

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུང་ས།



4 March 1997

Instead of beginning with our usual meditation Geshe Doga would like to say a few things.

If we reflect upon our current situation there are many reasons to feel fortunate, because we enjoy all the suitable outer and inner factors to achieve any type of personal goal that we seek in this life.

What is important to realise is that, because of the wonderful conditions we enjoy, there is no better time than now to achieve something in this life. So it is good to look back on one's life and see how much time has been wasted in sleepiness, laziness, indulging in mental distraction, and how much time has been wasted because of one's own delusions or ignorance.

Looking back on our life, there is no instance when we can say "I was absolutely happy" or "I was absolutely miserable in my suffering". The time that has passed has been wasted, and we are unsure whether those times were good or bad, meaningful or meaningless. The time has gone.

Just as time has gone in the past, so it will go to the end of this life. Year by year we shall become older, the body will become weaker and, just as in the past, we shall not find a secure sense of happiness in the future. Whatever we achieve in this life is not a real means to secure lasting happiness or satisfaction in life, nor will it solve or prevent our problems.

If, however, we look inwardly, we see that as time passes, our mind becomes more and more addicted to delusion, laziness and objects of distraction, and because of this we cannot find true peace, rest or happiness within the mind. If we continue like this, then as old age chases our life, our mind becomes more disappointed and lost in life. We realise that we have found nothing in this life that is truly meaningful, and so a sense of emptiness, of life lacking purpose or meaning arises.

Now if we ask ourselves why we go through such misery, we see that it is not because we have not found pleasure in life. We have in fact found and experienced almost all the possible pleasures that exist in this world - good clothes, food, drink, and material happiness.

If we reflect on our own life like this we realise that for life to become happier and more peaceful, we must go beyond material happiness. The reason why we have not found such security is because the mind is distracted by the pleasures of the outer world, and has never thought to seek that happiness within oneself. We must create the causes for this peace and happiness within our mind.

Why do material objects fail as a source of happiness?

We know very well from all our experience that material objects will not bring true satisfaction, and lasting happiness. If they could then the path to happiness and satisfaction would be very easy - just a matter of finding a beautiful place in which to live. But we know that no place can guarantee satisfaction and happiness, neither can any type of food, drink or any other material object. These pleasures are very limited, and not guaranteed to content our mind.

On the other hand, if we indulge in them, these material objects and pleasures can fill our minds with mental distractions and various types of delusion, with the result that our mind may become very distracted with endless thoughts concerning the past, present, or future. These thoughts can totally overpower us to the point where it is like we are fighting for our life against the enemy of our own thoughts. So we become the victim of our thoughts, and never stop worrying. While our mind is overpowered by such non-stop disturbing thoughts, then we cannot find any rest for ourselves. Led by these thoughts we feel depressed and hopeless about ourselves.

Under the overpowering influence of these thoughts it is easy to lose interest in doing anything. This is not because of any inability to achieve one's goals, but because of the overpowering influence of one's thoughts.

Laziness

Then there is laziness.

Laziness means something which discourages one from doing things that are supposed to be done.

It is laziness if you decide to give up work because you cannot get up early, or you get home too late, or because it is too hard. Any excuse to work slowly or not to finish a piece of work is a form of laziness. This laziness arises when mental delusions arise in our mind. When the mind is overpowered by mental delusions or distractions, then we cannot achieve anything, or find any peace or any happiness in life. Understanding why external things fail to satisfy, and how in fact they bring more unhappiness and suffering we should look for a method which will help us to overcome mental delusions, and which will inspire us to make the utmost effort to reduce them.

What are the remedies?

If we think "I can see and understand very clearly how harmful the mental delusions, laziness and distractions

are to the mind, and I also understand that overcoming these three things will bring more inner rest, peace and happiness", then we shall be even more motivated to undertake a practice which will overcome these three things.

What are the practices to overcome these negative states of mind? It is said that the remedy to:

- laziness is joyous effort
- distraction is meditative concentration
- mental delusion is directing one's mind towards dharma, or the spiritual way of thinking.

Being Aware of Both the Benefits and Disadvantages of our Actions

Whatever we decide to do - whether it be meditation or study - it is important to know very clearly our purpose for doing this. If you decide to overcome laziness then you should know why you wish to do so? You have to be aware of both the benefits and disadvantages of your actions.

The shortcoming of laziness is lack of enthusiasm in our actions. Being influenced by laziness, it is possible that that we shall not do any work, and even if we do there will not be much effort put into it. Likewise if we meditate we might sit in the meditation posture, but not know what we are doing, or upon what object to meditate. Out of laziness then, the result will be a loss of clarity and purpose in our meditation.

So we have to study and know about the effect of our actions. Thinking of the effect of our actions, will naturally inspire us to do the right actions of body, speech and mind. A wrong action of either body or speech will ruin our reputation. Because we do not want this, by thinking about our loss of reputation will inspire us to do the right actions.

In essence spiritual practice or learning is all about how to live one's life better and in a more meaningful manner. Therefore we must take spiritual practice as a guide to improve our daily way of thinking and doing things. Whether walking, sleeping, or resting we must ask ourselves, "What is the right way of doing this?" It is very important to use all the teachings as a personal guide, and so become a better person.

Tonight we finish here. From next week we do normal sessions with meditation, teachings and so on. Geshe Doga would like to remind new members that they should receive a copy of the Study Group rules and conditions.

The topic of study for this year will be a commentary of the Lam Rim - the stages of the path to enlightenment. Geshe Doga thinks that there are maybe two weeks to finish stages of the path common to the person of middle scope. Then we shall begin teachings on the stages of the path for persons of great scope. So the focus of this year's teachings will be on bodhicitta - the essence of the teachings of mahayana buddhism.

We are indeed very fortunate to have this opportunity to hear teachings on bodhicitta. As His Holiness's late tutor said "Let alone someone trying hard to cultivate the

precious mind of bodhicitta, even someone who hears or says the word bodhicitta is fortunate enough." So we should feel very fortunate and try to begin this year's teachings with a positive and joyous state of mind.

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

Edit methodology

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Edited version checked by Alan Molloy

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11 March 1997

We should ensure that our motivation to study these profound teachings on lam rim is that of bodhicitta - the ultimate wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Make sure that this is your thought. Taming one's own mind is another purpose of studying the lam rim.

Taming the Mind - The Essence of Spiritual Practice

Studying the lam rim to tame one's own mind is not something that contradicts the bodhicitta motivation. In generating bodhicitta you have cultivated the thought to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Saying "for the sake of all beings" implies that the intention behind your actions is to benefit other beings. To fulfil this bodhicitta motivation you must practise lam rim and focus upon pacifying all negative states of mind.

It is very obvious that it is impossible to perform any action for the sake of other beings if we do not rid ourselves of such negativities, particularly the selfish ones. If we look within ourselves we see two attitudes - those of self-cherishing and of cherishing others. Of these two, the attitude of self-cherishing is by far the stronger, so how can we benefit any other beings? Let alone benefiting a far distant being, we cannot even benefit those with whom we have a close relationship. So it is very important to recognise what type of attitude influences the motivation behind our actions.

A very selfish and negative mind is like a very harmful and destructive weapon. Whenever it strikes it destroys all our inner peace and happiness. So we can see that it is some negative state of mind within us that is the main cause of any form of misery which we find in our life - such as being restless, or lacking stability in our lives, or seeming to confront unending problems. Not only does this negative state of mind cause a lack of inner stability, but it also causes a lack of stability in our relationships with others - a friend can rapidly change to an enemy and an enemy may become a friend and so on. All those things happen because we are led by a state of mind which is wild and cruel. Therefore it is clear that unless we cultivate peace inside ourselves by calming and disciplining our mind, we are in no position to help other beings.

As far as methods of calming the mind are concerned there is no more effective and better method than that found in the lam rim teachings. This method of gaining complete control over the mind is the same as that used by early masters.

If we want to be a person with more dignity, blessings and a good heart, then the only way to do this is by taming all the uncontrollable states of mind. Once we

achieve some level of mind control through our own effort, then we can really appreciate the level of spiritual practice which we have achieved, regardless of our own level of knowledge. Through the teachings we shall have found what we seek - inner peace and happiness.

We have to realise that this ability to control our own mind is something that we have to achieve for ourselves, and that the spiritual teachings are the method to do this. If we do not apply these teachings to our own mind then these teachings have no personal benefit. Not even one's teacher, or the Lord Buddha can cultivate such positive states of mind for us.

Having realised that lam rim is the most superior and effective method of calming our mind, how then is it to be put into practice? For this we must realise that practising the methods of lam rim is not something unrelated to our day-to-day life.

We must realise that spiritual practice will bring more happiness into our life, and help to solve unwanted experiences in life, for example in relationships with others, or at the work-place. The whole point is being able to judge whether there is any progress, whether spiritual practice is beneficial, whether or not one is receiving blessings from receiving the teachings. It is in daily life that we can see if there is more peace and satisfaction than before we began to follow the spiritual teachings.

In a sense what we base our spiritual practice upon is our commonsense sense of discrimination of what is good, and what is bad in our actions of body, speech and mind. From this perspective we should practise to increase, as much as possible, the positive qualities of our actions of body, speech and mind whilst at the same time decreasing the negativities of our actions of body, speech and mind.

What is negative and what is positive? To a large extent we can understand this by using ourselves as an example. If we take for example our dealings with friends and so on. What we need to consider when we look in our minds, is the sort of attitude that we hold towards a person. If we experienced that attitude from another how would we feel? Likewise with understanding the difference between our positive and negative verbal actions. In this way we can gain an understanding of how our actions of body, speech or mind determine the reactions which we receive from others. It is very clear if we think in this way.

Therefore what the "practice" part of "spiritual practice" means that in daily life we must practise or retain all that

is positive in our actions of body, speech and mind. This can be in terms of our relationships with others and also in our workplace. By adopting the spiritual teachings as a life practice in such a way, there be a direct benefit to us. The result of such practice, and the transformation of our actions of body, speech and mind into something more beneficial to others, will naturally attract more friends and lessen enemies. Others judge you in terms of your actions of body, speech and mind. If these three actions are positive, then in the eyes of the world you are a positive human being. In short the spiritual practice that we do has some benefit even in this life.

We should try to place the focus of our spiritual practice upon how to improve our daily actions of body speech and mind. In all our actions, whether walking, sitting, or eating we must be aware of making sure they are the right actions - then our spiritual practice would really benefit the lives of both ourselves and others. Our spiritual practice would then become a source of joy and happiness. On the other hand if we make no effort at all to integrate the spiritual teachings into our daily actions then all our life will just consist of complaints about not having enough friends, or about relationships with others, and so on.

Our own actions are the most important thing that matter in life, and we have to assume responsibility for them. Generally speaking people believe that those with more friends and relatives have more people to support them. However it is not always the case. For some people, having plenty of friends and relatives means having more problems in life. If we do not control our actions of body and speech, then the immediate recipients of our actions are those closest to us. It is the same with harsh speech. The immediate recipient of a frowning face is the person closest to you. If you do not discipline your actions then friends and relatives become a cause of problems and concerns in life.

Of course this is not to say that friends and relatives are perfect, and that everything is always our own fault. But even if it is by someone else's fault, and you hear a harsh word from a friend, and you also lose control and reply with harsh words, then your response causes even more damage to the relationship.

On the positive side the people to whom we are always considerate are none other than the people closest to us - family, close friends, and our work mates.

So we have to engage in spiritual practice, and what that means to us is to practise right actions towards those we meet in life. This may mean improving your means of verbal communication, or your mental attitude, or your physical expressions.

If you have a belief in the law of karma then you must put that into practice by transforming daily actions of body, speech and mind so they are not harmful to other beings. In work situations you are paid to fulfil some required responsibility. If you do not do so, then you are dishonest. By having faith in the law of karma we try to fulfil our responsibilities honestly, and so our actions not only benefit ourselves but are also of personal benefit.

Questions and answers

Geshela: What are the Three Baskets of the Teachings and the Three Higher Trainings?

Students: The Three Baskets are vinaya, sutra and abhidharma.

The Three Higher Trainings are higher morality, higher concentration and higher wisdom.

The Three Higher Trainings

In the context of the lam rim the training of wisdom specifically refers to special insight which is also known as superior insight. The training on concentration refers to calm abiding.

These three are related in that wisdom depends upon the training in concentration which in turn depends upon the training in morality.

This is because the wisdom which is special insight can only be achieved after achieving calm abiding, in which even subtle mental distractions are overcome. However to overcome these subtle internal obstacles to meditation and calm abiding, we must first overcome gross disturbances, which is done by the practice of morality.

In other words the first training of morality is the foundation of the other two trainings. In fact we covered the three trainings last year. Refer back to the lam rim commentary. It is also good to study useful examples to understand the function of these three trainings.¹

It is important to gain a good understanding of these three trainings as they are the tools to calm one's mind. In practice it is necessary to apply these three trainings so as to fully calm and subdue the mind. So it is important that we know them well.

One of the advantages of undertaking such a thorough study of these subjects is to develop wisdom knowledge about them - this knowledge can be very supportive of our practice. For example, while meditating we might sit and focus on the subject, and it seems all right, but after the meditation session we might forget the whole point of the meditation, and so it becomes very hard to integrate spiritual practice into our daily life.

Throughout our practice we must apply mindfulness. However mindfulness itself lacks the discrimination of what is right or wrong. Therefore, in order to apply mindfulness all the time, there must be a good knowledge of what is right and wrong.

By applying mindfulness to ensure attention, object and method, supported by wisdom knowledge, are maintained throughout, meditation will be very effective. Then even after meditation, mindfulness must still be maintained so that actions are not polluted by some negative actions. Even this mindfulness requires the support of the wisdom knowledge which discriminates right from wrong.

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¹ Editor: In a previous class Geshela gave the example of the axeman to illustrate the Three Higher Trainings:

"To cut a tree you need a sharp axe, and the wielder of the axe must have a strong shoulder and hand. Without a strong shoulder and hand the tools cannot chop down the tree, no matter how sharp the axe. Likewise the three higher trainings are indispensable. To cut the tree of ignorance of grasping at the 'I' we need the sharp axe of wisdom, supported by the firm shoulder and hand of concentration."

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18 March 1997

Let us cultivate the bodhicitta motivation of wishing to attain full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. In order to achieve this, we listen to these lam rim teachings to tame our minds.

422.222.2 Which Spiritual Path will lead to Liberation

ལམ་ཇི་ལྟ་བུ་ཞིག་གིས་འཁོར་བ་ལས་ལྷོག་པ།

In the last teaching we began the topic covering which spiritual path will lead us to the state of liberation from cyclic existence. The path which will do this is the wisdom realising selflessness. This wisdom is the direct remedy to the ignorance of self-grasping. It is this ignorance which is the root of all other delusions, and the root cause of cyclic existence.

We understood, last week, that we must gain the wisdom which is a special insight into the realisation of selflessness. And to gain such a realisation of selflessness, we must first develop a single pointed concentration, called calm abiding, on the wisdom realising selflessness. But prior to gaining calm abiding we must first engage in the training of morality. Therefore the path to liberation is encompassed in the threefold trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom.

The lam rim teaching is the guideline for one to reach full enlightenment. Here we are concerned with the teaching on morality. Of these three scopes of the stages of the path, the one which we are currently studying is the common or shared practice. It is not the actual stages of path of a person of middle scope, rather it is the stages of the path common to a person of middle scope. The training of wisdom is explained later, in the teachings on the stage of great scope.

Morality

In general morality means a sense of restraint or refraining from non-virtue.

Technically, morality refers to the thought of refraining from harmful actions. True morality is the sincere thought, from the depths of one's heart, to refrain from each of the ten non-virtues: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, idle gossip, covetousness, malicious thought and wrong views.

We also need to realise that there are benefits in practising the morality of refraining from each of these ten non-virtues. Nagajuna said "Morality is the basis of all excellent qualities, just like the earth is the basis for all moving and unmoving things to exist." We should

realise that our practice of morality serves as the basis for the cultivation of our positive qualities. Without laying the basis of morality, we can develop no spiritual qualities. As buddhists, morality (particularly that of not causing harm to other living beings) should be the basis of our practice; in the sense that all other spiritual practices we do, should be based on this foundation.

So morality mainly refers to the genuine thought of refraining. Therefore, in our spiritual practice we should cultivate this strong thought of restraint, with a positive belief about the benefits of such morality. Whatever happens in life, whether it be good or bad, you should still maintain your morality, refraining from doing any of the ten non-virtuous actions.

You should call this your spiritual, or dharma practice since what dharma means is "that which protects". Here the practice of non-killing is dharma. It is dharma in the sense that by undertaking that practice you are protected from falling into the depths of lower rebirth. Morality is also our refuge in the sense of being a cause for us to take a happy rebirth.

Benefits of Morality

The practice of morality has great benefit both to our own personal life, and that of others. Why did Lord Buddha emphasise this practice of morality? Because morality is the source of true peace and happiness. If we talk of peace in terms of our own immediate environment, it will naturally be very peaceful if there is no harmfulness, and no cause of harmfulness. We can live very peacefully if there is no need to worry about threats to our life, property or relationships. It is living beings who are responsible for peace and harmony in their environment. If living beings hold harmful thoughts towards each other, having no respect for life, property or truth, then such a place would be a very insecure place in which to live. Even a single person engaging in one immoral act can be the cause of greater harm to hundreds of thousands of beings. One single individual practising morality on the other hand, can benefit countless beings, enabling them to attain true peace and happiness in their life.

Whenever we talk of practising morality, we first have to think about how we can control or tame our mind. We have to make an effort to minimise thoughts of harmfulness like killing, stealing, and so on.

If we then engage in meditation, we shall find it to be much more effective, and even easier, if it is based upon our progress in the practice of morality. However if our practice of morality is weak, then it can be detrimental to

our meditation, for example by not producing a good result, or by the meditation becoming very difficult. Due to the weakness of our morality, our mind is influenced by desire for pleasant objects, or gross outer objects of distraction. Not only do we find it hard to calm our mind by meditation, and focus on objects, or a particular topic, but neither can we make any further progress. Progress in meditation can only occur by firstly overcoming outer distractions. Only then can you counter the subtle meditation obstacles such as sinking. In this way we can make progress.

Morality as a Cause for Stable Relationships

What we are discussing here is something that everyone of us can put into practice. The first and best thing is to focus upon a practice which is very simple, and easy to put into practice, and which makes full sense. It is on this basis, that we decide to do further practice.

Morality is also the practice which can transform us into a better person, which is what we all wish. The effect of the morality of refraining from the ten non-virtues is to subdue all harmful actions of our three doors of body speech and mind. The actual practice is when we integrate the morality of refraining from ten non-virtues into our daily life. We do not just follow this practice of morality on the advice of our teachers, but because we see the benefits to our own life, and the contribution it makes to the peace and happiness of other beings.

How does this practice benefit others? It benefits those closest to us. For example if you are trying your best to keep the morality of refraining from the ten non-virtues, then that gives your friends much peace of mind, because they know that you have no thought of lying, or harming, or deceiving others.

Imagine their fear and mental insecurity if they thought you were not fully trustworthy in what you say or do in your relationship with them. Through the lack of practice of morality, even a close friend will live with a great sense of fear and suspicion in their dealings with you.

Whereas on the positive side if we practise morality, this has the potential to make our friends feel very trusting, so morality is a good cause for stability and harmony in our relationships, with resulting personal benefit. So our practice of morality, if taken seriously, will be of great benefit to ourselves and many others.

It is up to each individual to decide what sort of verbal, physical or mental actions they perform. In other words each individual being has to control their mental or physical actions. If you want your actions of body, speech and mind to be beneficial or useful, then you are responsible for creating such actions. Therefore the ten virtuous actions have the potential to transform all our actions of body, speech and mind into something beneficial.

Tea Offering

In making tea offering we say the three syllable mantra OM AH HUNG three times. Each repetition has a special meaning.

On the first repetition imagine the tea which is offered is purified of stains and faults.

On second repetition the tea is transformed into a heavenly nectar.

On the third repetition we transform our offering into something everlasting and inexhaustible.

After this the tea is offered to holy objects, who by accepting this offering experience uncontaminated bliss.

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25 March 1997

Please make sure your motivation is that of bodhicitta.

Morality (continued)

Previously we have noted that morality refers mainly to a sense of restraint, such as restraining from any of the ten non-virtuous actions.

To further show the importance of morality the Lord Buddha said 'After I pass beyond sorrow, then this is your teacher'. The 'this' in 'this is your teacher', refers to the practice of morality within the continuum of any being.

Accordingly, we have to understand that if we have taken any formal moral vows, then those vows are the morality within our continuum. As Buddha said, those vows are your guide: they are no different from having the actual Buddha as your teacher. Likewise you should see the morality within your continuum of refraining from the ten non-virtues as your teacher, or spiritual guide.

We determine both the form we take, and the living conditions of our next rebirth. By making the best use of this life, with all its opportunities, we can have all that we desire in the next life. We all wish for a better rebirth in any of the happy realms. As Buddha said the main cause for such a rebirth is the practice of morality. So in addition to faith in Buddha's teachings based upon our knowledge and understanding of them, we also need to make an effort to practise them. Having practised morality, we are guaranteed a good rebirth, so there is no reason to be frightened of death, or our future life.

If, with faith, we develop spiritual practice (such as the practice of morality, or the practice of preventing harmfulness to other beings), then not only will there be benefits in this life, and in future lives, but also, at the moment of death there will be peace and confidence. So there are great benefits in following a spiritual practice.

Having seen some benefits in following spiritual practice, we should then realise that the best time to practise is now, when we are physically very well and mentally alert, with clarity of thought and good discriminating powers. With such freedom we should contemplate the various topics of Dharma, thinking of how Dharma can help us do all that we want in this, and future lives.

As said before, we all wish to take a happy rebirth. But simply achieving a happy rebirth is not enough. To be able to have all the wealth and material we need to practise dharma and achieve our spiritual aims then the Buddha advised us to create the cause of those things which is practising generosity. This does not necessarily

mean material generosity, as we may not be in a position to do this, rather it means to develop the practice of generosity in the mind, thereby developing the state of mind which wishes to help others. Then if we do have the resources, we are ready to help others. So, keeping the words of the Buddha in mind, we should try our best to practise generosity.

Nagarjuna said:

Morality results in happy rebirth

Generosity results in abundant wealth

Patience results in beauty and lustre of the body

Joyous effort results in success in whatever action one undertakes

Concentration results in peace in the mind

Wisdom results in overcoming all delusions in the mind.

Spiritual practice, then, has the potential to fulfil all the desires of this and future lives.

It is important to always relate what we learn about Dharma to our own life and mind, otherwise our learning will have no true meaning. Then we can see how every event of our life illustrates Dharma. Look at our current life. We are human beings, which of course is a good form of life. As humans, we talk about our life in terms of bad and good things.

All the good aspects of our life are results of good actions in the past. They all show that we have created the cause: we must have practiced morality. We are not starving, and we have created enough wealth to be comfortable. This shows that we have practised generosity. Even if we are not perfect we do have some positive qualities such as patience, effort, some concentration to do the practice of meditation, and we have some wisdom knowledge. So on the positive side we have so many reasons to feel good and fortunate in our life.

However, at same time many unwanted things happen in life. This shows our lack of familiarity with spiritual practice. Our mind is so easily overpowered by delusions, and so very weak in virtue and other positive aspects. This shows that we must make more effort to change our mind.

If we relate Dharma to our own life in such a way, then whatever events occur in life, even very bad or undesirable ones, we can see them as a means of encouraging us to practise Dharma more in future, by minimising our negative actions.

So the most important part of spiritual practise is to fully

utilise our mental potential, and thus realise that we do have the capacity to achieve full enlightenment. By focusing upon our mind it is possible to eliminate many unnecessary problems which we are currently facing. There is an enormous amount to learn if we focus all our attention onto our own mind, because when we look into its nature we see the tremendous potential for change.

The Key to Spiritual Practice: Watching our Three Doors

The key to practice is very simple. All we have to do is watch our actions of the three doors of body, speech, and mind, then we can see that in each case there are positive and negative actions. The positive actions need to be adopted, and the negative ones abandoned. So in actual practice it is very important to have clear knowledge of what is positive, and what is negative. Then, based on this knowledge, we can, if not all the time at least at some of the time, adopt positive actions and abandon negative ones on a day-to-day basis.

Having developed this knowledge which discriminates positive from negative, it is very important to not be discouraged and say, "This is impossible! I cannot achieve anything, I cannot make any progress". Because you can make progress by focusing on those practices which are easiest or most simple for you. Then having achieved at that level, go on to the next steps.

As long as you make some effort on a daily basis you will make progress, and after a period of time you will be able to see that progress. You can directly experience the benefit of any effort made over a long period, no matter how small it is.

So the practice that we can all do, is to focus upon the actions of our three doors in daily life, constantly trying to improve them, even if we can't perfect the complete act. Take the example of speech. We know that saying certain words will disturb the minds of others, and so end in disputes and quarrels. We also know other words are pleasant to hear and are welcomed by others. Similarly with our actions of our body: our facial expressions are also of these two types. Of course the most important of these three doors is our mind, so it is always important to increase our understanding in terms of knowing the various types of thoughts which we generate in our mind, and what effect each type of thought has upon our experience in life.

If we gain more experience of our thoughts through continuous observation, then we can see the patterns of thoughts which destroy our sense of peace, happiness, and joy. We can also see those states of mind which always bring peace, joy, and happiness. This is the daily basis on which one makes an effort to increase positive actions of the three doors, and minimise the negative ones.

Engaging in positive actions of the three doors has a direct connection with topic of morality, because the benefits of doing the right or positive actions are also the benefits of practising morality.

Although in Buddhism there are many levels which we can study and practise, the Buddha always emphasised that of all his teachings, what is the most important for each individual is the teaching which suits them. There

are many aspects of teachings taught by the Buddha because of the diverse interests, needs and levels of those to be taught. For most people these days, the most important and relevant teaching is that which relates to their own life. The Buddha's teaching on morality directly relates to our daily life since it shows us what we should, and should not, do in terms of our actions of the three doors.

Shantideva said: "Before speaking to someone, you should first check your mind". This advice is also related to the importance of our speech. That is why before speaking to another, we should first check our mind to see the nature of our motivation.

Going further we should also think of our own daily actions of speech, and how the effect of those actions of speech are also the effects of the mind behind those actions. If our motivation is very negative, but our speech is very sweet and pleasant, the listener will not be fooled. The same is true of our facial expressions.

It is universally accepted that pleasant actions of body and speech are a very important and useful quality. For this reason school reports and references refer to conduct, behaviour in class, friendliness, cooperativeness with their teacher and other students, etc. It is a positive thing to have a good report or reference in respect of these qualities. From this point of view, the practice of morality of action of our three doors is something universally acceptable. Whoever adopts those values will become a more acceptable being to society.

Happiness in life is more than simply having good living conditions, or even an affluent lifestyle. Something more is needed. Adopting good moral conduct is another condition of happiness. Through it you gain friendship and the trust of others, and through that you achieve your aims and objectives in life. So this practice of morality is of direct benefit to everyone.

Next week will be discussion night. A list of discussion topics will be prepared for the study group test on the following week. The topics should be simple and general, dealing with simple issues. The compulsory question is "How does meditation help to control one's mind?". This can be answered in many ways, for example by the specific meditations we do, eg. how patience works to overcome anger. Or you are free to write about your own meditation, and what positive experience you gain through that.

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

Edit methodology

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

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

Edited version checked by Alan Molloy

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