

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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17 April 2000

Cultivate the motivation for listening to these teachings, which is to achieve the state of buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. Also cultivate the thought of putting these lam rim teachings into practice.

Before engaging in any spiritual practice we should remember the importance of always focusing on, and checking our mind, and then try to bring about some change as we engage in our practice. It is also important to remember that if in our daily life we experience some lack of stability within our mind then we do not always have to put up with it, as we can apply an appropriate spiritual practice to rid ourselves of this chaos. For example if one does a deity practice it might mean praying to that deity to be free of whatever immediate problem one faces.

Relating Spiritual Practice To Our Minds

As part of our spiritual practice it is also important to understand how we can bring more peace and happiness in our life through understanding and changing our mind. It is very important to know that our spiritual practice concerns something we have to recognise within ourself. We have to recognise that everything we learn in our spiritual training relates to something within our own mind. For instance when we talk about the object of refuge as a protector and guide for both this life and future lives, then we see it as something to be identified within ourself. When we talk about what spiritual practice we should do, we need to try to identify and understand what we need to do to change and transform our own mind. In following spiritual practice whether we are listening to teachings, or contemplating their meaning, or meditating upon them, it is important to be aware that we are in fact focussing on our own mind.

It is important that we do not view our mind, or our daily actions, or our way of thinking as something apart from the spiritual teachings we are studying. Rather we always should try to remember that the spiritual teachings are all about our own mind. In this way it is possible to fully understand and appreciate the benefit and effectiveness of this spiritual practice in terms of bringing immediate happiness, as well as happiness in this life, and also in terms of securing a better future in the many future lives to come.

Making Progress

We learn in the teachings that all our problems are caused by the negative states of mind such as the various forms of mental delusions. If we check it seems that these delusions are so strong, and so difficult to tame that our unruly state of mind is beyond our control. Yet it is said in the teachings that these delusions are not the true nature of mind at all, rather the nature of mind is a very clear state. Therefore, it is possible for us to completely separate our mind from those negative states and mental delusions. As said before if we constantly relate this teaching to our mind, trying to apply the teachings to change our mind, then we can slowly see the effect of the teachings. In the past our mind was



habituated to negative states, and now it is beginning to change from those habituated states. As we make some progress in our practice or spiritual training, then we gain more faith and more conviction in this spiritual practice, realising that the spiritual Dharma is an unfailing truth. Then we can adopt additional practices and make more progress.

Of main headings of the teachings concerning the topic of calm abiding, we have finished the first main heading which is The Gathering Of Suitable Conditions To Achieve Calm Abiding, the second main heading which is The Actual Means To Achieve Calm Abiding, and the third heading which is By Depending On The Actual Means, How To Achieve The Nine States Of Mental Abiding.

422.331.214 The Six Forces

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We have already covered the topic of The Six Forces under the previous heading, however following the outline of the text, we shall list them here.

- The first mental abiding is achieved through the force of hearing.
- The second mental abiding is achieved through the force of thinking.
- The third and the fourth mental abidings are achieved through the force of mindfulness.
- The fifth and sixth mental abidings are achieved through the force of alertness.
- The seventh and eighth mental abidings are achieved through the force of joyous effort.
- Finally the ninth mental abiding is achieved through the force of familiarity.

We have already discussed the meaning of each of these six forces, so we do not need to discuss it again.

422.331.215 The Four Mental Attentions

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We have also discussed before the fifth main heading, The Four Mental Attentions, so here we shall just list them in conjunction with the nine mental abidings.

- The first and the second mental abidings rely upon forceful attention.
- The third to the seventh mental abidings rely upon interrupted attention.
- The eighth mental abiding relies upon attention with effort.
- The ninth mental abiding relies upon effortless attention.

422.331.216 The Way Calm Abiding Develops From This Point

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The sixth main heading is about real calm abiding, where we learn about the special characteristics, which qualify single-pointed concentration as calm abiding.

Before achieving calm abiding, the highest level of concentration is the single-pointed concentration, which one achieves at the ninth mental abiding. At that ninth mental abiding we understand that the single-pointed concentration is completely free from the fault of the subtle forms of both the mental sinking and excitement, and one can sustain the single-pointed concentration of the ninth abiding for as long as one wishes.

Under this sixth heading we learn why the single-pointed concentration of that ninth mental abiding is not qualified as calm abiding, and what extra quality is needed in order to achieve calm abiding.

In the lam rim text it is said that in order to achieve the actual state of calm abiding, one needs to further familiarise oneself with single-pointed concentration, in order to achieve the special bliss of pliancy of body and mind.

The text by Kamalashila, called *The Middle Stages of the Meditation*, says that a person who meditates on calm abiding needs to experience the pliancy of mind and body, and that experience will empower their mind to focus on objects as they wish. Based on this quotation, Lama Tsong Khapa concluded that two things are needed in order to achieve actual calm abiding. These are:

1. To have achieved the full control and stabilisation of one's mind on the object.
2. To have experienced mental and physical pliancy.

What Is Mental And Physical Pliancy?

In his *Compendium of Knowledge* Arya Asanga says that pliancy is a state wherein one is purified of the mental and physical obstacles called *ne nya-len* in Tibetan¹. This pliancy causes one's mind and body to become very functional. By achieving this exceptional physical and mental state one creates the basis to purify all types of obstructions.

Lama Tsong Khapa gives a further explanation about the meaning of this pliancy of body and mind, and the specific negativities or obstacles each one of them overcomes. Pliancy of body overcomes *ne nya-len* obstacles in our body and pliancy of mind is the remedy to *ne nya-len* obstacles in our mind.

Lama Tsong Khapa said that these *ne nya-len* obstacles in our body and mind are the specific causes, which physically or mentally discourage or prevent us from engaging in virtuous actions. For example, our reason (or cause) for not engaging in virtuous practice could be because we physically tire very quickly, or because we are physically tired, or because of some physical stress and so on. Or it could be because mentally we lack the motivation to engage in the practice. There is some obstacle in our body or mind which serves as a major cause for physically preventing us from engaging in virtue, or a mental cause which allows laziness to prevent us from engaging in virtuous actions.

It is said that we can know when we have achieved the pliancy of body, because there are no such obstacles. There is no physical factor, which can discourage us, or make us lose interest in pursuing meditation. It is said that with pliancy of the body then our body feels very fit, very light and supple. It is as if we have such full control of our body, so that it becomes very functional in the sense that it is very

conducive to engaging in virtuous actions.

If one has achieved the state of calm abiding, not only is single-pointed concentration achieved, but pliancy of body and mind has also been achieved.

The mental and physical obstacles we are talking about here are called *ne nya-len* in Tibetan. Specifically a physical *ne nya-len* is something which physically prevents our body from being very functional when we have to use it to undertake any virtuous action, and yet makes it easier when we try to engage in non-virtuous actions. This physical *ne nya-len* obstacle serves as an obstruction for us in our desire to abandon mental delusion, as a result of which it is said that we feel our body to be very heavy. The converse is that if we overcome these obstacles then our body becomes very light, very fresh and so on.

Basically what we have covered tonight is that to achieve actual calm abiding, one has to achieve pliancy of body and mind in addition to the single-pointed concentration of the nine mental abidings. We have also discussed what mental and physical pliancy means, and what specific *ne nya-len* obstacles of body or of mind each one of them overcomes. When we understand and overcome those obstacles and achieve that state of pliancy, we shall understand the benefits to the meditator.

Following this heading, in the text there is discussion of the indications of having achieved this pliancy. We shall talk about this next week, but beforehand you should read about it in the text.

Order of Achievement

When we talk of pliancy of body and mind then we are also talking of the physical and mental bliss which occurs. We talk of the bliss of the pliancy of mind, and the bliss of the pliancy of body. We should note here that, as the text says, one first experiences the pliancy of mind, followed by the pliancy of body. However, in terms of the order of experiencing the bliss of each, the order is reversed. That is, first you experience the bliss of the physical pliancy, and after that the bliss of mental pliancy.

35 Buddhas Confession Prayer

We shall now recite the 35 Buddhas Confession Prayer, which comprises all the four forces for purifying negativities. As we recite this prayer we should try to recall and apply those four means of purification which are:

1. The force of object which is the object of refuge
2. The force of regret or confession
3. The force of promise which is resolving not to repeat the negativities in future
4. The force of remedy

To give a brief visualisation to go with this purification prayer as we recite it, visualise or just imagine that all the 35 buddhas of confession are in the space in front of you. Imagine that at the centre of your heart is the syllable PAM, black in colour, which you can think of as the seed of all the negativities that you have accumulated. Then during the recitation think of receiving the blessings from the 35 buddhas in the form of a stream of nectars and light which enters through your crown aperture. As this blessing nectar and light fills you, imagine that it forces this black syllable PAM downward until it eventually bursts. As it bursts you imagine that a massive amount of all your accumulated negativities leaves your body in the form of all kinds of filth, such as darkish smoke or liquids. This is a short purification visualisation, which we should do as we say this prayer.

¹ Ed: The Tibetan term *ne nyan-len* has no direct translation. It refers to those obstacles acquired with one's rebirth. Tsepak Rigzin "Tibetan - English Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology" *gnas-ngan-len* = taking unfortunate rebirth.



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25 April 2000

Make sure that your motivation for studying this profound lam rim teaching, the stages of the path to enlightenment, is to achieve the state of Buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings. We should also try to be very determined about putting this teaching into practice to calm our mind.

422.331.216 Achieving Calm Abiding (cont)

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In the last teaching, we left at the point where we described how one experiences pliancy of the mind before pliancy of the body, and that in terms of the order in which we experience the bliss of pliancy, we experience the bliss pliancy of body before the bliss of pliancy of mind. The next section concerns the indication of having developed pliancy of mind and body.

The Indication Of Having Developed Pliancy

It is said that the pliancy which the meditator gains on achieving calm abiding is not something which is suddenly manifested. Rather, it is said that right in the very early stages of the meditation, before we progress to the ninth level of mental abiding, we have already developed some form of pliancy in association with our meditative concentration. However in the early stage it is not so obvious and apparent to us because it is not fully developed. Rather, it is at the subconscious level and very subtle. As we develop our level of meditative concentration this pliancy becomes more obvious and noticeable.

As Lama Tsong Khapa asked, "What sign is there to show the complete, fully developed form of pliancy?" As a part of the development of true pliancy, the meditator who is engaged in single pointed concentration experiences some heaviness in the brain. However, this feeling of heaviness is not something that causes discomfort to the meditator. Lama Tsong Khapa gives the following example to illustrate it. When your head is completely shaved, it is of course very cold in the cold winter season. If at that time, someone places their warmed hand on your head, then this feeling is similar to the heaviness in the brain, which you experience in association with pliancy.

Soon after this feeling, then it says that one will become free of the *ne nga-len* obstacles¹, which prevent one from abandoning delusions, or any negative states of mind. It

is this freedom from *ne nga-len* obstacles which gives rise to pliancy of the mind.

Lama Tsong Khapa's use of the example of the feeling of heaviness in the brain as a sign of experiencing pliancy is based on Asanga's text, *Hearer's* (or *Shravaka's*) *Ground* of which uses almost exactly the same example. As we have just discussed, having overcome all the *ne nga-len* obstacles in our mind, which have prevented us from abandoning mental delusions, one achieves pliancy of mind, making the mind completely functional, willing and able to engage in virtuous actions of abandoning delusions. Asanga says that this mental pliancy which one experiences will bring about an increase in wind energy, which is very conducive to undertaking virtuous actions. One first experiences this conducive wind energy arising from the crown of one's head. That is why, just prior to experiencing mental pliancy, there is a feeling of heaviness in one's brain. The brain and the heart are the two most important parts of the human body. Scientists have shown that as the body first begins to form, the brain and heart form together first. From there, all the other parts of the body are formed.

So this functional and conducive wind energy first arises at the crown of the head and from there it flows out, filling the entire body. At this point, Asanga's text says that there is a physically blissful experience, a sense of contact, and the body feels physically very light and so forth. This makes not only our mind, but also our body, very free from any obstacles to virtuous actions.

As a result of this deep and tremendous bliss and ecstasy you feel because of this conducive wind energy pervading your body, it says that the meditator becomes overwhelmed with extraordinary or immense bliss. At this initial level the bliss and ecstasy experienced is so intense, it has the effect of making the meditator feel that the object of the single pointed concentration has become a bit unstable. However as the meditator remains with, and continues with this experience, the bliss becomes less intense, and then suddenly, it is as if the bliss and ecstasy merges with the object of meditation, so that even the object itself is like bliss. This is the indication of transcending from the single pointed state of meditative concentration into this state of calm abiding.

Geshe Doga hopes that it is clear to you, however if it is not, then it is best to refer to the commentary where it is very clear.

Geshe Doga then quoted from the His Holiness the Fifth Dalai Lama's lam rim text, called *The Word Of Manjushri*, which is the commentary to the lam rim text by the Third

¹ Obstacles that we face are also not just due to immediate conditions, but also depend on our past karmas. *Ne nga-len* obstacles are the very specific obstacles which come with the mind and body of any being whose rebirth is due to delusion and throwing karma.

Dalai Lama, His Holiness Sonam Gyatso entitled, *Essence of Refined Gold*.

The Word Of Manjushri says that because subtle pliancy exists from the very beginning, the *ne nga-len* obstacles, which prevent one from engaging in virtuous actions to counteract and overcome mental delusions, are pacified, and so full pliancy of mind arises.

Then, the text continues, due to the force of that pliancy of mind, the conducive wind increases, freeing one from the *ne nga-len* obstacles of the body, making the body feel as light as cotton. This results in real pliancy of body arising. By the virtue of this pliancy of body, great bliss and joy will be experienced which is manifested in one's body. This experience of the bliss of pliancy of body in turn induces bliss in the mind, which is the bliss of the pliancy of mind.

At the time when the pliancy of body arises, there is some sensation of bliss and joy in one's mind, however this does not mean one has achieved calm abiding, because this bliss will diminish to the point that it coexists with single pointed concentration. The bliss actually causes the mind to fully stabilise on the object, so that single pointed concentration and the bliss of pliancy co-exist together.

To clarify the point about this experience of intense bliss diminishing, the text also says that when this first intense bliss diminishes, it does not mean that the pliancy ceases or is diminished. This is illustrated by using the example of someone receiving praise. As it says in the analogy, initially the person is delighted and overwhelmed with joy when their fame or reputation is boosted. This joy slowly diminishes, however it does not necessarily mean that the person's fame and reputation will also diminish.

When one achieves the state of calm abiding for the first time, it says one has achieved the preparatory stage of concentration, of the first level of the Form Realm for the first time. In other words, for the first time one has transcended the state of mind of the Desire Realm to the ground of the higher realms of, for example, the first level of concentration of the Form Realm. This first stage or preparatory level of concentration one achieves is called the Unavoidable Preparatory Stage, because it is something that is indispensable to gain many other realisations, whether they be mundane or supramundane realisations.

Based on this preparatory stage of the first concentration of the Form Realm that one has achieved, if desired, one can also achieve the preparatory and calm abiding stages of all four levels of the Form Realm, the four levels of the Formless Realm and so achieve all the realisations and higher states within worldly or cyclic existence. However, it is said, that this is not the purpose of achieving calm abiding, and achieving the preparatory stage of this first concentration.

Benefits of Calm Abiding

We should also try to learn about the benefits and advantages of achieving calm abiding.

1. It is said that as a benefit of achieving calm abiding, one achieves a form of clarity within ones mind. In other words, the mind becomes so clear and luminous that if one observes a wall, one can mentally observe

and count every atomic particle in the wall.

2. As a benefit of calm abiding one can also achieve the capacity to overcome mental delusions. After achieving calm abiding, even if the ten signs or principal causes for creating delusion² appear to ones mind, or if one has contact with these objects, one can immediately remember their faults and shortcomings, and there will not be any mental attraction to them.
3. As a result of calm abiding, fewer mental delusions will arise, and those that do can be easily removed and eliminated.
4. Calm abiding also has the benefit of transforming all states of mind while sleeping into the state of single pointed or meditative concentration.

This is just a brief description of the benefits of calm abiding.

As said before, what is most important is to keep in mind that the purpose of achieving calm abiding is not to achieve any higher qualities for ourselves within cyclic existence, such as the higher qualities of the Form and Formless Realms. Indeed the aim of any spiritual practice that we do is not to achieve a higher goal within this worldly existence. Therefore it is important to try to infuse any spiritual practice we do with the motivation of the bodhicitta mind, or of renunciation, and to always supplement our practice with taking refuge in the Three Jewels and so forth.

This concludes the teaching on Calm Abiding. In the next teaching we shall commence the next major topic, which is on wisdom, or special insight.

It is important to read more about this topic of calm abiding and know as much as possible about it, because for anyone showing any interest in, or who follows this meditation practice, this calm abiding meditation is the most important meditation practice. Therefore if we learn more about this topic, it means we can perform our meditation more effectively.

Meaning of the Heart Sutra Mantra

Sometimes OM is added into the mantra after the TAYATHA so that that mantra becomes TAYATHA OM GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SOHA. Normally when people say this mantra they do not say OM. However in the commentary on the mantra, you always find the OM included. The meaning is TAYATHA means It is So; OM is the beginning of the mantra; GATE means Go, so the first GATE means go to the Path of Accumulation; the second GATE means go to the Path of Preparation; PARAGATE means go beyond, which indicates the Path of Seeing; PARASAMGATE means go completely beyond, which indicates the Path of Meditation; BODHI SVAHA means be founded or stabilised in Enlightenment, which indicates the Path of No More Learning.

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Note on authentication

Transcribed from the tape by Vanessa Walsh

Edited by Adair Bennett and Alan Molloy

Checked by Sandup Tsiring and Alan Molloy

² The ten objects which generate delusions are the five sensual objects of form, sound and so forth, the three objects of the three poisonous minds ,and the last two are the signs of male and female sex.



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2 May 2000

Try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation by thinking that the reason for undertaking this study of the profound lam rim teachings is to achieve the state of buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. Also cultivate the motivation to put into practice whatever you learn from this lam rim teaching.

422.331.22 How To Train In Special insight

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In terms of the six perfections, this next major heading How to Train in Special Insight, concerns the perfection of wisdom. This lam rim teaching specifically elaborates upon the last two perfections, the Perfections of Concentration and Wisdom.

What The Term 'Perfection' Means

As a reminder, the term 'perfection' as used in 'perfection of wisdom', refers to wisdom as both a cause and a result. The term 'perfection' (paramita in Sanskrit and pharchin in Tibetan) means to go beyond, or to go to the other shore. It can be explained in terms of the cause, in the sense of the means of going to the other shore, and in terms of the effect, in the sense of being the other shore at which you arrive. In terms of cause, the Perfection of Wisdom refers to the wisdom which realises emptiness and the ten fields of knowledge, possessed by someone on the path of learning. However, the effect aspect of the Perfection of Wisdom, literally the fully perfected and fully realised wisdom, is only possessed by a fully enlightened being.

The Ten Fields of Knowledge

It is good to be able to list the ten fields of knowledge, because we come across them in many Scriptures. In fact, these ten can be divided into two sets of five.

The five lower classes are:

1. The study of poetry
2. The study of semantics or meaning
3. The study of lexicography or terminology
4. The study of astrology and mathematics
5. The study of performing arts

The five higher classes of knowledge are:

1. The study of painting and sculpture
2. The study of healing and medicine
3. The study of grammar and Sanskrit
4. The study of logic
5. The study of metaphysics or philosophy

You can check these lists with other references if you wish.

With regard to the heading, Training In Special Insight, according to the lam rim commentary that we are using there are three subheadings.

422.331.221 Presenting The View Of The Selflessness Or Emptiness Of Person

422.331.222 Presenting The View Of The Selflessness Or Emptiness Of Phenomena

422.331.223 Based On This, How To Realise Special Insight

The Order Of Presentation

From this outline we can understand that of the two views of selflessness, the selflessness of person is presented before the

selflessness of phenomena. Whereas, in most of the scriptural sources on the Middle Way, such as Chandrakirti's *Supplement to the Middle Way*, Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Wisdom*, and other major scriptural sources of the Middle Way, the view of selflessness of phenomena is presented before the view of selflessness of person. There is a reason for both approaches.

Unlike the lam rim style teachings most of the Scriptures of the Middle Way present the view of the selflessness of phenomena first. One of the reasons is that this order is the same as the order in which the two wrong views of self-grasping of person and self-grasping of phenomena are generated. In other words, we generate self-grasping of phenomena first, and then based on that we generate self-grasping of persons. Based on that order, most of the Scriptures on the Middle View present the view of the selflessness of phenomena first.

In the lam rim teachings, the selflessness of person is presented before the selflessness of phenomena, and the reason is that this is the order which accords with the realisation of these two selflessnesses. In other words, one realises the selflessness of person before realising the selflessness of phenomena. Not only is the lam rim order of presenting these two views of selflessness the order which best suits practice, but it is also said that realising the selflessness of person is easier than realising the selflessness of phenomena.

While it is said that the selflessness of a person is realised before the selflessness of phenomena, this does not mean that one of these ultimate truths is more subtle than the other, or in other words that they are differentiated in terms of subtlety and coarseness. There is no such difference. According to the Middle Way School of Prasangika or Consequence, no distinction is made between the two selflessnesses in terms of subtlety and coarseness. The only difference between the two is their base.

The base for the selflessness of person is the person, whereas for the selflessness of phenomena it is other phenomena. When we talk of emptiness, or the selflessness of oneself, then that is the selflessness of person, but when we talk of the selflessness of one's body, then we are talking about the selflessness of phenomena. There is no difference in terms of subtlety between the emptiness or selflessness of one's body and selflessness of oneself. However, due to the different bases, it is easier to realise the selflessness of the person, ie oneself, first.

The view of the selflessness of person, is further explained under two subheadings:

422.331.221.1 How To Engage In Space-Like Meditative Equipoise

422.331.221.2 How To Engage In Illusion-Like Post-meditation

Next is a brief explanation of each subheading.

422.331.221.1 How To Engage In Space-Like Meditative Equipoise

Engaging in Space-Like Meditative Equipoise refers to engaging in meditative equipoise on emptiness, which is likened to space, where space means the lack of something to touch, or contact, or a lack of obstruction. Sometimes all phenomena are categorised into positive and negative

phenomena, and space is a negative phenomena. Of the types of negative phenomena, it is said that space is a non-affirming, negative phenomena. Its existence is just the negation of touch, of contact and of obstruction. Similarly, in meditative equipoise the emptiness which one realises is also a non-affirming negative phenomena. It is empty, or just the negation of inherent existence, existing by way of the phenomena's own character.

422.331.221.2 How To Engage In Illusion-Like Post-meditation

When arising from meditative equipoise, one is arising from a state where the only thing that is realised is mere emptiness, in the sense that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence. Upon arising from meditating on this, other relative or conventional objects also appear to the mind. When those things appear they are like an illusion. Why? Because of the influence of the meditative realisation of emptiness in meditative equipoise. In the post-meditation period, therefore, even though things appear to the mind as having inherent existence, or existing from their own side, one knows that this is not the truth, and that what appears to the mind does not accord with reality. It is a bit like the magician who, with his magic wand, transforms and manifests various things, like horses and elephants. Even though the manifested things appear to his mind, he knows that they are not real and that they are his own creation. That is the experience during the post-meditation period.

The Four Points of Analysis

The subheading, Engaging In The Space-Like Meditative Equipoise, is elaborated by explaining four points to be ascertained, which establish this view of selflessness. Of course, it is said, there are many other ways of establishing this view of selflessness. However this one, which uses these four points of analysis, is regarded as particularly effective. It is the most popular one, because it helps us to understand the truth of dependent arising at the same time as understanding the view of selflessness or emptiness. The four points of analysis are:

422.331.221.11 Ascertaining The Negated Object

422.331.221.12 Ascertaining The Pervasion

422.331.221.13 Ascertaining The Lack Of True Oneness

422.331.221.14 Ascertaining The Lack Of True Difference

Why We Need To Realise Special Insight

As mentioned in the commentary, it is important to know the reason why one needs to realise special insight. It is a unique path that one is choosing, one which is called the supramundane path.

As we discussed in the last teaching, the followers of many other schools of tenets, having achieved calm abiding, achieve the higher states of mind, like the preparatory level of the concentration of the form realm. They use this specifically to prevent all the very gross forms of delusions, and through this achieve lasting peace. Thus they use calm abiding to achieve the higher states, and to achieve all the goals of the mundane path. It is important to realise that in following this spiritual path one is seeking liberation from cyclic existence, or samsara. The reason why we must realise special insight, or this wisdom of emptiness or selflessness, is because, as we discussed in one of the previous teachings, this wisdom of emptiness is the only means of cutting the root cause of cyclic existence.

Cyclic existence refers to these contaminated aggregates, into which we are continuously born. If we examine the cause of these contaminated aggregates, the main sources are karma and delusions. Of these two, it is mainly delusions, which are responsible, because it is delusions which motivate the creation of karma, and the root cause of all delusions is self-grasping. Thus, one must realise special insight, because the wisdom of emptiness is the only antidote to self-grasping.

It says in the text that after realising this wisdom of emptiness, one will be able to remove all the faults of cyclic existence, even though one has not made any specific effort to attain all the qualities of the higher levels or realms, such as the various clairvoyant powers and so forth.

Geshe Doga also refers you to the text where there is a quotation from Nargajuna's text *Praise to the Praiseworthy*.

Although people who follow your doctrine
Do not gain the actual dhyani planes,
They prevent their rebirth existence,
While Mara looks on helplessly.

Furthermore, it is said that other than realising this profound view of emptiness, there is no other door to the state of liberation. This wisdom of emptiness is like the guide who shows the path to a blind person. In a sense, this is saying that all the other five perfections are blind, whereas the perfection of wisdom leads the blind.

The importance of wisdom can also be understood using the analogy of a bird. Wisdom and Method are the two wings of the bird which one must use to reach the final state of enlightenment. Try to understand how important it is to engage in the path which uses both method and wisdom together. Of course, method is the bodhicitta mind, and wisdom is the realisation of emptiness. Without both, one cannot achieve complete enlightenment.

With regard to this Lama Tsong Khapa also said that without relying on this wisdom realising the ultimate truth, then no matter how much one familiarises oneself with renunciation, bodhicitta and so on, one will never be able to cut the root cause of cyclic existence. Therefore, make a diligent effort to try and realise this wisdom of emptiness and dependent arising.

The source of this text is the *Four Hundred Verses* by Aryadeva which says that even by the virtue of a little amount of merit, if one gains some understanding of emptiness, even with some element of doubt, the effect is such that it can tear the cloth of self-grasping into pieces. So, it is said, self-grasping is destroyed, just as a crop is destroyed by a hailstorm.

This shows us that even if we do not gain a full understanding of emptiness, to the point of the ultimate truth of emptiness, having just a glimmer of understanding, even with a bit of doubt, can counteract this self-grasping. As it says, self-grasping is like a cloth that is torn into pieces - it is useless. Some texts refer to desire or craving, rather than self-grasping, becoming inactivated. This is just to show the effect of meditation on emptiness and to inspire you. It is such a powerful **weapon** for abandoning desire and so forth.

As we have just learnt, Aryadeva said that when someone with a little amount of merit gains understanding of emptiness they gain so much benefit. The fact that we have direct access to this teaching on emptiness, and that we have this opportunity to practice Dharma and so on, all confirms to us that we have a great store of merit within us. So when listening to these teachings try to feel inspired to continue with further study and practice.

Of course, this is not to encourage you to think "I am so fortunate" with pride inflating your mind!

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

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Note on authentication

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Edited by Adair Bennett and Alan Molloy
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Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ଓঁ ব্যার্লুক্স শ্রিয়াব্দন্তা



9 May 2000

Try to reinforce the bodhicitta mind that you have just generated, and strongly think that the reason you are receiving these teachings is to follow them, and put them into practice. The goal of following this practice is to achieve the state of Buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings.

Prerequisites For Realising Emptiness

The teachings on special insight mention the need to gather all the suitable conditions to realise emptiness, or the ultimate truth. These suitable conditions include:

1. Finding a perfect master, and receiving from him or her all the instructions on realising emptiness, completely and without any error.
2. Gathering enough merit, and also purifying all obstructions.
3. Praying to one's guru or spiritual guide, seeing the guru as being inseparable from one's special deity.

Engaging in the practice of guru yoga, seeing the guru as inseparable from one's favourite deity, is the practice one especially undertakes to gain the realisation of emptiness. For the realisation of emptiness, it is recommended to see the guru as inseparable from Manjushri, as Manjushri is the deity of wisdom, the manifestation of the wisdom of an enlightened being. Praying and relying on Manjushri indicates the special connection. It is just the same as seeing the guru as inseparable from Avalokiteshvara or Chenrezig if one's practice is to cultivate love and compassion, because Chenrezig is the embodiment of all the compassion of all the Buddhas. The implication here is that the realisation of emptiness will only occur when all the necessary suitable conditions are met, which in turn depends upon having created the right cause.

The Four Buddhist Schools Of Philosophy Or Tenets

There are four main Buddhist schools of tenets or philosophy in early Indian Buddhism. Each school of philosophy has its own presentation of the ultimate view of reality.

The Prasangika View of Emptiness

The view of emptiness presented by the Prasangikas or Consequence School is considered as the ultimate thought of the Buddha. It is also a unique view, in the sense that it illuminates not only how things exist in an ultimate sense, but at the same time, it explains how things exist conventionally or nominally. The Prasangika presentation of emptiness combines the teachings of both method and wisdom. It is said that the Prasangika view of emptiness is presented in such a way that the meaning of emptiness indicates the meaning of dependent arising, and the meaning of dependent arising indicates the meaning of emptiness.

The way the Prasangika school presents the meaning of emptiness is that things lack inherent existence. That is, they do not exist by way of the phenomena's own character. It is a view which clearly indicates that everything is empty of any existence that is not depending on any causes or parts, or the collection of causes and parts. When the view of emptiness is presented in this way, it naturally implies that things occur in dependence on dependent arising.

To the Prasangika school, the meaning of dependent arising is that things depend upon causes and conditions and parts, or

the collection of the causes and conditions and parts. That meaning of dependent arising automatically gives the meaning of emptiness. In this respect, the presentation of emptiness by the Prasangika school, i.e. the way the meaning of emptiness and dependent arising compliment one another, is said to be unique to that school of tenet. None of the other schools of tenets use this presentation.

These different schools of tenets are all based on the Buddha's teachings, yet each seems to offer a different explanation of what the Buddha taught on emptiness. Essentially this shows the Lord Buddha's quality and skill in guiding his followers. As the Buddha had clairvoyant powers he could read the minds of others. Through his supramundane qualities, the Buddha was also able to understand all the predispositions, mental aptitudes and mental capacities of all other beings. Therefore the Buddha taught the Dharma in a way that suited the varying requirements of his followers.

As a result, with regard to teaching the view of selflessness, there are four main schools of tenets. The Vaibashikas (the school of Particularists) and the Sautrantikas (the school of Sutras) are the two lesser schools of tenets. The two higher schools of tenets are the Cittamatrins, or the Mind Only School, and the Madhyamika, which is the Middle Way School.

The Two Lower Schools - Vaibashika and Sautrantika

The first view of selflessness which the Buddha taught, is that phenomena are empty of a substantially existent self, in the sense of self sufficiency. This view of emptiness is asserted by the two lower schools of tenets.

Cittamatrin or Mind Only School

After that, the Buddha taught the second highest view, which is the view held by the Mind Only School. Here the Buddha distinguishes between those phenomena which exist truly, and those which are empty of such true existence. In fact, in the Cittamatrin, or Mind Only school, all phenomena are divided into three categories.

1. Dependent phenomena or objects.
2. Fully established phenomena.

Both first and second categories are said to truly exist

3. Imputed phenomena. All the things which belong to this third category of imputed phenomena are said to be empty of true existence.

Madhyamika Middle Way School

Higher than this, is the Mahayana School of Middle Way, of which there are two sub-schools.

Svatantrika Middle Way School

Following after the Cittamatrin view of selflessness, is the first [of the Middle Way schools], the Middle Way School of Svatantrika, the school of Autonomists which presents the view taught by the Buddha [on] selflessness. The view of selflessness presented by the Autonomists states that all phenomena are empty of true existence, however they exist inherently.

Prasangika Middle Way (Consequence) School

Finally Buddha taught that all things are empty even of inherent existence. That is the view presented by the School of

Consequence, or Prasangika Middle Way School. It reflects the final view of the Lord Buddha.

Which are the Authentic Commentaries?

In fact, anyone who seeks the state of liberation must realise the meaning of emptiness, which is also called suchness. To do this, one must depend upon the Buddha's teachings on the meaning of emptiness. Furthermore, the Buddha's teachings are difficult to understand directly. So it is important to follow the very authentic later commentaries on the Buddha's teachings.

The question is, of course, whose teachings should one follow to gain this understanding of the meaning of emptiness? If you read the lam rim commentary, you will see that two great masters are listed - Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti.

The Buddha himself prophesied that Nagarjuna would be the master who would spread the Buddha's teachings on the view of emptiness, and cause them to flourish. The glorious Chandrakirti is said to be the true holder of the view of emptiness, which was taught by Nagarjuna. In the lam rim commentary, it is emphasised that following the legacy of these two great masters is the only way to find the Middle View of emptiness. There is no hope of gaining this view of emptiness using any other way.

In *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path*, Lama Tsong Khapa said that even though the glorious Chandrakirti had already attained a high level of Bodhisattva in some other pure land of Buddhas, he appeared in this world specifically to illuminate the import of Nagarjuna's teachings. Chandrakirti's authority to comment on the teachings of Nagarjuna, even Nagarjuna's commentaries on Tantra, is absolutely authentic, and there is no possibility whatsoever of any mistakes. That is what Lama Tsong Khapa said.

If Chandrakirti is the master we should rely upon to understand all of Nagarjuna's teachings and thoughts, and thereby to understand the teaching of the Lord Buddha, the next thing is how does Chandrakirti teach on selflessness? What basis does he use to teach emptiness, and what types of reasonings are employed to explain the meaning of emptiness? The basis of Chandrakirti's teaching on emptiness is the person and all the parts of the person, such as their sense organs (their eyes, nose and so forth), and all those other phenomena that are included within the continuum of the person. These are used to define two types of self-grasping. Just as there are two types of selflessness, there are the two types of self-grasping - the self-grasping of person and self-grasping of phenomena. These two self-grasplings serve as the cause, which binds sentient beings to cyclic existence.

The person is the basis upon which self-grasping of person arises, and so it is the basis upon which to teach the selflessness of person. Self-grasping of person is some sense of 'I', 'I' and 'Mine', 'Me' which we innately experience deep within us at all times. Whereas the person's eyes, nose and so forth and other phenomena are the basis for generating self-grasping of phenomena, and so they are the basis upon which the view of selflessness of phenomena is taught.

The main reasons used to explain the meaning of emptiness are Refuting the Four Extremes Of Production, or Extreme Ways Of Arising. The other main reasoning taught by Chandrakirti is the Reason of Seven Aspects. By mainly using those two types of reasoning, these two views of a self [of persons] and of other phenomena are negated.

In the last teaching, we discussed the order of presentation of the two types of selflessness in the lam rim teaching. The selflessness of a person is presented first, because this order best suits meditation practice. The text also indicates that even though there is no difference between these two selflessnesses in terms of subtlety, there is a difference in terms of the ease of realising them: the selflessness of a person is easier to realise than the selflessness of other phenomena.

Regarding the order of realising the two types of selflessness,

Aryadeva's text *Four Hundred Verses* says that firstly beings eradicate the extreme view of denial or nihilism, the view which negates or denies the law of karma and its effects. After this, they eradicate the view of self-grasping of person, and then they eradicate the view of self-grasping of other phenomena.

As we said, in elaborating this view of selflessness of person, many types of logic are possible. However it is said that for the beginner, the reasonings of the lack of oneness and difference are the easiest means to understand the view of selflessness.

As we said last time Lama Tsong Khapa gave a detailed commentary on how these reasons of a lack of oneness and difference are elaborated into the four points of analysis. These four points of analysis are explained in detail in Lama Tsong Khapa's *Medium Exposition of the Stages of the Path*. Numerous followers of Lama Tsong Khapa also used this reasoning of the lack of oneness and difference in the four points of analysis as the main reasons to establish the view of emptiness.

Next week is discussion week. When we begin the teaching next time, we shall begin from the first point of analysis, which is identifying the object of negation.

Traditionally, when they come to this topic of ascertaining the object of negation, teachers pause in the teachings for a day or two. During this break the students are instructed to go and look for the self. Maybe you can go and do that.

Here the object of negation is the self which is conceived by the view of self-grasping of a person. We are referring to the experience of a sense of 'I', which we always feel strongly within ourself. When we talk of the self-grasping view, we are talking about this sense of 'I' which innately or spontaneously arises in us. Therefore, the way to identify this self, which is the object of negation (or what emptiness is empty of), is to try and sit in meditation, and as much as possible try to fully relax your body. Then try to observe this sense of 'I' which is within yourself. Then when you see that 'I', explore what kind of existence that 'I' or self has, and what its status is. That is the way to identify the object of negation.

In the lam rim commentary we are using, we are already up to the topic of identifying the object of negation. However before that the lam rim commentary includes a number of personal stories about the effort Lama Tsong Khapa made, and the stages he went through in his life as he tried to gain this view of emptiness. It would be beneficial if you could read that section.

Query: Is the sense of 'mine' also self-grasping of person?

Geshe-la: All phenomena can be divided into two, the person and all phenomena other than the person. All other phenomena mean all phenomena, which are not the person. The person and all that is included within the continuum of the person (eyes, nose etc) are the basis for teaching both the selflessness of person and the selflessness of all other phenomena. In the teachings we mentioned the parts of the person, like the eyes, nose and so forth. Of course these parts are included in the continuum of the person, but they are not the person. They are the bases of other phenomena, and they are the basis for teaching the selflessness of other phenomena.

Query: I thought the notion of 'mine' was an example of self of person, not self of phenomenon. I am distinguishing 'I' from 'mine'. I impute 'mine' and then I have the appearance of 'mine', and that is an example of the self of person and not the self of phenomena.

Geshe-la: As you said, it is the sense of 'mine', in that context which is also the self-grasping of a person. We talk of the different types of wrong view, one is the wrong view of the transitory collection, where we talk of the wrong view of 'I' and 'mine', and both are considered to be the self-grasping of a person, or the conception of the self-grasping of a person. This conception of 'I' or 'mine', is just 'mine' without qualifying that 'mine' with the specific ownership of the object, by saying 'my hand', 'my leg' and so forth. That is the conception of the self-

grasping of a person.

Next week is discussion week. For the compulsory question for the coming written text, you must explain the meaning of the verse from Bhavaviveka's text *Heart of the Middle Way*. Roughly translated the verse refers to the way in which the wild elephant of the mind, when it is tied to the pole of mindfulness and disciplined with the iron hook of alertness, can be fully tamed.

When we discussed the meaning of this verse in the teachings, there was also reference to the meaning of these words in Kamalakshila's *Stages of Meditation*, where he commented on the analogy slightly differently from the way commonly known. Study these differences from your notes.¹

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¹ Editor: See Lam Rim class dated 16th November 1999

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STUDY GROUP DISCUSSION NIGHT –16 May, 2000

Covering discourses 17/04/2000 – 09/05/2000

- 1/ How does one progress from the ninth mental abiding to the achievement of calm abiding?
- 2/ What is meant by physical and mental pliancy?
What obstacles (Tibetan: ne nya-len) are purified with the attainment of physical and mental pliancy?
What is the sign of having fully developed pliancy?
Which is achieved first:
 - physical or mental pliancy?
 - physical or mental bliss of pliancy?List some of the benefits of calm abiding.
- 3/ Why is it essential to realise emptiness in order to be liberated from samsara? What is emptiness empty of?
- 4/ Discuss why the Lam Rim presents the view of the selflessness of persons first and then the selflessness of phenomena, whereas in many Scriptures on the Middle way, the view of the selflessness of phenomena is presented first and then the selflessness of persons? Are there differences between the two types of selflessness in terms of subtlety and coarseness. Is one easier to realise than the other.
- 5/ What are the prerequisite conditions for gaining the realisation of emptiness?
- 6/ List the Four Buddhist schools of tenets. Which school is considered to present the ultimate view of emptiness? The Prasangika view of emptiness is said to be unique amongst the schools of tenets in that the view of emptiness and dependant arising complement each other. Discuss.
- 7/ Where do **you** think the self exists?

Compulsory question

- 7/ Discuss the meaning of the following verse from ‘The Heart of the Middle Way’.

“Securely tie the wayward elephant of the mind
To the firm pillar of the visualisation
With the rope of the memory;
Break it with the hooks of wisdom.”

YOU ARE IN GROUP

T A R A I N S T I T U T E
(Study Group Test)

23th May 2000

Answer any four from question.no.1-6

Question.no.7 is compulsory

Time allowed one hour

1. Define calm abiding and list some of its benefits.
1. Describe mental and physical pliancy.
1. Why is it essential to realise emptiness in order to be liberated from samsara?
1. Explain why is there difference between the Lamrim style texts and the texts on the Middle Way in the order of presenting the two Selflessnesses?
1. What are prerequisites for realising emptiness?
1. Briefly describe how and why ones experience of emptiness during the meditative equipoise is like space, and while during the subsequent period or post meditation is like an illusion.
1. (Compulsory)
Explain the meaning of the following lines from “Heart of the Middle Way” by Bhavaviveka.

“Securely tie the wayward elephant of the mind
To the firm pillar of the visualisation
With the rope of the memory
Break it with the hooks of wisdom.”