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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ཅུ་ལམ་རིམ་རྣམས་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



3 March 1998

Let us make sure that we all generate the correct motivation. The reason for this is very important, because the quality of the actions we perform, whether they are good or bad, is predetermined by the motivations which preside over our actions. So to ensure that our actions will yield a good result or fruit, we have to make sure that our motivation is right at the start, and then do our best in the middle, and at the end of our actions.

We should try to cultivate bodhicitta as our motivation. The way to do this is by generating such strong compassion and love for all sentient beings that you take upon yourself the whole responsibility for releasing all sentient beings from suffering, and leading them to everlasting happiness.

First one generates the strong thought, "I shall free all beings from suffering and place them in the state of happiness." Having generated this thought, go on to think about what is needed to be able to achieve this goal. What you need is the capacity to help other beings.

However, although you have this wish at present, you do not possess the capacity to free all sentient beings from suffering, and place them in that state of happiness. To achieve your goal you need to attain complete enlightenment or buddhahood first. And so you generate bodhicitta mind, which is the genuine wish to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all beings.

In our practice of generating the right motivation of bodhicitta we are training our minds to be more thoughtful, or considerate of other beings. We are also making sure that in our mental attitude there is no stain of mental delusion, that there is no selfish motive. In other words we are trying to develop this love and compassion towards other beings by performing all our actions with this motivation, and also by overcoming all self-interest and self-importance.

At this point we need to know why we must think of other beings, and work to benefit them. If we do this we shall see that not only is there benefit for other beings, but at the same time we shall also meet all our own needs. Not only will our actions benefit other beings, but we shall bring more happiness to our own life which will become more satisfying and meaningful.

We can also see that with a selfish motivation of thinking only of oneself, all the actions and goals we pursue in life become very small or narrow. Instead of happiness and satisfaction these selfish thoughts bring more harm and suffering to our life.

We can understand this simply by asking ourselves, "Why is my mind still dissatisfied with my life? Why am I still short of peace and happiness in my mind?" When we ask this we can see that it is because all the actions we have done so far in our life have been done under the influence of this selfish mind; out of the mind which thinks only of one's own comfort and satisfaction. Because of this mind many of our actions have the effect of bringing disharmony to our relationships with friends, relatives and others. As a result of this selfish mind we meet many unwanted things that we have not confronted before. If on the other hand we could create more positive actions towards others, then we could achieve more happiness and satisfaction in our own life.

At the same time we also need to consider our own self potential and realise how great it is. As human beings we have all the freedoms and good, suitable conditions in our environment. We should think that we must work to utilise this life to benefit other beings. As said before, benefiting other beings not only broadens the scope of our own life, but we also have the self potential to achieve not only our own purpose, but we can do the same for all other beings.

We are trying to understand what dharma practice means, and how it is beneficial to our life. The main point is to always cultivate positive states of mind, while eliminating all negative states of mind. We have to see that both our happiness and suffering are mainly derived from our own mind. Happiness is derived from utilising our self-potential in the right way, and suffering arises by misusing that self-potential.

As human beings we all have self-potential. On the positive side we all possess a human nature which shows love and compassion for others. If we develop and strengthen that good human nature, and express it in our actions, the result is that we shall find more happiness.

Alternatively, if our actions are motivated by strong self-cherishing then the result is unhappiness and suffering as a result of our own actions. For instance, as a university student you might wish to come top of the class, but not extend that wish to any other students. With this attitude if some other student comes first you will be very disappointed and unhappy, and feel very miserable. Obviously this misery or suffering just because another student gains first place is totally the result of your faulty way of thinking. You would not experience this suffering if you believed that like yourself, all the others wish to come top, and as a result

you would be happy to see another student achieve this goal. We are all the same in always desiring the best outcome. With the right attitude these problems of mental suffering can be prevented.

Adopting the correct way of thinking, such as cultivating love and compassion, and thinking of the needs of others is dharma practice. Overall we have to see that as human beings we all have enormous potential within us: we have unique human qualities of discrimination, wisdom, love and so on. However if we let any negative emotions over-rule our mind then our actions become harmful to our own life.

So it is very important to see the important role that the type of mind or mental attitude which we hold plays in directing our life, and deciding our future. We need to know how our mind plays such a key role in life, and how important it is to always correct it, and always make sure that we have the right state of mind. If we do not do this then all our actions and mental decisions in our whole life will only be a source of suffering. Even the actions we recall as giving us some pleasure, in the end become a cause of suffering, called the suffering of change. The reason why the end result is suffering is because there was something wrong with the motivation which led us to do these actions.

Within our mind we have to understand the meaning of dharma and its opposite. Our practice has to be to always control or tame our own mind. We have to understand that the suffering which we do not want in our life is caused by our own unruly, negative state of mind, and that this unwanted suffering arises from within us. So we have to understand that the solution or remedy to overcome that suffering is also within our own mind. In simple terms we feel very disturbed and unhappy when our mind is overpowered by anger. For as long as anger is present in our mind no matter what we try to do we cannot comfort ourself. Therefore, we can see that to find happiness and comfort we have to overcome our anger, and the true remedy to anger is found within ourself, through cultivating love, compassion and tolerance.

In this way it is important to see that dharma practice is the source of all goodness and happiness, whereas all suffering and unhappiness is caused by some evil force. Both 'dharma' and 'evil' have to be understood within the context of our own mind, just as virtue and non-virtue, as the source of happiness and suffering, also have to be understood in context of one's own mind. From this point of view we have the self-potential to prevent suffering. Likewise, we have the self-potential to find happiness. The elimination of suffering and achievement of happiness are both in our own hands.

So happiness and suffering do not come from the outside. If we strongly wish for happiness we must create the causes ourselves. It is impossible for any other being to give you the happiness which you seek. Likewise impossible for others to remove the source of your problems and suffering. The most effective way of eliminating suffering and finding happiness is to transform your mind. The lam rim, or the stages of the path, is very suitable for us since in that path there are teachings that are relevant to all levels of practitioners -

those of small, medium and great scope. The lam rim teachings are suitable for all these levels of beings.

The essence of all the teachings is cultivating bodhicitta or good heart in our mind, which is possible if you put in the effort. If in your prayers you always wish for love and compassion for all beings, and are always accompanied by such great love and compassion, it has potential to be of benefit in this and future lives. If in your prayers you always wish to have that mind, and rejoice for others who are endowed with that mind, your prayer becomes a cause to generate bodhicitta.

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

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10 March 1998

As usual before the teachings, cultivate the bodhicitta motivation by thinking that we are receiving these teachings on the stages of the path to enlightenment to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Along with this have the strong motivation to put these teachings into practice.

Four Important Points About Spiritual Practice

In the past we have discussed four important points in great detail. They are:

- 1 Why we need to practise Dharma
- 2 We are capable of practising Dharma
- 3 We must practise Dharma in this very lifetime
- 4 We must practise at this very moment

Whatever the level of our spiritual practice, for example in terms of the three scopes, we must do that practice with awareness of these four important points.

1. Why we need to practise Dharma

Firstly we must look into the purpose of practising Dharma or some other spiritual practice. We know that there are different schools of spiritual teachings, and here we must investigate the point of following such spiritual practices. The answer to this lies in the basic inborn sense of "I" that all beings have. This sense of "I" arises spontaneously and is always present within us, and it always wishes for happiness and tries to avoid suffering. Whoever has this spontaneous sense of "I" will automatically have this fundamental desire to find happiness and be rid of suffering. Based upon this natural wish for happiness and no suffering, every being then engages in those activities which are seen as a means to fulfil that desire. Even those people who live a very worldly or mundane life ultimately try to fulfil this wish within their lives, whether it be in their education or work.

We have to distinguish spiritual actions from very worldly actions. What they have in common is the hope that they will produce happiness and eliminate suffering. However the worldly person is one who views outer, or material objects as a true means of finding happiness and eliminating suffering. They see that making progress in the material world, and in the ideas which help to develop that material world as the way to increase their happiness and reduce suffering. Whereas a person following spiritual teachings, believing that those teachings will eliminate suffering and help to attain happiness, does not share that view. The spiritual person sees that the source of happiness is wholesome, positive, virtuous actions and the source of suffering is

unwholesome, negative, non-virtuous actions, and so they act accordingly in order to achieve happiness and remove suffering.

The Scopes or Levels of Spiritual Practice

A spiritual person knows that no matter how much outer development you make, it does not necessarily bring more inner happiness. They see that in addition to material conditions humankind also needs a spiritual guide to truly find inner happiness.

Generally speaking all schools of religion are founded or initially developed on this knowledge: that human problems cannot be solved nor can all human wants be fulfilled by material outer conditions, and that inner wants in particular cannot be fulfilled just by material conditions. We can say that the basic foundation of all religions is the same – the value of love and compassion. All schools are founded to help living beings, and to eliminate their problems and suffering.

By knowing that inner happiness does not necessarily come from outer conditions, no matter how good they may be, we understand that the importance of spiritual teaching in our life is that it is the true means of finding happiness within oneself. So we understand that we need to follow these spiritual teachings in order to find this happiness and peace. Therefore we have to understand that the real meaning of the spiritual teachings is those practices which are the antidote to the delusions or mental defilements within our mind. All our unhappiness or sufferings are the direct outcome of the mental defilements or delusions that we generate within our mind, and if these delusions are not counteracted there is no inner happiness or peace.

We also have to see that our spiritual practice is that true antidote to these delusions, whereas material conditions can sometimes increase them. When that happens then in spite of our great material comfort we find that instead of feeling more happiness, we experience more suffering. Therefore we realise that we need to practise the spiritual teachings or Dharma.

The Lower Scope of Practice

What is the real spiritual teaching? It is the practice which we can apply to diminish the mental delusions within us. The next question is the meaning of the words 'mental delusion' or 'mental defilement', which refer not just to one but to various types of mental delusions. A spiritual practice is one which counters delusion. What type of delusion qualifies as the object of true spiritual practice? At the very least the practice that we do must

be to counter the delusion of being attached, or attracted to this present life or world. Therefore if we follow the practice of spiritual Dharma at the lowest level, the type of delusion to overcome is attachment to this world. If our practice does not target attachment to this world, it is said that it is not effective in enhancing inner peace and happiness. However if we could turn our mind away from the affairs of this world, and engage in wholesome actions, then these actions can truly bring more peace, relaxation and happiness in this life as well as being a cause for a better future rebirth, for example as god or human being. This is the practice of Dharma at the lowest level.

The Middle Scope of Practice

If we go further with our spiritual practice, we realise that it is not enough to have overcome attachment to this present life, and engaged in spiritual practices in the hope for a better future rebirth, because a better future rebirth does not ensure lasting happiness. Therefore our next goal is to seek the everlasting happiness which can only occur if one liberates oneself from samsara or cyclic existence. Therefore the delusion one has to counteract now is attachment to the pleasures and marvels of cyclic existence. If this attachment is not removed then there is no end to being reborn over and over again in this cycle, and there is no end to suffering, and no true happiness. Then motivated by the desire to overcome attachment one turns to the spiritual practice called three-fold training. If you follow this training, you see the end to this cycle of rebirth in cyclic existence. This is the medium level of spiritual practice.

The Great Scope of Practice

Going further than this middle level of practice you may feel complete confidence and conviction in following this three-fold training to overcome attachment to cyclic existence, and thereby bring about an end to this cycle of rebirth in cyclic existence, but this is still not enough. You see that the fault is your self-cherishing attitude in only seeking a personal goal, and not seeking to benefit all sentient beings. Therefore you seek to achieve full enlightenment in order to benefit other sentient beings. And so you generate the genuine mind of enlightenment. This is the aspiration to the great scope or goal of spiritual practice, the bodhicitta mind.

In short, we need to practise Dharma because we want happiness and do not want suffering. This point therefore includes a reflection upon these three scopes of the spiritual path. Our knowledge of Dharma has to be such that when we engage in analytical meditation we shall be able to start from one point as a base or main subject or root, and then like a tree from that point we should be able to think of other whole branches or topics that come from that root, and of all the sub-topics that come from that branch. At the same time we need to be able to condense a whole range of topics into one main point.

2. We are Capable of Practising Dharma

To completely understand why we are capable of practising Dharma we need to fully contemplate the meaning of this precious human rebirth, and realise how outwardly and inwardly we have all the suitable

conditions of life. In terms of outer conditions we are now human beings having the all the leisure and endowments which make this life a perfect base on which to follow spiritual practice. Inwardly we possess a human mind which is gifted with a sharp knowledge and ability to discern things. So, gifted with all these physical and mental conditions one has very suitable conditions in which to practise Dharma.

3. We Must Practise Dharma in this Very Lifetime

We need to practise Dharma in this lifetime because this wonderful human life of leisure and endowment which we have found is rare, and not something which can be found again and again. This provides us with the motivation to practise Dharma now, while one has this wonderful human life.

4. We Must Practise at this Very Moment

We must practise Dharma right at this moment because not only is this very suitable human life very meaningful, with great potential and very rare, but it is also very uncertain, and could end at any moment. It is wrong to think "Before I practise Dharma I shall enjoy life and become rich". It is wrong to delay or procrastinate over one's practice. We have to see that we must practise Dharma at this moment.

Meditation on these four points is done so as to lead to the effect of the last point: no form of laziness should prevent or interfere with Dharma practice. It is as if we must rush to practise Dharma because you have no time left if you don't practise now. We must emphasise that such a thought of committing oneself to practise must be genuine, and arise on the basis of a great deal of contemplation and understanding of spiritual practice. It is with this mind that we commit ourselves to follow spiritual practice.

Next week we return the teachings on the seven-fold cause and effect, beginning with superior intention.

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17 March 1998



In the meditation you have just finished you cultivated the bodhicitta motivation. Try to make it stronger by thinking "I shall attain full enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, and for this purpose I shall receive these teachings and then put them into practice."

Generating Bodhicitta by Seven-Fold Cause and Effect

We have been discussing the seven-fold instructions or precepts to cultivate bodhicitta. They are:

1. Recognising all beings as one's mother
2. Remembering the kindness of all beings
3. Repaying their kindness
4. Loving kindness
5. Great compassion
6. Superior intention
7. Bodhicitta

We shall begin the sixth, Superior intention, tonight.

Cultivating Un-Biased Love and Compassion

As a result of your meditations on the first three causes or stages of the seven-fold cause and effect meditation, there is some transformation of your mind, and you make some progress mentally. This mental development takes the form of loving kindness and compassion for all beings.

The cause of this loving kindness and compassion is a very stable genuine and unselfish feeling towards others. You would have a similar feeling of love and compassion for your boyfriend or girlfriend, but the cause for having such close loving feelings includes an element of attachment, as well as genuine love.

The kind of loving kindness for others which we generate in the seven-fold cause and effect meditation is the result of seeing them as very close friends. This close feeling arises on the basis of the understanding that just like ourselves, all other beings also wish for happiness and to avoid unhappiness. It is on this understanding that you cultivate loving kindness by wishing them to have happiness, and you generate compassion by wishing them to be free from unhappiness or suffering.

So the love and compassion you generate is not conditional upon some specific relationship. When it is conditional on a specific relationship, for example with one's partner, then as the relationship changes, so do your feelings of love and compassion for that person. Even our enemies qualify as suitable objects for the love and compassion we generate in the seven fold cause and effect meditation, because they fit the criteria.

Our reason for cultivating the form of loving kindness and compassion which we are discussing here must be that the other person wishes for happiness and does not want unhappiness, and we genuinely wish them to have happiness, and we genuinely wish them to be free from suffering. Therefore it is very important that we examine our reasons for showing love and compassion. For example the reason might be that he or she is a relative or partner, but such a love is imperfect; it is tainted and impure. To cultivate universal love and compassion the reason must be applicable to all beings in that everyone wishes for happiness and to avoid suffering.

Sixth Cause: Superior Intention:

Through generating strong love and compassion, one would

generally feel "How wonderful it would be if all beings have happiness. May they have happiness. May I be able to cause happiness", and then be able to show this kind of loving kindness. Likewise when you feel "How wonderful if all beings were free of suffering. May they be free of suffering. May I be able to free them from suffering", this gives rise to a very genuine compassion. Such true love and compassion can arise from our meditation practice.

After this we have to realise that although we have generated thoughts of love (wishing other beings to have happiness) and of compassion (wishing them to be free of suffering), no matter how genuine and strong your wish it remains just a wish. In actuality it brings neither happiness nor decreases the suffering of other beings, and their situation remains the same. All that changes is something within yourself - you have sympathy for them, and you have a genuine wish for all beings to have happiness and be free of suffering. Therefore, to further develop this love and compassion you must take the responsibility for the welfare of other beings. For this you must have such a sense of responsibility that you think "I alone shall lead all beings to happiness, and I alone shall release them from suffering." In this way you vow to yourself that you will lead all beings to happiness and free them from suffering.

This taking of personal responsibility is called superior intention. It is superior in the sense that it makes the love and compassion you generate superior to the love and compassion possessed by practitioners of the lower vehicles, the Hearers and Solitary Realisers. In other words the lower vehicle practitioners also have love and compassion: they too wish for others to be happy, and cannot bear to see others suffering. However their love and compassion is not superior because they do not personally vow to shoulder the responsibility for bringing happiness to all beings, and freeing them all from suffering. Therefore in order to cultivate this superior intention you must see that after generating love and compassion, the task of leading others to happiness and releasing them from suffering falls entirely upon oneself, just as children feel they have the entire responsibility for looking after their parents.

In the seven-fold cause and effect meditation the stages of loving kindness, compassion and superior intention are mainly to cultivate the aspiration to benefit other sentient beings. What is this aspiration to benefit other beings? It is the wish to place all beings into the state of buddhahood. In the text it says that each of loving kindness, compassion and superior intention has a special role or function in cultivating the aspiration to benefit other beings. *Compassion* is like an eye through which to see other beings. *Love* is like the hand with which to hold other beings close to one. *Superior intention* is like the arm by which we take the responsibility for the well-being of others entirely upon oneself.

The Effect: Bodhicitta

With the cultivation of superior intention you generate an aspiration to benefit all beings thinking, "I shall place all beings into the state of full enlightenment, and free them all from suffering." There is a strong intention as well as a strong resolution to benefit others. From this you generate the

bodhicitta mind by thinking that, despite your sense of responsibility for placing all beings into full enlightenment and freeing them all from suffering, you do not have the capacity or power to fulfil that responsibility.

If you do not have such capacity, then who does have such powers? Only a fully enlightened being or Buddha has the capacity to place all beings into full enlightenment. In this way you understand that in order to fulfil your aspiration to benefit all beings and lead them all to the state of full enlightenment, you have to achieve full enlightenment first.

So having cultivated superior intention, in which you generate the aspiration to benefit others, you then generate the aspiration to achieve your own enlightenment, in order to benefit all other beings. In this way, after superior intention the bodhicitta mind arises: it arises simultaneously with the aspiration to achieve your own enlightenment.

Therefore, there are two types of aspiration:

1. The aspiration to benefit others
2. The aspiration to achieve one's own enlightenment

The first aspiration is the cause for the second. In other words the aspiration to achieve one's own enlightenment is generated after the aspiration to benefit other beings. However it is said that in terms of the fulfilment of these two aspirations, the order is reversed. The goal of one's own enlightenment is accomplished before achieving the goal of benefiting all other beings by placing them in the state of full enlightenment.

In generating bodhicitta or the aspiration to achieve one's own enlightenment, one needs to take into account all of the qualities of a Buddha which are discussed under the topic of 'Taking Refuge'. The Buddha's qualities include those of holy body, speech and mind, and the Buddha's enlightened activities. You have to consider these qualities in order to know the power and qualifications of a Buddha, and the qualities you will have when you achieve buddhahood. The more you contemplate these qualities of a Buddha the stronger your faith in Buddha. The stronger this faith, the stronger will be the aspiration to become Buddha, and so the stronger our effort will be in our practice.

Blessing Food

As we enjoy our tea, always remember whenever we take any food or drink that we you bless it with the mantra OM AH HUM, and at the same time remember its meaning.

When these three syllables are repeated three times:

1. The first repetition purifies all faults – eg unpleasant colour or taste
2. The second repetition transforms the offering into uncontaminated nectar
3. The third repetition makes the offering inexhaustible and everlasting

Sometimes we say OM AH HUM only once, in which case the meaning of each syllable is:

HUM is the seed syllable of the exalted wisdom of the omniscient mind or enlightened wisdom. There is no phenomena that cannot be purified by this. So HUM is to purify.

AH is seed syllable of the vajra speech of Amitabha Buddha which transforms everything into uncontaminated nectar.

OM is seed syllable of Vairochana Buddha which increases and becomes inexhaustible.

Do not feel that all you offer is only a small cup, which is not enough for all the refuge objects. Rather you have to think that your offerings are inexhaustible, no matter how many holy beings there are.

In short you can think of the qualities of Buddha's body, speech and mind when you think of the three syllables OM AH HUM. Therefore, when you make an offering, if you think of the meaning of just these three syllables, there is a lot to

meditate upon, and to keep the mind busy. After saying the offering prayer it is good to sit quietly for a while, and to think of the meaning of the offering.

In the next few days it would be good if everyone could make some effort to remember the main practices of each of the three scopes of stages of the path:

1. In the lower scope the main practice is abandoning the ten non-virtues, so remember each of these ten non-virtues to be abandoned
2. In the medium scope the main practice is the three-fold training, and knowing its meaning
3. In the great scope there is bodhicitta and generating bodhicitta by the seven-fold cause and effect, and the deeds of bodhisattvas - the six perfections, and the four means of gathering disciples

If you do this as much as possible, and become familiar with practices of the three scopes of the teachings, then even if we do not achieve full enlightenment or the state of buddhahood in this life, (which for most of us is impossible), then by making some effort to focus on these topics of the spiritual path, at least we plant the seeds in our mindstream. Then in future lives we can be very sure of being born as spiritual practitioners of a very high class, ie as learned and highly realised practitioners.

Of course it is not completely impossible for us to achieve full enlightenment in this lifetime: in fact it is very possible. Everybody has the choice and ability to become whatever we want to become. If we have the strong will to become a very knowledgeable and learned person in this life, we can achieve success by making an effort. Similarly, by making an effort we can transform our mind into a very calm happy one in this lifetime: we can fully transform ourselves so everyone will see us as a very kind-hearted, soft person with a very calm and happy mind. Just as we can achieve much in our material pursuits, with strong aspirations in our spiritual pursuits we can also achieve our goal.

In seeking happiness and security in our life we do not just need outer support. Most importantly, we need inner support for life's happiness. The way to achieve this inner support is by engaging in such spiritual practices as the practice of moral ethics, the three-fold training, the six perfections, developing concentration and intelligent wisdom. We must be self-sufficient and able to direct our own life and make our own decisions. This self-sufficiency is important since outer conditions are unreliable and can deceive us at any moment. Outer supports have some advantages, but without inner support, then no matter how much outer support we surround ourselves with, we are very confused and unhappy about our own life. So by filling ourselves, as much as possible with inner qualities, wealth and knowledge, then even if there is not enough outer support it does not matter too much. If there is some outer obstacle or problem we can work ourselves out of that problem.

We have to realise that for our life to be very secure and happy we have to enrich ourselves by increasing our inner qualities, through seeing that outer support is unreliable, and by knowing that we cannot find what we want outside. For example, outside people upon whom we think we can rely, can change any moment, and turn against one. Their relationship with us changes so quickly. If you have wealth and reputation then they come to you, but if you have no wealth and reputation and need their support they turn away from you. Geshe-la often jokingly says to people "You should be fully independent and self reliant, and not rely upon other outside people".

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ཅུ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



24 March 1998

Let us make sure that we receive these lam rim teachings with a bodhicitta motivation, and a mind of great joy and delight. How fortunate we are to have this opportunity to be able to hear and practise the Dharma teachings. Make sure that we have the bodhicitta motivation, wishing to achieve full enlightenment to benefit all beings, and the genuine thought of putting what we hear into practice.

We can consider ourselves as very fortunate for two reasons:

- We are not deprived of spiritual benefits because we have the opportunity to study and practise spiritual teachings.
- We are not deprived of worldly benefits, as in our living conditions there is no shortage of food and drink and such material support and comforts.

422.321.127 The Result: Generation of Bodhicitta Mind

བྱང་ལྡན་གྱི་སེམས།

As a result of cultivating strong loving-kindness and compassion one generates superior intention, thinking "I alone shall free all beings from suffering and place them in everlasting happiness." Thus you resolve to take upon yourself the whole burden of releasing all beings from suffering, and leading them to happiness and the state of liberation.

At this point, develop the meditation, by thinking that let alone helping all sentient beings, at this moment one is not in the position to help even one sentient being in this way, or even help oneself. This leads to the question, "If I do not have this capacity to help all sentient beings, is there any being who does have that capacity?" You investigate just who has these qualities of being able to benefit all beings. When you find such a being, you then generate the strong desire to reach that same level of capacity yourself, so that you can benefit all beings.

In this way you realise that only a fully enlightened being or buddha has the full capacity to benefit all sentient beings without any limit or hindrance from his or her own side. This is because fully benefiting sentient beings entails knowing the spiritual needs, interests, temperament and predispositions of all sentient beings: only a buddha has such knowledge. Other beings, for example hearers and solitary realisers - spiritual practitioners of the lower vehicle - do not have such qualities. Although they have abandoned the afflictive obscurations or obstructions to liberation, they have the fault of not having abandoned the obstructions to omniscience. Even bodhisattvas who are on the last part

of their existence in their last life as a sentient being are not equal to a buddha or a fully enlightened being, since they have not abandoned subtle obstructions to omniscience.

Therefore, to fully benefit all living beings one must achieve the state of buddhahood or fully omniscient mind. This state is only attained by abandoning all obstructions that exist, including the obstructions to the omniscient mind.

Here it is also customary to reflect upon all the qualities of a buddha, as we studied under the section of taking refuge. One should realise that all the qualities possessed by a fully enlightened buddha make one a perfect being to benefit other beings. So in this way, induced by love, compassion and superior intention, and understanding that unless you achieve the state of buddhahood there is no way that you can fully benefit all beings, one generates this strong wish to attain the state of buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.

Bodhicitta is defined as 'the wish or aspiration to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of other beings'. Here 'for the sake (or purpose) of other beings' implies that there is a purpose that you want to help other beings to fulfil. What is this purpose? It is the state of cessation, or the state of liberation, or the ultimate state where all the faults and obstructions that need to be abandoned are abandoned. These are the qualities to be possessed within the continuum of other beings.

In the other part of this definition of bodhicitta, the 'full state of enlightenment' refers to the final state of ultimate enlightenment which you attain yourself - your own ultimate future qualities. This mainly refers to your ultimate state of attainment of a buddha's truth body which has two aspects:

- The quality which resembles the state of cessation of having removed all obstructions to both liberation and an omniscient mind. This is the nature truth body of a buddha.¹
- The other quality is the ultimate development of your mind, for example, love, compassion, and wisdom knowledge. This is the wisdom body of a buddha.²

In this definition of bodhicitta the state of enlightenment

¹ Svavabhavakaya (Tib: ngo-wo nyid ku) p. 221 *Tibetan Tradition Of Mental Development*. The Svavabhavakaya is the void nature of the buddha's omniscient mind (or wisdom).

² Jnana Dharmakaya (Tib: ye-shes chos ku) p. 221 *Tibetan Tradition Of Mental Development*. The Jnana Dharmakaya is the conscious state of the buddha's mind, which understands all there is to know, which is attained solely by the buddhas.

which we wish to generate is not the state of full enlightenment which was attained by the historical Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, which was a quality of the Guru Shakyamuni. Rather in bodhicitta, one wishes to attain one's own future state of buddhahood. Why? The reason why one yearns to attain this state of buddhahood is to fulfil the needs of other beings. That is, the main aim of bodhicitta is focused upon fulfilling the purpose of other sentient beings.

As part of cultivating a motivation before engaging in any practice we say the prayer "In order to benefit all other beings I shall attain full enlightenment or buddhahood." You should try to not just recite the prayer, but at the same time you should try to remember the meaning of bodhicitta as we have studied it here. With this bodhicitta motivation we aspire to achieve full enlightenment. Why do we aspire to achieve full enlightenment? Because achieving full enlightenment is indispensable not only to fulfil our commitment, and wish to benefit other beings, but also for us to be able to fulfil all our work for our own sake.

Before engaging in any spiritual practice we need to cultivate this bodhicitta mind. It does not matter if we cannot generate genuine bodhicitta. With the mind of achieving full enlightenment for the sake of all beings, even with a contrived form of bodhicitta whatever form of practice we do thereafter is a much stronger form of practice and we have more merit because it is for the sake of all beings.

In short the meaning of seven-fold cause and effect is :

Including the preliminary meditation on equanimity the first three are called "The basis to create the mind which aspires to benefit other beings", and they are:

1. recognising all beings as one's mother
2. recalling their kindness
3. the thought of repaying their kindness

The next three are regarded as "The actual aspiration to benefit other beings". They are:

4. loving kindness
5. compassion
6. superior intention

Bodhicitta is the result produced by the love, compassion and superior intention.

What matters most to us is making progress in our own spiritual practice. To make such progress it is important to inspire ourselves by thinking of the benefits of the spiritual practice we do, and of the unique and fortunate life situation in which we have been born.

In terms of any spiritual practice and worldly benefit, we must think how fortunate we are to be able to enjoy spiritual teaching and material comforts. This excellent opportunity and these good conditions are all because of the causes created in the past. Such causes are the good karmic actions we did in the past, and the kindness of our precious spiritual teachers.

Geshe-la always tries to think in this way of his fortunate life situation, and that thought makes every moment bring joy. Even drinking a cup of tea comes from the kindness of one's guru. Look at our own situation. Not only can we listen to teachings and practise them, but we have also found a perfect spiritual teacher such as H.H.

the Dalai Lama, particularly those who went to such a holy place as Bodhgaya, and received teachings there. We are such fortunate beings and in the past must have done a great many virtuous actions to create such good karma, and all this arose through the kindness of one's spiritual teacher.

The qualities of H.H. the Dalai Lama are so great and the teachings so valuable, that it is important that we try to apply them to our perspective of things. Since we all follow and have faith in spiritual teachings, it is important that we try to apply this to our way of life. The qualities of H.H. the Dalai Lama are so great that he can teach according to the level of the listener - whether of high, medium or low intelligence they all understand at their respective level. Not only that, but he uses such very skilful means and wisdom in his teachings that whether the teaching is sutrayana or mantrayana, he can pass it on to all beings. To be able to meet such a perfect teacher and a living buddha, and having found a good life full of material comfort and receiving teachings, and the freedom to practise religion or any study, is all the result of karma created by past deeds. This encourages and inspires one to do the same now, so that in the future you can enjoy such good fortune again.

Spiritual practice is something we have to remember and keep in our minds at all times, so that whatever we do, and whatever we experience in life, is integrated into our spiritual practice. When we find some happiness in life, we should not forget our spiritual practice or knowledge. Because if we forget, we shall become distracted or excited, and as a result of this we may face problems.

Rather if we think that these pleasures and the happy times that we experience are the result of good karmic actions we did in the past, we are inspired to do more positive actions, to create more good karma. At the same time when we face problems or even undergo some minor suffering, we need to be aware that the cause of that is the negative karma that we have created, and then we use that experience to refrain from creating any more negative acts. In this way our spiritual practice can progress consistently and our life becomes more stable.

Next Tuesday is discussion night. As usual, take the discussions as a good opportunity to learn and share knowledge with others. So everyone has to remember to be open to others with your views, to share your knowledge, and be patient with the new students. Geshe-la hopes discussion night will be very beneficial for you all.

In the written test the compulsory question is to identify:

1. the objects of refuge
2. the cause of taking refuge
3. the manner of taking refuge

How you approach the answer to this is up to you. Everyone is encouraged to do the written test, however it is up to individuals. Those who are not writing the test must use that time to do their own meditation.

TARA INSTITUTE

STUDY GROUP DISCUSSION NIGHT 31st March 1998

Covering discourses 03/03/98 - 24/03/98

1. What is the *practice of Dharma* and how does this help us overcome difficulties in our relationships with others?
2. What do spiritually minded and worldly minded people have in common and what distinguishes them?
3. Define the three scopes of spiritual practice.
4. Whatever our level of spiritual practice, we must always be aware of the following four important points. Discuss each point.
 - i) why we need to practice Dharma
 - ii) we are capable of practicing Dharma
 - iii) we must practice Dharma in this very lifetime
 - iv) we must practice at this very moment
- (5 was skipped in the numbering)
6. Having generated loving-kindness and great compassion, how do we then cultivate the superior intention?
7. When making offerings of food and drink to the triple gem, what thoughts and visualisations should accompany our recitation of OM AH HUNG?
8. Why should we consider ourselves fortunate?
9. Why can only a fully enlightened being help all sentient beings and why should we aspire to attain this state?
10. What two aspects are included in the following definition of Bodhicitta - "a wish to attain full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings"

Compulsory Question

Identify the objects of refuge, the causes of going for refuge and the manner of going for refuge.

YOU ARE IN GROUP -1

TARA INSTITUTE

STUDY GROUP TEST-1

7th April, 1998

Answer any **four** from question no. 1-6

Question no.7 is compulsory

Time allowed one hour

1. What do spiritually minded and worldly minded people have in common and what distinguishes them?
2. Define the three scopes of spiritual practice.
3. "I must practise dharma, I am capable of practising it, I must practise it in this life time, and I must practise it right now." Discuss.
4. How do we cultivate superior intention to generate bodhicitta?
5. Why should we consider ourselves fortunate?
6. What are the two mental aspects (aspirations) of bodhicitta?
7. (Compulsory)

Identifying the objects of refuge and the causes for taking refuge, explain the manner of taking refuge.