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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅད་སྤྱོད་

5 September 1995

Make sure that your motivation to proceed in spiritual practice is to attain the full state of enlightenment, for the sake of all sentient beings. Generate the thought that the purpose of listening to these teachings on the lam rim, and putting them into practice, is to attain buddhahood for the sake of all living beings.

Generating Renunciation By Understanding The Nature Of Existence

In the previous teachings we discussed the various types of suffering which are experienced by all sentient beings within cyclic existence or samsara. We saw that even if you are born in any higher rebirth, you are not free from the source of suffering, because all cyclic existence is subject to the three types of suffering, which we have also discussed.

The purpose of contemplating the sufferings of cyclic existence is to generate a true sense of renunciation, which is a strong yearning for the state of liberation from cyclic existence. To generate a true renunciation, the faults of cyclic existence must be recognised, and strong dissatisfaction with cyclic existence must be felt. And, as we learned from the teachings, there is nothing worthwhile in this cyclic existence, as all things in cyclic existence have the nature of suffering.

Think of the wonderful opportunity you have now with all the freedoms and suitable conditions for you to do whatever you wish. So you must also recognise its value, and understand that it is not without causes. It is the fruit of good karma - the wholesome actions created in the past.

You must also realise that not seizing the value of this great opportunity, is not realising the fruit of all one's virtue in the past. Of course it is best to generate a true renunciation in order to fully seize this human potential with its great opportunity. But even if full renunciation is not generated, at least we should try to become familiar with the true nature of cyclic existence, which is suffering.

Reducing Attachment To Worldly Existence

Geshe Doga says he always instructs that while we have suitable conditions, we should make full use of them, by engaging in spiritual practice and by making our life very happy. This means taking full advantage of material

comforts, like food and clothing, which we should enjoy with full satisfaction. At the same time, however we should not be too attached to surrounding things, and try to be generous to poor people. Then at the time of death there is no fear of loss, because there is no attachment in the mind.

The reality, is that as time passes by, all surrounding things which we possess, and for which we have exerted great efforts, become more distant. Friends or material wealth become more distant from you with every passing minute, but death, and the life after, is drawing ever nearer. We must therefore become concerned about something which we shall all face sooner or later, and reduce our concern for things that are becoming increasingly distant from us. It is our future destiny that we must think about.

If our minds are preoccupied with the temporary affairs of this life, then not only do we lose sight of future lives, but we also lose happiness in this life. The reason for this overwhelming concern about this life, and why it is so important to us, is because there is a strong attachment to this life. It is this attachment which is the source of our day-to-day problems and difficulties. Even if we have some success in obtaining desired objects, because of this attachment there is no satisfaction or contentment, or we may use those objects to generate pride in our success. If we examine, at a deep level, our strong attachment to this life's affairs we see that it is like weighing things on a balance scale - up and down with pleasure and pain. In this way we realise why we need to generate renunciation.

Renunciation is not just a sense of disgust, or dissatisfaction, with this life. Rather out of this sense of disgust, which results from contemplating the various drawbacks of cyclic existence, attachment is decreased and liberation from cyclic existence is sought. This is renunciation in the true sense.

True Renunciation Versus Artificial Renunciation

True or genuine renunciation is generated after feeling this sense of disgust towards all objects of cyclic existence - even towards the pleasures of cyclic existence (in the form of wealth or friends). From the depth of one's heart it is apparent that no matter where one is born in cyclic existence, or what one attains, the nature of

existence is suffering. There is nothing beyond that.

From this deep understanding of the suffering nature of cyclic existence the thought of seeking liberation is generated. This is true renunciation. Whereas artificial renunciation is when one thinks of leaving cyclic existence because of some immediate unfavourable situation, then when that immediate unfavourable situation changes, there is no longer any thought of renunciation. True renunciation can be developed by not only considering the immediate cause of suffering, but also by seeing all one's rebirths in cyclic existence as having the nature of suffering.

There is only one person who can free you from cyclic existence, and lead you to the state of liberation, and that is yourself. When we face death, there is nobody or nothing to provide protection or refuge apart from yourself. Considering the reality that we have to face death, and life after death, we must ask ourselves what can we do to overcome all these fears at the time of death, and in all future lives? Because if you do not do something, nothing else can.

The difference between one who follows, and one who does not follow spiritual practice is in their perception of life, and its purpose. For a non-believer in spiritual practice there are no future lives, so the comfort of this life is their only concern. To provide comfort for this life, any action is acceptable. Whereas for a true believer of spiritual path, they are responsible for not only this life, but also for many future lives. From this perspective the concerns of future lives become the primary concern. Therefore for the spiritual practitioner it is necessary to make some sacrifice of comforts in this life. By making this sacrifice you are in the position to create causes for long term future happiness.

Renunciation Is Essential To Developing Bodhicitta

Although this topic of renunciation is included in the stage of the path of the person of middle scope, this topic of renunciation is also essential for a person of the great scope to follow. For a person of great scope the main spiritual goal is the state of buddhahood. To attain the state of buddhahood, the person of great scope must generate bodhicitta - the altruistic mind of enlightenment. This altruistic mind of enlightenment is generated by cultivating compassion, or true sympathy, for the suffering of all other living beings. However before cultivating true compassion for all other living beings, one must understand the nature of suffering very well in the context of one's own life. Thus, anyone following the great stages of the path must generate renunciation, by contemplating the suffering of their own life.

If the topic of renunciation is such an important topic for the person of the great scope, why is it listed in the lam rim teachings in the stages of the path of middle scope? The reason is that for the person of middle scope, renunciation is the main driving force behind their

practice to achieve their ultimate goal, which is personal liberation. Any action produced out of the motivation of renunciation is a cause to achieve liberation.

There are three principal aspects of the path - renunciation, bodhicitta and the wisdom realising emptiness. It is wrong to put these three aside in favour of something else which is perceived as a more profound practice. If these three are excluded then there is no other profound practice, as renunciation is the primary cause to achieve liberation, and bodhicitta is the primary cause to achieve buddhahood, and without the wisdom realising emptiness we cannot cut the conception of self which is the ignorance that is the root cause of cyclic existence.

Our homework is to memorise the six root delusions. These can be found in the text *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. Here you will find a quotation from Vasubhandu's *Treasury of Knowledge* which lists the six root delusions. Next week we shall discuss the source of cyclic existence.

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

The original typescript is prepared from Alan Molloy's original transcript, which has been checked against Damien Busby's notes. Adair Bunnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.

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ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལམ་ལུགས་བཅུ་དཔལ་

12 September 1995

Ensure that you have a proper motivation to study and practise the lam rim.

To recapitulate the outline of the teachings so far, and explain future headings:

422.2: Training your mind in the stages of the path shared with the medium scope

This has two subheadings:

422.21: Developing thoughts of yearning for liberation

We have finished this section.

422.22 The nature of the path to liberation

In terms of the outline of the teachings we are at this heading which has two subheadings:

422.221: The true source of the stages by which a being enters cyclic existence

This is elaborated into three subheadings:

422.221.1: How delusions arise

This has four subheadings:

422.221.11: Identifying mental delusions

422.221.12: The stages in the development of delusions

422.221.13: The causes of delusions

422.221.14: The faults of delusions

422.221.2: How karmic actions are accumulated

422.221.3: How beings die and are reborn

422.222: The nature of the actual path leading to liberation

422.22: The Nature Of The Path Which Leads To Liberation¹

ཐུན་པར་བསྐྱོད་པའི་ལམ་གྱི་རང་བཞིན་གཏན་ལ་དབབ་པ།

Having discussed over many evenings the general and specific topics on the shortcomings of cyclic existence, we come to realise that the nature of this existence is suffering. Regardless of where you are born, or what you obtain while in cyclic existence, you are subject to the nature of suffering. Once you come to realise how cyclic existence is pervaded by this suffering nature you will feel disgust or dissatisfaction with this existence. The result of this feeling of disgust, is that you will yearn for liberation or nirvana, and such a yearning is renunciation.

In terms of the four noble truths we must first recognise the truth of suffering very clearly. After recognising your suffering you will have a wish to be free from it. This is like a patient suffering from intolerable pain, but who only develops a strong wish to be free from that pain after recognising how terrible it is.

With the thought of being free from your suffering, you need to examine the causes of that suffering, since to be free from it (to achieve liberation) you must remove its cause. Therefore, after the first noble truth we must learn about the second noble truth, which is the noble truth of the cause of suffering.

Uncovering The True Nature Of Our Own Lives

To make real progress in our spiritual practice, we have to relate what we learn to our own life - our own reality. The purpose of our talk of samsara and its suffering nature is to arouse renunciation towards this cyclic existence.

We may have great knowledge of samsara, and the various sufferings existing there, but we won't have any dissatisfaction with our own life in cyclic existence, or fully appreciate our suffering, if we always relate the term 'cyclic existence' to outer things, and not to our own life. For without the recognition of the suffering nature of existence in our own life we cannot generate renunciation. Also if we do not truly appreciate the nature of suffering in our own life, we cannot know the suffering of other beings, and so we cannot truly extend compassion to them.

As we have discussed in the past, we have to see our own life and the body in which we live as samsara; as cyclic existence; as being a product of delusions. Our life is chained to this suffering existence because our own body is contaminated in the sense that it is the outcome of mental delusions, and throwing karma.

The Nature Of Our Own Reality

We have to be consistent with our spiritual practice, and cannot hope that it will always go very smoothly. The aim of our practice is to counteract mental delusions such as attachment, anger, and so on. Since we have had these delusions over countless lifetimes, they are very strong, and dominate our life and mind, so we have to make a concerted and very consistent effort to challenge them. Even if we challenge them one day, they will then arise again the next, because they have been in our minds for a long time, and it is hard to break their force. Whereas when we try to cultivate a virtuous frame of mind, it takes a great deal of effort, both to cultivate and maintain it, since virtue is not as strong as delusion.

Therefore to overcome the delusions, and achieve the spiritual goal of liberation, the most effective path is to first understand the reality of one's own life as much as possible. This is like

¹Page 508 *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand*: Ascertaining the nature of the path leading to liberation"

someone in a dark room who has now walked outside, and can understand the outer reality very easily. Likewise if one understands the nature of suffering of cyclic existence in the context of one's own body, then no matter how much your body is admired by others, you see it as a samsaric body, subject to suffering. As long as you have this body there is no escape from suffering.

The more you understand the nature of your own body as being the nature of suffering, the less attachment you will have to it. Likewise understanding the shortcomings of your own wealth, friends and so forth will decrease your attachment to them. As a result of this you will naturally have the same outlook on the various things of the outside world, eg. other people's bodies and wealth, as they are no different from you, and also have the nature of suffering. Since they have so many shortcomings you will naturally have less attachment.

As mentioned earlier, we have had this attachment to our belongings, body and outer objects over a long period of time, so even though we theoretically understand how these objects have many faults and in real terms are not worth possessing, still there is attachment to them.

Antidotes to can be applied to whatever delusion currently dominates your mind. For example you can generate renunciation against attachment or compassion to remedy anger. It may seem difficult and indeed it may seem even artificial to apply such antidotes but these are very effective methods in gradually counteracting delusions.

There is no escape from suffering as long as we are bound to these contaminated aggregates, and there are the two main causes for us to possess them - karmic actions and mental delusions.

Of these two, delusion is the main source because it is due to the delusions that we create the karma to take a life which is bound to contaminated aggregates. It is said that without delusions, such as craving and grasping after things, the karmas which we accumulate are like a seed without the necessary condition of moisture. Without moisture it will never produce its result. It is the same with delusions. We say that we are born to a suffering existence because of karma, or as a result of accumulating the karma to be born there. But for karma to ripen its results, the necessary contributory conditions of delusions such as craving and grasping must be present.

Furthermore, it is said that unless we overcome these delusions we cannot prevent ourselves from creating more karma to be born in cyclic existence. We can purify all our negative karma by means of the four purifying forces². For example, at the end of the day, before going to bed, we may engage in a very powerful meditation practice to purify all the negative karma which we have created so far, (by the force of regret about creating those negative karmas and so forth) and then do something to accumulate some virtuous karma and then dedicate that karma purely. However since delusion is not uprooted it is possible that after purifying that karma we may create more karma! For example just before falling asleep we might generate some thought, and on the basis of that thought due to delusion, we may become angry and thus create karma. So from this point of view delusion is the main source of cyclic existence.

To overcome delusion we must get used to the practice of virtue. If we are very successful in doing this, then virtue will

arise very swiftly and spontaneously. Remember that delusions can arise very easily and continuously because of their strength and long term familiarity.

Therefore to make progress in our practice we must remind ourselves over and over again about virtue. Reciting Tara, Chenrezig or Buddha mantras is one means. Others are reciting prayers, or cultivating faith in the three jewels, or just thinking of various holy objects of visualisation. These are all ways of occupying the mind with virtuous thoughts. You can even drive a car while reciting mantras, which can also be a protection against being killed or involved in an accident. To get ourselves used to spiritual practice we must apply any means or method which can help us to think of virtue.

The worst difficulty, which we must all face, is death, and we have to prepare ourselves now to face that final problem. Since there is no other means which can protect us from death, our only protection is spiritual practice, and by taking refuge. We must get used to the thought of relying upon the Lord Buddha as our protector when facing a difficulty or hardship in life, and generate a strong faith in the Buddha who is our only protection. Who else could be our protector? Make a prayer to Buddha and request him to grant us blessings.

In this way we become used to thinking of Buddha whenever we face any hardships in life. If we do this now while our life is happy, and with a clear mind, and if we accustom ourselves to entrusting ourselves to Buddha, then at the last moment, when death comes it will be natural to think of Buddha. Although no one can see your visualised Buddha, for you it is real, and the blessings you receive are a real protection. So even if you have no natural inclination to lead your life according to the spiritual teachings, but at least if you cultivate faith in that practice, you will gain some positive impetus to continue in your practice, and through this make progress.

Geshe-la would like to thank you all for doing the last exam. He was very pleased with your answers.

Homework for next week: Memorise the four noble truths, the five aggregates and the six root delusions.

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² These are: Regret, base, antidote and promise.

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19 September 1995

Try to generate the correct motivation by thinking that I seek the state of buddhahood for the benefit of all beings, and that in order to achieve this state of buddhahood I am undertaking this study and practice of lam rim.

422.221.1 How Delusions are Developed

ཉོན་མོངས་པ་སྐྱེ་ཚུལ།

In our previous discussions we learned that the root cause of cyclic existence is mental delusions. So we need to first identify those delusions before we can apply any remedy to overcome them.

In essence, delusion refers to a negative or very disturbing thought, or state of mind. The effect is such that whenever delusion is present, that person will experience a very unpeaceful and uncontrollable mind due to the force of the delusion.

The purpose of practising meditation is to overcome or defeat mental delusions. If you want to shoot an enemy with an arrow, you have to identify the target very clearly. When we sit in meditation our target is to conquer all delusions. As there are many types of delusions - e.g. anger, pride, desire - each of these should be clearly recognised in order to overcome them.

We must also overcome delusions because they are the true source of all our emotional problems. Unless we recognise this true source and apply some remedy, then all the other things we do to try to overcome our problems will not help.

When we are involved with some unsatisfactory situation we relate the cause of our situation to some outside factor or person. We may blame an outside person, and then engage in a dispute, and fight with that person, yet the true source is our own delusions which we continually generate in our mind. If we examine events with a clear sense of discrimination, we can see that external factors are only of minor importance in determining our day-to-day feelings of pleasure and pain, and the deeper cause of those feelings is something deep within ourselves.

Once we clearly recognise how all our problems arise from the delusions which we generate within ourselves, and then accordingly follow meditation practice, we can actually achieve the goal of that meditation practice, which is to reduce delusions. So with a clear idea of the purpose of meditation, we know that we must target all our mental delusions, with the knowledge that they are the cause of our daily restlessness and unhappiness. Unless we free ourselves from the dominant force

of delusion, there will be no end to the mental suffering, and no freedom from unhappiness. As a result of meditation we can reduce the force of our delusions so the feelings within us become more settled and stable, and we can experience that inner sense of peace and happiness.

422.221.11 Identifying Mental Delusions

ཉོན་མོངས་ངོས་གཟུང་བ།

There are two categories of delusions:

422.221.111 The primary or root delusions

ཅོ་ཉོན།

422.221.112 The secondary delusions

ཉེ་ཉོན།

422.221.111 The primary or root delusions

ཅོ་ཉོན།

There are six primary delusions: attachment, anger, pride, ignorance, doubt and deluded views. Of these six the first is attachment.

422.221.111.1 Attachment

འདོད་ཚལ་ས།

If we were to define attachment; its object is any contaminated object; its perception is to perceive that contaminated object as beautiful, attractive or appealing; its wish is to then acquire that object; [its function is to generate suffering]².

Because attachment is a delusion, it is something to be

² Editor: Further definitions of attachment are:

Geshe Rabten *The mind and its functions*:

"Attachment is a distinct mental factor that, when referring to a contaminated phenomenon that exaggerates its attractiveness and then proceeds to wish for and take a strong interest in it. As a contributing condition, it acts as a basis for the continued production of discontent."

Lama Tsong Khapa: "Attachment is a hankering after any pleasurable external or internal object by taking it as pleasing to oneself. For example, just as it is difficult to remove oil stain from a cotton cloth, in the same way, this hankering after and getting more involved with the thing makes it very difficult to get rid of."

¹ Page 508 *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand*. The title used in the text is 'How delusions are developed'.

overcome. But our experience of attachment towards other people for instance, has been perceived as an expression of our desire for happiness and pleasure. Therefore when it is said that attachment is negative we might ask 'Why is attachment negative, since it is not only a means of bringing some satisfaction or pleasure to myself, but also to others as well?'

Also, in our experience attachment and love are very closely connected, so that it is very hard to separate them. Therefore we need to consider in what way attachment is different from the feelings of love and compassion towards others.

The Difference Between Love and Attachment

The difference is very clear even in the definitions of attachment and of love. Attachment, as described before, makes us desire things because they appear to be very beautiful, useful or are a means of self gratification. Here we can see that attachment is basically desiring, or wishing for things, because they are seen as a source of pleasure, or satisfaction for oneself.

If we consider the various feelings which we have towards other people, this will give some idea of the difference between attachment, and love and compassion. For example in a husband-wife relationship there is a strong sense of desire and bonding to each other. In the relationship between, say, a mother and her son there is also an intimate feeling of closeness. Of these two relationships, it is usually the man - woman relationship which has more attachment. There may be some element of love, but the relationship is mainly one of attachment. The reason is that each sees the other as a source of personal pleasure, and this attitude generates strong desire, a feeling of wanting to be close. Whereas in the relationship with their children there may be some attachment, but mainly it is a feeling of love.

Generally speaking it is very difficult to establish a relationship of pure love. But by knowing the difference between love and attachment in relationships with others, we can see how desire has a selfish purpose, with no sense of giving, or concern for the needs of the other person.

Consider a relationship, where the woman finds out that the man has another girlfriend. If she has a strong feeling of attraction to the man, then day and night, night and day, she would find no peace, nor enjoy food, nor drink nor going out nor even resting. This is because the object seen to be a very essential source of fulfilling self or desire is lost. The same applies to the man if his girlfriend leaves him for another man. If he is attached to her, he will undergo the same misery. The crux of the problem is that in this circumstance you have lost everything.

Now with the mother-son relationship, if the mother finds out that her son has found a new girlfriend, who is very nice and very attractive, she will be very happy for her son. Deep down she may feel some sadness that she will lose her son, but this is not as strong as her delight.

So the main difference between love and attachment is in the attitude. Love is being wholeheartedly concerned with the needs of the other person; with whether they have enough happiness or pleasure. There is a sense of sharing the burdens of life. Love is solely a feeling of helping others. Whereas attachment is very self centred. It is an attitude of seeing others as the source of one's security and pleasures. The common feature of both love and attachment is the strong expression of a feeling of closeness with another person.

If love is the source of all joy and happiness in one's own personal life, in society and in the world, then attachment is the

source of unending misery in the lives of ourselves and others. So if we wish our relationships with others to be the most enjoyable, lasting and beneficial for all, then we need to develop more love in our relationships rather than attachment.

This means being very caring and considerate of others, recognising that some actions please whilst other actions cause harm to others. If we have thoughts for the needs of the person with whom we share our life, then naturally they will reciprocate and show kindness and help to us when we are in need.

Love is the thought of giving pleasure and happiness to others. So if you have love, your feeling of love will grow even stronger when they are in desperate need of help. If you have a strong feeling of love then the more trouble the person you love is in, the more sympathy you will feel.

As we saw, attachment is hoping for something from others to satisfy your life. If this is your main feeling, then in a situation where the other person is facing troubles, and going downhill in terms of finances or health, your attitude to that person may change. Since they are no longer attractive you will tend move away from them. Therefore a relationship which is mainly based on attachment is very unstable, and not very fruitful or beneficial to either partner.

With relationships based on love, both parties get more benefit or satisfaction out of it while it remains. Whereas if it is based upon attachment there is less benefit. To go further, suppose this relationship breaks up in the future. Then the relationship based on attachment will leave great pain in the lives of the former partners. Even though your friend may have finished the relationship, if you have attachment, your object of desire is still there like a disease which will inevitably cause you suffering. Whereas in a relationship with a true caring thought for someone you love, the relationship may finish, and although the object of attachment is lost, the object of your love is not. Therefore when such a relationship breaks up you do not suffer as much as someone whose relationship was based on attachment.

So love is the source of happiness now, and in the future, whereas attachment is the source of misery now. With attachment there is no contentment in the mind. If you have one, then you want one hundred; then if you have one hundred, you want one thousand. Attachment deludes your mind as to the true nature of reality. The true nature of reality of cyclic existence is not appealing, whereas attachment makes us see cyclic existence as attractive. Therefore we do not generate renunciation, and so we have no strong aspiration to seek liberation. Therefore attachment is not only the source of immediate problems, but it is also an obstruction to achieving the ultimate state of liberation.

Student: Can we have attachment to non-contaminated objects?

Geshe-la: No, you cannot generate attachment to non-contaminated objects since only contaminated objects can be perceived in a number of different ways. For example the shape of a cup can be perceived as elegant, or ugly. There are different perceptions in regard to its entity. Whereas for non-contaminated phenomena you cannot perceive any difference in their entity.

Attachment has more to do with the way an object is perceived by your mind. For example at different times you might experience anger or attachment towards the same person.

Student: Is Buddha an example of a non-contaminated object? But Devadatta saw him as being not perfect.

Geshe-la: If you see the true aspect of the Buddha you

will not generate any delusions. However we cannot say that what ordinary people perceive with their eyes corresponds to the true, real aspect of the object.

One of the qualities of the Buddha's physical aspect is that there is no difference or gap, between the physical aspect of the body and the mind which perceives it. So if the aspect of the body is perceived as perfect, it is always perfect. Whereas for other objects, the way they are perceived is subject to change. Therefore, we cannot absolutely say its aspect is beautiful all the time, because we perceive it as beautiful at one time, but on another occasion we do not perceive it as beautiful.

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26 September 1995

Try to ensure you have the right motivation.

The Antidote To Attachment

We have finished the definition of attachment. Having recognised attachment, we now consider the antidote to counteract it.

Although we may have many reasons why we are unhappy and dissatisfied with life, the fundamental cause of this is attachment, or desire for things. The best thing after recognising all the faults of attachment is to find the remedy that removes that attachment from its root. If we cannot completely remove attachment, then at least we can try to partly overcome the specific form of attachment or desire which torments our mind, and causes pain and unease. Even if we cannot overcome or counteract all levels of attachment, it is worthwhile to apply the remedy described here to overcome the very gross or forceful attachment, which brings us unhappiness in the immediate short term.

In our normal view of daily life, there is a misconception that happiness (or pleasure) can result from attachment or desire, and that without this desire or attachment, there is no way to experience that pleasure or happiness. This kind of view is always the one that appears to our mind, and so we follow the tendency to attachment. Therefore as spiritual practitioners it is important to see that this is not the right view, and that in fact this view enslaves one to desire or attachment. So we have to try to not become completely habituated to desire or attachment. It is said in the sutras that drinking alcohol can be very addictive. If one keeps drinking it one becomes addicted, even to the point of death, as a result of that habit. It is said that desire has that same addictive quality. The more acquaintance one has with it, the more it is sought.

In trying to overcome attachment, it can be attacked at its root cause, or at least one can minimise one's acquaintance with it. There are thus various levels in overcoming attachment.

Overcoming Attachment By Meditation On The Foul Aspects

The meditation to overcome attachment is meditation upon the unattractiveness or ugliness of the given object of attachment. The objects of attachment can be our own

body, possessions and so forth. Let us say the object is our own body. According to the perfect classical instruction¹ the way to meditate is that you imagine that from the centre of your forehead on the right side blood and pus drips, and oozes. From the centre of the forehead it covers the whole right side of your body. Then imagine that from the centre of your forehead to the left side of your body, is just a skeleton, i.e. just bones. Viewing our body in this manner, there is no way it can be attractive, and there is no way that the mind can become attracted to the body.

When our mind is overpowered by attachment we need to ask ourselves, "Is that attachment benefiting me? Is that attachment something positive for me? Will that attachment show mercy on me?" These questions can be asked not just of attachment, but of any the negative states which dominate our mind. Is that state showing sympathy to us? Or is it causing some unhappiness in our life? If we consider this, and want to remove that negative state of mind, then the only way to remove it is to change our own mind. This we have to do ourselves, because our mind is not going to change this attachment or ill thought without assistance.

We need to overcome the negative state of mind not only because we are seeking the ultimate goal of full enlightenment, but also for the purpose of benefiting ourselves in this very lifetime. From our own experience, we can learn that external things eventually fail to satisfy us. We might think, out of desire, "If I had a new partner, then I would be happy". However there is no external object which is a true cause of mental satisfaction. So mental satisfaction must come from within our own mind, and this is achieved by overcoming all the mental delusions in our mind. For example, overcoming a degree of attachment will bring peace and satisfaction to the mind.

With this in mind, as a remedy to attachment we meditate on the unattractiveness of the body - either

¹ This quintessential instruction has its source in the Abidharmakosha. Geshe Doga has described this instruction several times in different teachings: 8th September 1989 in the commentary to the sixth chapter of the Madhyamika-Avatarata and also in the "Love and attachment" course of 30th May 1993. A brief mention of this meditation is found in the text of the sixth Chapter of the Madhyamika-Avatarata itself.

one's own or another's body. If we follow this meditation it becomes very effective. It is said that you do not have to be very specific, when meditating on the unattractive qualities, for the meditation to be very effective. That is, it is not necessary to meditate upon the specific object of your attachment; you do not have to be focussed on 'de-beautifying' the specific person to whom you are attracted. Rather, to be effective, all you have to do is think of the body in general as unattractive - dripping blood and pus and as a skeleton.

You can also think of the whole ground as covered by bones and skeletons. You can visualise the ground in front of you as covered with flesh, blood, pus, organs and bones. Also visualise that the meat turns an unpleasant reddish colour then an unpleasant bluish colour - like rotten meat. The meat and bones are not joined together in an attractive shape, but are scattered about. Also the shape of the meat is uneven, just like when maggots eat meat, and leave holes in different parts of it.

Regardless of the object of your desire or attachment, if you do this meditation with the images as clear as possible, then observing the objects in this most disgusting way will have some effect on the mind, and minimise, or even completely overcome attachment.

Mostly we are attached to the bodies of other people. If we examine it our attraction is only based on the outer or external appearance of the person. So try to think that, although outwardly there is some appealing beauty, what is inside is just filth. In actuality we see that it is just storage for filthy things. Thinking in this way will help lessen our attachment to objects, especially when it is so strong as to cause pain in the mind.

We assume that we have finished the root delusion of attachment. The next root delusion is anger, but we shall not go further tonight.

You should read the lam rim text as much as possible since the text has all the instructions you need in your practice. When studying the texts, it is wrong to put aside the lam rim and look for instruction elsewhere. Apart from the lam rim all other books we read have no meaning to our life, and are just to pass time. As we read the lam rim text we find it to be like a very responsible parent giving good advice to their children. The lam rim covers everything we need in our spiritual practice: how to set up an altar, how to make offerings and even how to clean our room. It shows not only the meditation technique to use, but it even shows what sort of cushion to use, and what sort of motivation to have. It tells us what attitude to have when teaching dharma to others, and how to listen to the teachings.

It gives instructions if you have some emotional problems such as anger, attachment and so forth. If our interest is not so much for this life, but beyond then the causes to achieve a better rebirth are shown in the lam rim. If you want to abandon cyclic existence completely,

or even achieve full enlightenment all the methods to achieve these goals are in the lam rim.

It is a unique quality² of lam rim that not only does it present all these instructions, but they are presented in a very orderly manner, like a meal that is ready to eat and drink.

Next week is discussion. The week after is the test. The compulsory question is 'What is the difference between attachment and compassion, and how do we overcome attachment?'

Geshe-la encourages you to actually write the test questions. Generally meditation is more important than writing. Some of you specifically requested that you prefer meditation. If you are doing meditation in that time then that is the best and your time is not wasted. However sometimes if you are not doing something physically, then it is so easy for the mind to wander. If you are sitting there, and the mind is wandering outside then it is better to write the answer. But if you do not do the test because you are lazy, or could not be bothered, then that is not good for you. Then it is best that you write your answers.

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

The original typescript is prepared from Alan Molloy's original transcript, which has been checked against Damien Busby's notes. Adair Bunnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.

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² The lam rim is generally stated to have the Four Greatnesses (page 81 *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand*) and the Three Features (Page 92 *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand*). In brief the Three Greatnesses are:

1. The lam rim is complete because it contains all the subject matter of sutra and tantra.
2. It is easy to put into practice because it places the steps in taming the mind in a sequential order for easy practise.
3. It is superior to other traditions because it contains instructions from two gurus who were schooled in the traditions of the two forerunners.