or wrong friendship, as a cause of generating mental distraction. It is important that we are not influenced by the distractions of poor friends.<sup>1</sup> If they are very fond of drinking alcohol or reading distracting books then we may develop the same habits. If we allow ourselves to be influenced by negative advice from our friends, then we may lose our virtuous qualities, and end up adopting their bad habits.

The point here is that we are our own best protectors, because if we examine our actions very thoroughly, we can see that many of them are harmful to ourself. If we take responsibility for our own actions, and if we utilise our discriminating mind, then we can get rid of all those internal and external stains which we possess.

In trying to remove all these internal and external stains we cannot afford to be overly influenced by outside friends, and especially the advice of a poor friend. If, for example you have taken moral precepts or observe special vows, it is so easy to lose those vows or precepts and engage in some immoral action if you follow the advice of a poor friend. Listening to poor friends and following their advice means that it is most likely that you will end up like them. Try to realise how much outer friends can distract the mind, thus causing more delusions to develop.

One of the reasons why we must be very careful in socialising with, or befriending others, is that it is very easy to be tainted by non-virtue, whereas virtue is something which is very difficult to attain. The only way, therefore, to ensure our progress in increasing our virtuous qualities, and decreasing non-virtuous qualities is to be self-guided, and to allow less influence from outer conditions. There are many causes of distraction. We can never find a friend with no desire for things, who never gets angry or jealous, or who has no pride. In a

way, everyone in the outside world is trapped by their desire for the pleasures of this life.

We do, however, have the capacity to do what we want. For example, if a friend becomes very angry it is not necessary for us also to also become angry; we do have a choice. If we wish to do so, we can protect ourself from doing the things we believe to be destructive. If we think that spending more time with a friend (or anyone with whom we are socialising) will increase our delusions or negative actions, then as far as we are concerned time spent with that person is not doing us any good. Whether or not that person is good or respected by others is not important. What is important is that if they influence us to increase delusion or negative actions, it is to our advantage to minimise the time spent with that person.

## Showing Love and Compassion to All

If we were to be analytical about this subject of abandoning poor friends, then it might occur to us "Is this not contradictory to Buddha's teachings that all sentient beings deserve compassion and loving kindness?" To avoid such doubt we must clearly know that when it says "Abandon the poor or bad friend" it really means to abandon the negative or non-virtuous actions which they do. It is not saying to stop showing compassion to them. In fact we have good reason to show them love and compassion, because they deserve our help. Likewise this teaching on abandoning poor friends is also applicable to those we regard as virtuous friends, because they also have some shortcomings or negative habits.

In association with this topic we find in the commentary text the "Ten Inner Treasures of Kadampa". These ten are something to be practised, and you can refer to the text for these. (Refer to list at the end of this transcript.)

We shall understand the reason for studying mental delusions - identifying them, knowing their causes and results - very clearly in the context of our own experience. Then we see that the outcome of delusions is that they have incredible power to force us to do actions which are very undesirable and negative. Yet under the influence of those delusions we continue to perform those negative acts. Delusions, then, have the power to remove our choices. They completely overpower our mind and our actions, and we become powerless under their force.

Having understood delusions in the context of our own experience, then we can also understand delusions in the context of our outer friends, when they lose control and become angry. In that situation our friend is completely

<sup>1</sup> To make the text flow more smoothly, we have chosen to use the term 'poor friend' rather than 'ill friend'. As the teaching makes clear later on, such people are not necessarily poor in every aspect of their personality, it is just that they are poor for the development of all aspects of virtue within us

overpowered by anger. Not only are their actions completely under the control of delusion, but they also experience emotions which are very tormenting and disturbing. They are suffering, they need help, they lack joy, peace and happiness. With this understanding we see the reason for us to show them compassion and love and not to cause them harm. Our feeling of wanting to be close to them is not desire or attachment, it is love.

If we also consider situations where there is conflict between partners in a relationship, the immediate cause is because both partners have engaged in negative activities, and have negative thoughts. In other words the conflict is between the negative thoughts and actions of both people. If even one partner showed positive thought and actions, instead of these negative thoughts and actions, then this conflict would not occur, or if it did it would be resolved quickly.

To a large extent, if we cultivate a better attitude in our mind, and adopt a better way of performing actions, then our life would not be too influenced by outside factors.

#### **422.221.134: 4th Cause of Delusions: Reading Distracting Books**

བཞུགས་པ།

The fourth cause of delusion is reading distracting books, which refers to those books which can arouse any delusion. For example books about war can stimulate anger or hatred as a direct outcome of reading that book, whilst books on sex can arouse sexual desire and lust.

It is obvious that what we find in sex books, (where the content is totally to do with the descriptions of kissing or copulation, and physical ways to stimulate desire) is all designed to stimulate sexual desire in the reader's mind. Likewise books on the causes of war stimulates our mind to investigate who is right and wrong, and then for no personal reason we feel anger towards one side. Other books can bring more ignorance to our mind, whilst yet others can bring more jealousy.

So these books are a cause of generating delusions, and have to be abandoned if we want to minimise the amount of delusion. On the other hand it is to our advantage to read those books which inspire more virtuous thoughts, like books on the life of great spiritual practitioners. In Tibetan, the stories of such masters are called "nam-tar" or "liberation". By reading these we can be motivated to undertake positive activities in our own lives.

#### **422.221.135: 5th Cause of Delusions: Familiarity with Delusions**

ཤེས་པ།

The fifth cause of delusion is familiarity with them. This is concerned with how easily we can generate delusion in our mind, regardless of any cause or (obvious) reason. The arousal of such a delusion depends upon the degree of our familiarity with that particular delusion. We are all different with regard to the types of delusions we generate. For some people generating attachment is very easy, and does not require a highly attractive object. For them any object which has a slight degree of attractiveness can generate desire. For other people it is

the opposite; even a very attractive object will not stimulate them to generate desire. If a person is very familiar with anger, it will only take a very small circumstance for them to generate anger.

To a large extent these differences occur because of our familiarity with delusions in past lives. Any effort we make in this life to minimise this familiarity with any delusion, will at least bear fruit in future lives. We also have to make an effort to diminish our familiarity with delusions in this life, because if we are very habituated to them it will become harder and harder for us to counter them in the future. The best way to reduce this familiarity with delusions is practising meditation.

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#### *Edit methodology*

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*Edited version checked by Alan Molloy*

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### **The Ten Innermost Jewels of the Kadam Tradition (Ten Inner Treasures of Kadampa)**

There are three divisions:

- 1 The four entrustments
  - a Entrusting one's mind and thoughts to one's Dharma Practice
  - b Entrusting one's Dharma Practice to life as a beggar
  - c Entrusting one's life as a beggar to death
  - d Entrusting one's death to a barren cave
- 2 The three Vajra-like convictions
  - a The Vajra-like conviction to be stalwart towards any hindrances caused by friends or relatives
  - b The Vajra-like conviction to disregard the opinion of worldly people
  - c The Vajra-like conviction to firmly guard one's practice
- 3 The three changes in one's living status
  - a Expulsion from the ranks of people
  - b Finding oneself among the ranks of dogs
  - c Attaining divine ranks

For an explanation of The Ten Innermost Jewels of the Kadam Tradition refer to page 49 of the Tibetan Tradition of Mental Development by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey.

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7 May 1996

Before starting the discourse both students and teachers recite prayers taking refuge, and for the generation of bodhicitta. If we put these prayers into practice, it means that right from the beginning, we generate the right motivation.

The significance of reciting the refuge prayer - taking refuge in the three jewels - shows that the spiritual path we are following is not perverted. When, after taking refuge, we recite the bodhicitta prayer and generate bodhicitta, this shows that this path which we follow is not an ordinary one, but is a superior path. This is just to remind you.

In the teachings so far, we have finished:

- identifying the delusions, and
- the stages in which delusions are generated.

The current section we are studying is the causes of delusions. There are six main causes, of which we have finished five.

## 422.221.136: 6th Cause of Delusions: Mental Intention

ཡིད་ལ་བྱེད་པ།

The sixth cause of delusion is mental intention. This cause helps us to trace back to the original cause of delusion.

"Mental intention" means the initial thought process by which our mind becomes associated with an object. In the beginning we just have a thought of a particular object. The next stage depends upon how we view that object. When the object appears to our mind, our mind immediately starts to project its own view onto that object.

If the mind views that object as very attractive then it begins to think over and over about that object's qualities in terms of its shape and colour. Such an object can be animate, for example a man or a woman. These thoughts can develop that object into one which is absolutely beautiful from the top of the head downwards, in all respects - colour, shape, smell. Then our desire for that object will become very strong. As a result of our strong attachment we become completely absorbed in the object, even if it is not near us, or we have not actually possessed it. As a result we then suffer out of fear of losing that object or not obtaining it.

Likewise if we superimpose negative qualities on an object, then hatred will arise as a result of thinking about that object. Thinking of someone and generating that thought not just once but over and over for a whole year, and thinking of how that person has caused trouble and

loss to us, will naturally increase hatred towards that object.

Knowing about mental intention gives us a very good knowledge of the source of delusions such as anger and hatred. The main reason is that we are attached to an object due to its superficial qualities, and those qualities have been created by our own thought processes. This gives rise to the attachment and hatred which are such a source of suffering in our life.

Understanding this on the basis of our own life, we can also see how others are in the same situation. We can see how their delusions started, and how those delusions are the cause of their suffering; we can see that they are victims of their delusions. So we are in a good position to give helpful advice to others.

## How do our Thoughts Change our Experiences?

It is said that of the six causes of delusion, the fifth and sixth causes are the most serious. Learning about the sixth cause shows that our way of thinking is a very influential cause of delusions. We must know what kind of thinking or thought process can stimulate desire, (and similarly with other delusions such as hatred). Knowing that a particular way of thinking about an object can stimulate desire for it, we can prevent that desire by thinking of that object in a way which is the opposite of the previous way of thinking. If we have one particular state of mind or thought, then we cannot also have the opposite type of thought, because the two cannot exist simultaneously.

This can be applied to a situation where we find it difficult to go to sleep. The reason is that the type of mind which occupies us wanders after very gross objects. To go to sleep we have to subdue all those very gross thoughts.

If we do not eliminate desire for a particular object, it will continually make us suffer. Desire arises when we view an object as very attractive, and this view can become very fixed and instinctive. Because it is so strong we may believe that it is impossible to view that object in any other way, and so we believe that we cannot decrease desire. But if we ask "do we have potential to view the object of desire as ugly or unattractive?" then the answer is "yes". It may be difficult in the beginning but we do have that potential to view the object as unattractive.

Of all the types of suffering which we experience in life, that which we experience in our mind due to the disease of delusions is the most lasting and serious. On the other hand, if we are free of the disease of delusions, and

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always know how to cure ourselves of that disease, if we enjoy sound health and body, then we can say there is no other reason which can be a real cause of problems to our life. All other conditions - food, clothes, shelter - are very minor.

Applying this to our daily experience, we see that the reason why there is no balance and stability in our life and in our relationships with others, is also because of the lack of a stable view of things. This is, of course, due to the ignorance which obscures our perceptions. So, in relation to our partner, our view can change from like to dislike, in even a single day even though our partner will not change a lot physically. In the morning our view can be that of a very lovable partner to whom we are attracted. We feel that we can trust them completely and we feel very certain in our knowledge of them. But in a short time this changes. All it takes is to see something unpleasant. Then our attitude also becomes very unpleasant. Instead of feeling close we feel very distant. We lose trust and feel uncertain towards them.

So it is hard. The basic cause is ignorance in the mind, but the immediate cause is our view - the constant change in our view from like to dislike, and vice versa. The result of this is that it is difficult to not only assess our own life, but also that of another. We feel that there is no-one who we can wholeheartedly trust.

This finishes the causes of delusions. Of course if we went into detail about these causes we could go on for months!

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14 May 1996

Try to establish the bodhicitta motivation, and think that with this bodhicitta motivation we shall listen to the teachings, and put them into practice.

## 422.221.14: Faults of Delusions

ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་ཉེས་དམིགས།

We are now up to the study of one of the major headings which is the faults of delusions. The purpose of knowing about these faults is to overcome delusions, and all their results.

We must relate this to all the types of suffering which exist. In the meditation we have just done we contemplated six types of suffering: uncertainty, lack of satisfaction, the lack of friends and so on. Last week we meditated on the three types of suffering: suffering of suffering, suffering of change and all pervasive suffering. All these sufferings derive from delusions, and without stopping those delusions we cannot stop suffering. If we investigate the link between suffering and its cause we find that suffering is the result of the karmic actions we have performed, and these karmic actions were in themselves driven by the force of mental delusions which dominate our mind. The whole purpose of knowing about mental delusions and the truth of suffering is to arouse a sense of dissatisfaction in order to reduce our desire for this world of cyclic existence.

### The Intention to Actually Remove Delusions

Let us review the order of the teachings leading up to this topic of the faults of delusions. We firstly identified the types of delusions. Then came the topic of causes of delusions. By knowing the cause of delusions we then know the reasons why delusions arise in our mind, so we learnt about those. Delusions arise because of certain causes and conditions. When all the conditions are present, then naturally delusions will arise within us.

Therefore this next topic of the fault of delusions is important because without knowing about their faults we won't do anything practical to remove them.

All these teachings have to be integrated as a practice for our mental development, in order for us to find lasting peace, happiness and stability in life. With delusions in our mind it is said that we cannot achieve either mental or physical happiness which is what we seek in either the short or long term. On examination we see that we do not find enough inner peace, and even if we do find a degree of peace and happiness, it is very temporary and short lasting. Normally, when we think of the causes of

happiness or suffering in life we focus on the outer conditions of our life. But if we consider our own experience, we see that the cause is actually within us, and any moment our mood can change from a very stable, happy and content one, to a very discontented state of mind.

In our experience we know that sometimes the cause of our restlessness is not something which is visible or concrete, yet we feel that inside us there is something causing this restlessness. It is something which drives us to do something to be happy: to do something, to go somewhere, to see someone or to touch something. Under such circumstances it is important to look for the real cause of that suffering, which is something within us.

Suppose you have chosen to live with one thousand people in the hope that they can support and protect you. In fact it is possible that out of the one thousand people the majority might actually dislike or even hate you! The cause of this is the lack of stability or control over your mind, which makes you generate delusions such as attachment and hatred towards the various objects you confront in life. If the objects are very pleasant then we generate desire, which then causes the mind to be distracted and agitated, so that it cannot easily be calmed. Or if you meet with some unfavourable situation or unpleasant object your mental response to that situation is hatred or dislike. With hatred in the mind there is no mental peace. It is mainly because of the lack of a balanced view of things that we cannot find a balance in our daily life.

The reason we become very agitated, restless and unhappy is not because of external situation or objects. If we could stabilise our mental perspective of things, then even if the outer objects we meet are very attractive, we shall not become too mentally attracted to them. If the object is unattractive we won't feel hatred towards it. If we are strong enough in our practice it is possible to transform all our experiences (even unpleasant ones) into a means of spiritual development. For instance if we confront an unfavourable circumstance which normally stimulates hatred we can transform that circumstance to reinforce our practice of patience.

These teachings instruct us to change our view from the very mundane view of things to a very spiritual, beneficial and realistic view. It is a matter of contemplating very deeply which view is better. It is as a

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result of such deep contemplation that we gain some sense of wisdom in the mind.

What is the general view which most normal people believe is the normal response to things? In this mundane view when someone expresses desire towards us we must return it because not doing so is suppressing our feelings of pleasure or joy. Likewise if someone shows hatred to you, and if you do not in return show hatred, there is a feeling that you are somehow losing something. In terms of a spiritual perspective this mundane view is all very misleading, and of no benefit to anyone. With a spiritual perspective on the other hand, happiness can be obtained by abandoning both desire and anger.

As part of our spiritual training we must know that abandoning desire, anger and other delusions is the path to lasting peace and happiness, and so we must know how to abandon these delusions. We must also see how all other beings are tormented by delusions. For it is delusions which are responsible for bringing conflict into our relationships; it is delusion which turns friends into enemies. With delusions there is no basis for the formation of any true or beneficial relationship with others. We start a relationship with desire and lust for each other. When someone shows desire and attachment for you, then you respond in the same way believing that it is a very meaningful relationship. However if we investigate the basis of this relationship, we see that it has no good foundation as it is based on desire which we know can change quickly. As soon as the desire of one partner decreases, the other feels hurt and rejected. This feeling is all the outcome of desire. Thinking of desire for each other, as the main substance which keeps a relationship intact can be a source of a great deal of suffering, because desire by its nature changes very quickly. Great numbers of people suffer because of this view. They have the disease of suffering, because they have the disease of delusions.

The outcome of anger is very apparent, and so is the suffering it causes. The moment it arises in our mind we lose all peace and happiness. It may start with an exchange of a few harsh words, but if it is not stopped the conflict will become a great problem to resolve. We can see how in our practice we must suffer because of not overcoming delusions. So to minimise suffering we must minimise delusions, or at least stop them from increasing.

Mental suffering or misery is not something we can see with our eyes, but it can be very intense. In fact it is more harmful to us than any form of physical suffering. Therefore when we talk about feeling compassion, it is not only towards those in physical pain, but also to those experiencing mental suffering. If it can be generated such a compassion is very profound.

The compulsory exam question will be, explain the verse which is a quotation from Maitreya's "Ornament or Sutra" which is about the faults of delusions - p 519 Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand:

Delusions destroy you,  
Destroy sentient beings,  
And destroy your ethics.  
You hold your equals as inferiors,  
Guardians and teachers criticise you,  
And you do not heed opponents.  
You will be born in unconducive states.  
Your acquisitions and non-acquisitions  
Will decline, and you'll have great suffering.

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4 June 1996

We should generate a genuine thought to seek enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings. Then think "To achieve this state of complete enlightenment I am listening to, and practising these stages of the path or Lam Rim."

Having finished identifying the mental delusions and their causes, the next subject is the disadvantages of mental delusions.

## 422.221.14: Disadvantages of Mental Delusions

ཉོན་མོངས་པའི་ཉེས་དམིགས།

If we are totally ignorant of the drawbacks of mental delusions, then far from seeing them as something to be counteracted, we see delusions such as desire as a very positive and pleasant state of mind.

As it is very difficult to root out mental delusions, the best advice is to firstly target the mental delusions which are most personally destructive, and which cause immediate harm to us. Then as a result we shall experience more ease and happiness within.

Generally speaking our mind has the full potential to possess true peace and happiness. However due to other factors and conditions we are unable to ripen this potential. Even if we do experience some happiness and peace its duration is only momentary. Think of a moment where you are in a very joyful state of mind but in the next moment you experience very unpleasant feelings. If we examine we find that it is delusions that have brought about this change. In fact this loss of peace and happiness in the mind is an indication that delusions have arisen in our mind.

## Benefits of Being Aware of the Disadvantages of Delusions

Although we are talking of an abstract thing in our mind when we talk of delusions, that state of mind can also be seen in our outer behaviour. When any form of delusion overpowers our mind we feel totally deprived of inner happiness and become very vulnerable to outer factors and conditions. We become very emotionally temperamental and become easily upset or very angry.

There are many benefits in having a very good knowledge of how the mental delusions which we generate in our mind affect our experience and choice of actions. The main one is gaining more control over our thoughts and deeds, as well as becoming more knowledgeable and skilled in dealing with outside people.

As mentioned before, when delusions occupy the minds

of another person, these delusions also have the same effect. This person will become very vulnerable and can be easily hurt. Without knowing this, then even the slightest wrong-doing to your friend can cause them great mental suffering.

Therefore it is most important, that when that friend is under the influence of delusions, to make a special effort to restrain your own speech and actions. Do not say much, or if you do, then only say something to help them. You have to see that at this time your friend is most in need of your help, and does not need any further cause of trouble from you. With this understanding we learn to be more kind, tolerant and helpful to other beings whose minds are very disturbed, and such knowledge can benefit both ourselves and others.

## Other Drawbacks of Delusions

The Lam Rim commentary mentions some other drawbacks of delusions.

- When delusion arises in the mind it becomes non-virtuous. For instance as a result of the influence of desire in the mind you might commit non-virtuous actions of sexual misconduct, or lying and so forth. Under the influence of anger you might even commit an act of murder.
- The text says that delusions turn the object of your mind to an unwholesome or a perverted object. Due to delusions, instead of being kind and helpful to the people with whom you have relationships, we cause harm to them. The various objects which our mind sees are in actuality objects deserving our love, and compassion, instead they become a cause for developing more delusions. Even when practising meditation whenever delusions arise you immediately lose the object of your meditation.
- Whenever we generate delusions we strengthen the potency of the seed of that delusion. Each moment that we let delusion arise in our mind makes the root of that delusion firmer. It makes that delusion arise continuously, without any break. If it is not counteracted then it becomes easier for that same delusion to continuously arise in the future. Without challenging delusions there is no break in their continuity.
- Furthermore it says that delusions are a cause to create actions which are despised by noble and holy beings. As a result of those non-virtuous actions we then have to suffer in this life and future lives. If for example we steal something out of desire, the

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immediate result which will be seen in this lifetime is to face the death penalty or be physically punished.

- Also it is said the delusions increase the time needed to reach liberation and the state of complete enlightenment, for in order to reach both the state of liberation and complete enlightenment one needs to abandon delusions.
- The text also says that delusions are the cause for a decrease in our virtuous actions because, if for instance out of delusion we commit the action of killing, it is a cause for the deterioration of our own good nature.
- Delusions are also the cause of destroying our good nature and conduct. It is possible that someone who is very good natured can become very ill-natured due to the influence of delusions over their personality.
- Delusions also decrease the practice of pure moral ethics.
- They are a cause of bringing disrepute. Because of delusions one might engage in arguments or disputes with others and so develop a bad reputation.
- The text also says that all the wealth and respect gained from others is affected by delusions.

Next week we shall explain the meaning of some quotations about the faults of delusions.

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