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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལཱ་ལག་བཅངས།

5 December 1995

Make sure that you generate the motivation of bodhicitta, by thinking that studying and practising this teaching of the stages of the path is to attain the complete state of enlightenment, for the sake of all sentient beings.

The Importance of Motivation

When instructed to generate the right frame of mind, we should understand that our mind can be changed, or transformed, or modified. In actuality the fundamental nature of the mind is crystal clear, and not polluted by any negativities. Rather, it is due to conditional factors that we generate the various types of thoughts in the mind, which can be very destructive and disturbing.

In trying to bring some transformation to our mind we are trying to get rid of these disturbing thoughts, and replace them with positive ones such as a good heart or benevolent attitude. With the cultivation of such a positive frame of mind, our actions will yield very positive results.

Since our motivation has influence over our actions, it is very important to check one's motivation before engaging in any activities. It makes some difference to our daily actions if, on first getting up in the morning, we check our mind and begin the day with a very positive mind - a mind which cares for other beings. Depending upon the amount of effort we make, and our level of knowledge and skills, developing this habit can enable us to make progress in transforming our mind, and thereby our actions.

So whenever we are advised to generate the right motivation, we have to develop the notion that if we make some effort, our mind can be changed - even if we find disturbing thoughts there. We must generate the conviction that if we wish, we can change our mind.

Being Able To Enjoy Life Depends Upon Our Mind

As a benefit of achieving some purification in our mind we can experience some sense of happiness and purity and peace within ourselves, as well as experiencing happiness from the good outer conditions of life. Whereas if our mind is not pure, and is filled with some negativity, then we lack peace within and cannot find any peace or satisfaction from outside factors. So creating the right conditions for mental peace and happiness is essential. It is also our responsibility.

Our physical comfort is also important to us, and it depends upon ourselves as to whether we enjoy good or bad health. To some extent it is beyond our control due to the karmic actions of past lives, but the immediate conditions are within our control. We have the knowledge of what is suitable, and what is not suitable for our health. So we should take every action to prevent those unsuitable conditions, and meet the suitable ones. For example, if we are sick but take the right medicine, then our health can be restored to normal.

In the same way we can maintain the soundness of our mind. It is in our own hands to avoid those conditions which bring unhappiness and unease to the mind. By removing those conditions, and creating the conditions for happiness, then to a certain degree we can create the conditions for inner peace and happiness.

As Geshe-la always says: we can be our own best excellent master when we place less hope on outer factors and conditions. Then we place less hope on outside friends to provide support or pity. If we become our own master then we shall never have to feel unhappy, disappointed or discouraged about life because there is no-one who cares for us. Thinking like that, there is the expectation that others will do things for us so we feel helpless and disappointed if they do not. It is all due to our state of mind.

So our mind can be the direct cause of our own suffering or misery. If we examine our mind thoroughly, it might only be a small thought that is the cause of our misery, and getting rid of that thought is the solution to the problem. It can also be our own thoughts or state of mind which prevent us enjoying life, or the good conditions in which we live. Such thoughts blind us to those good conditions. In such situations we are unhappy, not because there are no conditions for happiness, but because of our untamed thoughts we do not recognise them. So there are advantages of learning about our own mind, and putting these teachings on mind training into practice.

Just as suffering mainly arises from within our mind, so true happiness is also something to be found within our mind. Our goal in life is enjoying physical and mental happiness. If we find that, then there is no need to worry about anything else: it does not matter much whether we

are materially rich or poor. On the other hand, if we do not enjoy happiness of mind and body in our life, then what is the use of becoming very rich? In fact it will turn out that the richer we are, the more things there are to worry our mind, and exhaust our body.

Therefore when we talk of happiness or satisfaction or fulfilment, it all depends upon contentment with whatever we possess in life. It does not depend upon many outer factors. For instance we can see many people who are not all that rich, but who live a very contented life. Whereas there are others who have millions and millions of dollars, and lead a very busy life. Mentally they are continuously restless, and physically they are always very busy.

In terms of our outer living conditions of comfort we are talking about the conditions to feed one mouth, the clothes for one body, and the shelter for one body. In terms of material conditions finding those requirements is not that hard, and they are sufficient, because we cannot make use of more than that at any one moment. In our pursuit of mental happiness we must learn how to look at our situation in various ways, and in this way we can tame our mind. With a tamed mind we shall live a very satisfactory and contented life with no complaints, regardless of outer conditions.

With an untamed mind we complain when we are unemployed, then we complain when we must work every single day. To rid yourself of these thoughts and feel positive about going to work, consider those who are extremely rich. They must work hard physically for many hours, and mentally worry about their financial situation. Compared to them we have nothing and are very poor, and we have to work to make a living, but then even those who are very rich must also work very hard.

So looking at our situation in such different ways, can help to calm the mind, and thereby enable us to find inner peace and happiness.

422.221.111.6 6th Root Delusion: Afflicted View

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To continue the Lam Rim teaching we have finished the first five root delusions called the five non-view delusions. The 6th root delusion is called Afflicted View and it has five divisions. This will be discussed next time. For homework go over the five wrong views in the commentary text.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

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12 December 1995

Try to generate the best motivation that you can.

Influencing the Effectiveness of our Practice

One of the main elements which makes a great difference to the quality of our practice is the motivation with which we engage in it. It is more important to perform a practice properly than to just consider the length of time for which we perform that practice. When we know how to perform our practice in the tight way we know that our future - be it good or bad - is all in our own hands. As our motivation is a very important part of any practice we need spiritual inspiration in order to always keep it alive in ourselves.

To generate such spiritual inspiration we must realise that the life we presently enjoy is very fortunate, since we are born as human beings having all the suitable conditions to practise the dharma. This human life allows us to freely follow spiritual practice. Both mind and body are sound, and endowed with the potential to practise dharma. Having obtained a human rebirth with healthy mind and body, but no contact with spiritual teachings is a disadvantage. However we have met spiritual dharma, and are born in a place and time where it flourishes. But even with all these, it would be a disadvantage if we had not found a perfect, qualified spiritual guide. We are very fortunate in having met such a spiritual guide. Therefore our life is very fortunate in having all these favourable internal and external conditions. With such a favourable situation you must generate the motivation to seize the benefits it provides.

Therefore, when you practise dharma focus more on the quality of the practice, since the quality of the practice acts as a cause to accumulate the causes to achieve liberation. If, for even two minutes every day we create the cause for liberation, then over a year we accumulate so many causes! Thus performing our practice properly will be of great benefit in the long run.

Our Best Refuge or Protection

When facing difficulties or sadness our own dharma practice can protect, or give us refuge. Therefore it becomes very important for us to perform our practice as well as possible, and also to consider the way dharma practice saves us from the suffering of life's problems. The practice of dharma means calming one's own mind. When we have achieved some control over our own

mind; when we are able to discipline and change our mind by ourselves; then if we apply the practice of dharma in a time of misery, it will be very soothing, and very effective in solving problems.

Therefore, as part of our practice we have to focus on our mind or inner continuum. By doing this we can see its faults by ourself. Through this we can see that all the problems we face, and those events which take place in our life which introduce some change, are all like the reflections of change in our own mind.

Normally the causes of all the changes which take place in ourselves are something which we identify with external objects or conditions in life. For example, we become angry when we see someone who we do not like or who we hate. The reason why we hate that person is because we see some outward fault in that person. Likewise when an outer object is seen as very attractive, the quality of beauty seen in our mind is something 'out there', and thus we generate desire or attachment for that object.

In fact it is due to our perception of things that we generate these various types of emotions. Anger, desire, and so on, are all due to something within our own mind. For example if the force of anger is very strong and deep within us, then it is very easy to become angry at any object at any time. Similarly the force of desire in us may be very strong, so that we become attached to things very quickly.

Therefore in terms of practising dharma and making progress in that practice, we must investigate our mindstream. Then within ourselves we must check whether we have more positive or more negative energy. If we have more negative energy it shows **that** this energy is very strong, and it abides in us very naturally because we have familiarised ourselves with its force in this life, or in past lives.

If for example the force or energy within us is dominated by the force of the three poisonous minds, try to see how our life and actions are dominated by those three poisonous minds. Then by the force of these three poisonous minds our daily actions become more harmful both to ourselves and to others. For example, through the influence of anger our mind changes even towards those close to us, causing us to show a very unfriendly

face and speak with harsh words. Whereas if the force within us is dominated by love and compassion, then our actions will be more caring towards others and so will be more beneficial to both ourselves and to others.

The practice of dharma then, means to make an effort to generate more positive states of mind. Whether it be actual love and compassion, or an intellectual love and compassion, or even artificial love and compassion, at least we cultivate some love and compassion in our mind.

Then, even if in this life the influence of negative minds is so strong because of familiarity with such negative minds over many lifetimes, we shall be able to cultivate actual love and compassion in future lives. Gaining control and cultivating positive states of mind will benefit both ourselves and others. It will reduce negative minds, and increase positive states of mind, and this progress will have direct influence on our deeds and will benefit others. For example, in general children can pick up a lot of habits from their parents. If the parents are very kind, friendly and hospitable to others, then the children are inspired to do the same. It also benefits others either directly or indirectly in terms of being able to show tolerance by acknowledging our own faults if we cause problems to others (especially our close friends). There is no need to feel ashamed about saying sorry. As we develop more self-awareness, this will naturally increase our practice of patience and so on.

Why is There a Need to Calm the Mind?

Before realising that the practice of dharma or meditation is to calm the mind, one has to know why there is this need to calm the mind. It is because all our problems derive from the mind. All our dissatisfaction or unhappiness is like a form of mental illness, which results from various negative states of mind.

If we examine within ourselves very thoroughly we can clearly see that anger, for example, is a form of mental illness, or can be a cause of mental illness which brings pain to us. How does this pain arise? It is simple. Out of anger we can upset even a very close friend. As a result of that our relationship changes. The resulting damage will make us feel very unhappy. Every thought of that friend, or that relationship, is very painful. And this pain is the result of our own anger.

Likewise desire or attachment can cause pain or bring mental illness. When you generate attachment you become very attracted to that person, (even if they have been your enemy) and out of attachment, you will place all your trust and hope in them. But later on when that person does not fulfil your hopes you will feel very disappointed. That feeling of disappointment is like an illness resulting from attachment.

Instead of applying dharma or meditation to remedy this illness some people seek help in external things such as alcohol, cigarettes or drugs. As a result they lose not only their mental health, but their physical health as well.

Their hygiene deteriorates, and they attract diseases. Mentally they may lose their memory, clear thinking and so forth.

What is the Use of Spiritual Practice or Meditation?

Spiritual practice or meditation enables us to recover from, or prevent that mental illness. Spiritual practice removes negative states of mind. We receive benefits, and where possible we should show this path of meditation or dharma to others; for example to your friends who are in need. If they are caught up in problems, and if you think the solution lies in the practice of dharma, or meditation, then you **should help** them.

Thinking back over this year we should try to feel positive about attending the Tuesday night study program. Try to feel that all the effort - listening to teachings, studying putting into practice and discussing topics with others - you made in attending Study Group over the year is the accumulation of causes to attain the state of everlasting joy and happiness, or liberation. So, like a beggar finding millions of dollars, take delight in finding this opportunity and try to rejoice **in our effort** as part of this Study Group.

To conclude these Study Group teachings we shall offer the Long Mandala, then 21 Taras, then the final Lam Rim dedication prayer, and then Lama Tsong Khapa prayer three times.

Geshe-la would personally like to thank everyone, since this Study Group has been most beneficial for the centre and for himself. Many of you have made a great contribution to the centre by attending the Study Group. There are some who, having learnt from the Study Group, have continued their own practice, and taught the teachings to others. Geshe Doga says that he has great admiration for them. Others took Study Group teachings in the past and no longer attend them, but continue the practice of dharma teachings in their own life and help others. Geshe Doga would like to thank them too. In this way it has been a fruitful year for all of us here.

Geshe Doga would like to say that his motivation for supporting the centre is all to benefit all beings, not only now, but in the future as well. Therefore you should feel confident that the support that you give the centre will not only benefit people now, but will also be of benefit in the future.

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5 March 1996

Tonight we commence the Study Group teachings for this year. Geshe Doga is delighted to see you and would like to welcome everyone to these teachings.

Geshe Doga says he will not begin the actual teaching tonight. Rather he will give an introduction to meditation. Apart from this it is very important that everyone who joins the group is aware of the commitments, the constitution and what Study Group involves. Tonight we shall use the time as relaxation for all of us.

There is one truth which we must understand and accept in our life, and that is the truth of interdependence. No matter what we try to do in life we have to rely upon various other conditions. We cannot do things solely by ourselves. For example if we undertake a course of study, there are many factors which we need to meet. There are factors and conditions from our own side and factors and conditions from the side of the outside world/outside conditions. Without depending upon others we cannot get anywhere, and we cannot even live our life. This is an important fact, and we should try to realise how everything is interdependent.

The True Cause of Happiness

Whether there is happiness or suffering in our life depends upon the respective causes and conditions. We all know that when the conditions in our life are favourable for us, then naturally there is more joy and happiness.

To some extent we can directly perceive the causes of both our happiness and suffering. We all wish for more happiness of course, so what is the nature of the happiness which we seek in life? It consists of our own good physical health, and the happiness of our mind.

Therefore the conditions for happiness can be explained in terms of external and internal factors and the creation of those conditions depends upon each one of us. There are certain conditions that each one of us has to create by ourselves, and there are other factors or suitable conditions which we must find by observing the outside world, e.g. by observing other people. By observing how other people do things we can create the same conditions for ourselves, and thus take care of the external

conditions essential for the health of our mind and body. Our body is so important to sustain happiness in daily life, because if we physically get sick and experience pain this has a direct effect upon us. There are many factors which generate, bring or enhance good health in our body.

But the happiness we seek does not just depend upon outside factors. There is also inner happiness which is essential for us. It is this inner satisfaction which brings true joy and satisfaction to the mind.

The mind is a very important part of our reality so it is essential to secure happiness in our mind. It's link with ourself is something very intimate and unbreakable. It is a deeper, more important link than the relationship of the physical body to ourself.

The mind is always with us. What the mind experiences is a personal experience, and those experiences of our mind also depend upon various conditions. There are conditions which enhance the peace and happiness in our mind, and which are very healthy for our mind.

Generally speaking in our daily search for peace and happiness in life our focus is mainly on outer, **external** conditions and factors. This is not to say that they are unimportant, but we have to realise at the same time that we are responsible for creating the right conditions within ourselves. Then, having created those conditions within, we must then know how to maintain them - just as we would cherish and try to safeguard good external conditions.

In order to maintain physical health we must apply some discipline about what we eat and drink, otherwise we can damage our physical health. Our body is like a basis or home for our mind and self, and if our physical health is damaged it can also affect our mind and ourself. On the other hand if we enjoy good physical health it is an advantage to ourself, and to our mind. Then we have more capacity to direct our energy to developing our mind. It is through developing our mind that we can decrease or minimise the negative qualities in our mind, and increase the positive ones, and so give access to the limitless source of peace and happiness within ourselves.

Suffering and Joy as Experiences of the Mind

On most occasions experiencing some happiness or misery is the immediate result of our own actions. Although changing our ways of performing the actions of body, speech and mind takes commitment, understanding and effort from our own side.

On most occasions experiencing some happiness or misery is the immediate result of our own actions. Although changing our ways of performing the actions of body, speech and mind takes commitment, understanding and effort from our own side, experiencing the results is very overwhelming. This is because we are the one who gains the most benefit from any feeling e.g. joy, which we experience in life. Unlike material things, joy and happiness cannot be shared, nor can a friend relieve or even share our feelings of misery.

The spiritual teachings always stress that the practice of spiritual teachings or dharma must be performed individually through the actions of body, speech and mind. If, in our daily conduct of body, speech and mind, we try our best to stop harmful negative actions, and adopt positive ones as much as we are able, we will find more joy and happiness in our life, and less cause of suffering.

By talking of both happiness and suffering in terms of one's own mind, then there is not much help to be sought from the outside, even if there is evidence that some drugs can relieve mental problems and suffering in the mind. In fact they don't work but it is hard to be convinced of what it is that really helps the mind unless we undergo that experience for ourselves. If we undergo some great mental disturbance and misery in the mind, is there any drug which can solve our problem? What is the best help?

In fact the only effective means to solve conflict and confusion in the mind is to first know our own mind well. What are the causes for this problem and confusion? Is the cause outside one or is it something within?

Then we find, as discussed earlier, the causes of our mental suffering and happiness are all within our mind. They are something which we create within ourself in our mind. Therefore -to remove such problems which are all related to our mind is to transform our mind, and that is easy.

When we talk about how it is important for everyone to enjoy good health of body and mind, most of us know how to maintain good bodily health. What we cannot avoid is confronting some conflict and confusion in our mind, while enjoying good health and living conditions. If it builds up it can become a deep source of worry and suffering.

In dealing with this problem we have to be very careful. We must know the precise cause of the problem. It is not related to our body so it is useless trying to relieve it by an external means like feeding the body more drugs, or becoming so worried and restless that we do something

physically to damage our health. Rather we must see the cause which brings happiness and suffering to our mind, and the cause of happiness and suffering to our body as two different things.

What is most important to bring peace and calm to our mind is relaxation or calming our thoughts. If our mind is too concerned about the problems it only makes the problems worse, instead of solving them. So we need a very relaxed and very gentle approach when confronting any difficult problem within the mind. With such an easy approach the problem becomes less over time.

In this way, what is happiness to us is the happiness of our mind and body. This is the main goal of our life. If that is our goal then it is our responsibility to be very appreciative if we enjoy very good health; to know its advantages and enjoy it. One should think "How lucky I am to have such good health, and some balance and understanding of the mind!" It is of great benefit to you to gain some control over your mind through this understanding.

So continually remind yourself of the value of having good health and a good mind. They are priceless treasures. Every single day try to protect them, and that protection involves the discipline of one's own actions of body, speech and mind, which is the practise of Dharma.

The reason why we focused upon interdependence of things, is because our success in the Study Group depends not only on our individual efforts, but also on everyone's combined efforts. Everyone will benefit if, as a part of this group we are all very friendly and helpful to each other.

In the Study Group there are differences in background, education, and so on, but the reason why we are in this group is to learn and to develop knowledge and develop friendship. It is like a family situation. Parents in a family can influence their children. If parents are very bad tempered this will influence their children. Not only do we want our own life to be very happy and meaningful, but we also want to be a good example to other fellow beings.

Being such a good example is easy! Do the admirable things that you see in others, just as you admire those who are polite, considerate, kind hearted and generous of their time to others - those who always try to prevent harm to other beings. As part of this human world, the way to help each other is to prevent harm to others and is to assist other beings. By joining this Study Group there is opportunity to extend your knowledge and develop friendship. It becomes like mixing milk with water.

It is important whenever you come to a session here to think "This is a most peaceful place, and these people around me are spiritual friends, so there is no better place to develop spiritual practice." Just as you are physically present, make sure that you are mentally here, and engage in Study Group sessions remembering that we do so not to compete with each other, but to learn and share our knowledge from the heart.

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12 March 1996

The first and most important thing is to ensure that before undertaking any action the motivation (or preceding thought) is correct, because with the right motivation we can focus on the result which we expect from our actions. Also giving time to set the right motivation helps to make the actions more enjoyable and positive.

Therefore we must be sure to establish the right motivation for attending the teachings.

Generating the Bodhichitta Motivation

For starting spiritual practice there are many levels of motivation.

But to engage in study and practice of the Lam Rim one is instructed to generate the highest level of motivation. This means freeing the motivating Mind from the influence of any thoughts such as attachment, anger or jealousy about the pleasures of this life.

It is incorrect, for example, to have the motivation for listening to Lam Rim teachings in order to obtain material goods, or to increase one's good name and reputation. It is also inappropriate to seek the pleasures of future lives.

In this highest motivation there should not be any attachment to this life's pleasures, nor to the pleasures of future lives, nor is it appropriate to aim for the state of liberation for one's own sake, since this shows a self-centred motivation.

The highest motivation, the best motivation, for listening to Lam Rim and then putting it into practice, is to wish to achieve the perfect state of enlightenment - free of all faults and possessing all good qualities - for the sake of all beings.

Going Beyond the Happiness of Desire

With regard to setting up the right motivation we said that it is inappropriate to have the motivation of obtaining pleasure, or any gain within this life when we engage in spiritual practice. In order to fully understand this point we need to examine it thoroughly, because for the ordinary person's mind the pleasure which we seek is something which arises from desire or attachment.

If we examine the kind of happiness which we seek in

this life and engage in lengthy discussion with others, we realise that the happiness we seek is the happiness of desire or pleasure. Yet no matter what we achieve or do in life we are never fully content or satisfied. If we then analyse or investigate the cause of this unending dissatisfaction in our mind, we will find that it is because our mind is influenced by attachment or desire. It is also said that achieving any desire or goal for this life is all due to attachment or desire, or the wish to achieve the goal of "desire happiness". And no matter how much we pursue this attachment/ desire happiness it will never fully satisfy us. At a deep level it is this desire happiness which is the cause of our unending unhappiness.

It is not like when we talk about the outcome of hatred. It is not difficult to know the result of that, since it is very destructive and harmful to both our own life and that of others. Whereas when talking **about the** consequences of desire we need to investigate more thoroughly and deeply. Without that, as mentioned before, there is no difference between what we seek and desire, and the desired outcome of that desire. If we engage in meditation, whereby we fix our mind singlepointedly on a virtuous object without any influence of desire or hatred, then our experience of peace and happiness is deeper and lasting, and brings no unease into our mind.

Beside these points, the reason why we must utilise our spiritual practice to overcome desire and hatred is because that is the whole purpose of spiritual training. So we must ask "In what way can spiritual training benefit others and as well as me?" Benefiting others refers not only to material benefits, but also to spiritual ones where we can prevent harm to others as well as ourselves. Then we can prevent harm not only to our mind, but also to our own body and speech.

We must seek the happiness beyond the happiness of desire, not only in this life but also in future lives. In the future if we seek happiness associated with desirous thought, then there will be no end to our suffering, since this desirous thought is like a chain binding us to cyclic existence.

Attaining a Balanced Stability in the Mind

We should examine the benefits to our life of the spiritual teachings within the context of our own experience and

actions. In the spiritual teachings there is an emphasis on overcoming desire and hatred, and the very biased attitude which is fond of some but shows dislike and distance to others. We should think that we have performed all our actions up to now with this attitude of desire and hatred. We should ask 9n what way has this attitude impacted upon all the actions which 1 have performed? Is this attitude good for maintaining my relationships?" For instance is it good for our mind to be influenced by these two attitudes depending on how things appear to our mind? It is always natural that your boyfriend or girlfriend appears as very attractive, and that you feel strong desire for that person. But as soon as they appear unattractive, or unpleasant to your mind then immediately you will feel hatred out of this unattractiveness. Then due to the force of this hatred, outwardly you will show hatred in your facial expression or speech.

Therefore desire and hatred is the main cause of instability in our life. Life becomes like a scale which always moves upwards and downwards. With this biased attitude our mind is very keen to become attracted or unattracted very quickly, this can be a further cause of losing our relationships and trust.

On the other hand if we try to familiarise our mind with thinking in a stable way (not becoming angry very quickly or becoming very attracted and excited about things very easily) then whether things are going well or not in a relationship; having wealth or not; having enough food or not; the mind retains a balanced stability. On the basis of this balanced stability of mind, if you then go to help others and support them then your happiness can be lasting. Then whether our lifespan is short or long, we have found some meaning, and lasting satisfaction for its duration.

We shall stop here tonight, and next week we shall continue the teaching from where we finished last year. We are up to the six types of root or primary delusions. Of these six primary delusions the first five are called "non-view delusions" whereas the 6th is called the "view delusion" and it has five types, which are called the five "view delusions".

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