

# 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་བཅུངས།



3 December 1996

Try to generate the bodhicitta motivation - wishing to attain the fully enlightened state of buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. Generate the thought that the purpose of listening to, and practising these stages of the path, or Lam Rim, is to achieve this goal of buddhahood.

## 422.222: The Actual Path which Leads to Liberation

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

We now begin the teachings on the actual path which leads to the state of liberation from cyclic existence. This is elaborated under two subdivisions.

As preparation for this teaching on the actual path to liberation, we have talked a lot about the cause and effect of cyclic existence from the point of view of the twelve links. So we have come to realise how, if we have not liberated ourselves from cyclic existence, there is no end to suffering. If we remain in cyclic existence we shall continuously create karmic actions, the result of which will ripen upon our own life, and there is no escape, or real freedom for us within this cyclic existence.

So we have to cultivate renunciation, which is the genuine wish to achieve liberation from cyclic existence. With such a wish we shall then seek the path to achieve that state of liberation. Therefore the teachings on the path to liberation are taught here.

Having decided to seek liberation, then we naturally consider the form of life which is best suited to attaining that state of liberation, and also the sort of path which would lead to that state.

These two actual subdivisions of the path to liberation are explained in terms of:

- What sort of life base or form is suitable to achieve liberation.
- What sort of path leads us to the state of liberation.

### 422.222.1: What Sort of Life Base is Suitable to Achieve Liberation

རྟོག་ཅི་ལྟ་བུ་ཞིག་གིས་འཁོར་བ་ལས་ལྷོག་པ།

The most important factor which inspires us to follow the path to liberation is renunciation, which is a genuine thought of leaving cyclic existence. Cultivating such a thought of renunciation means we have to see reasons for leaving cyclic existence. Therefore we are instructed to meditate on the faults and disadvantages of cyclic existence. One way of seeing cyclic existence is that it is very impermanent, and this can be recognised as a fault. Whether we talk in terms of the environment in which we live, or the sentient beings living in that environment,

they are all like the reflection of the sun and moon on water swept by the wind. It changes moment by moment.

Any wealth, happiness or pleasure to be found in cyclic existence is said to be like the shadow of a venomous snake's<sup>1</sup> head. It can only cover a very limited area, and to sit under it is very dangerous.

Therefore we can see the faults of cyclic existence, regardless of the level of cyclic existence in which we are born. Even if we are born in a very fortunate level of cyclic existence such as our own pleasant human life, we see with our own eyes how much suffering exists within this human world. In this way we see the faults of cyclic existence in terms of the uncertainty of everything - our life, our friends, our wealth.

As the text says, if we fully contemplate the faults of cyclic existence, we see this existence as being like a house on fire or a prison. We naturally do not want to go into a burning house as we know we would be burnt, and it could be suicidal. Likewise we do not want to go into prison, as that means losing our freedom.

In this way the thought of renunciation naturally arises, as we see all the faults of cyclic existence through meditation and contemplation. Generating this thought of renunciation is essential, as without it we cannot have the strong genuine wish to seek the path leading to the state of liberation.

When we truly feel some sense of disgust for cyclic existence, then we can generate renunciation. Influenced or motivated by renunciation, we then think of how to achieve liberation by asking ourselves "Are there any causes for this cyclic existence?" Knowing that cyclic existence cannot exist without causes and conditions, we investigate the true cause of cyclic existence. The two main causes of cyclic existence which we have discussed in the past are karmic actions, and mental afflictions or delusions. Of these the primary cause is mental delusions.

To know the form of life which is most suitable to achieve liberation, we must refer to the topic of precious human rebirth. It is said that to achieve liberation there is no life more suitable or fitting than this human life, possessing leisure and endowments as it does. So we must ask ourselves "Do we possess such a human life?" Recognising that we do possess such a life, then we know

<sup>1</sup> Editor: Refers generally to the shape of the hooded cobra found in India.

that we have the potential to achieve liberation, at least in terms of the form of life in which we are born.

If we talk about what form of life is suitable to achieve the state of buddhahood in one single lifetime, then it is none other than the precious human life which we possess at this moment.

Having found a suitable life base, what then is the actual path which will lead us to that state of liberation? It is none other than the three principal paths - renunciation, bodhicitta, and wisdom realising emptiness.

So not only have we achieved the form of life to achieve liberation, but at the same time we have met with the opportunity to study, and follow the right path to liberation.

As we contemplate the topic of dharma we should feel more positive, and inspired to practise dharma and make our life more meaningful and happy. If we look into our situation clearly, we are in a most fortunate situation because we have all the excellent living conditions around us. For us, achieving liberation, or our desired goal (which can be anything, even just living a happy life), is just a matter of correctly utilising the excellent conditions around us, or even just appreciating those conditions. We are so fortunate, especially if we compare our good living conditions with those of many others living in other parts of the world. There is also the physical health which we enjoy in our day-to-day life, and the inner condition of our mind - the amount of knowledge which we possess in our society compared to many others in the world.

If we look at our situation from the positive side, we have all the necessary conditions to achieve liberation. Even the goal of omniscience is right in front of us. Therefore it is important to realise that the best way which we can utilise this most favourable life situation is to practise dharma. It brings more peace and happiness to our life and eliminates, or minimises our suffering.

Whatever goes on in the outside world, if we have a clear knowledge of our real situation, we shall see that it is a very fortunate one, and then through dharma we can see how to bring more happiness. When we face difficult troubles we can see how to solve them, and minimise our problems. In this way we can lead a very steady life with happiness and peace.

Geshe-la learnt from his recent trip to India that a lot of people, even Westerners from countries like Switzerland or Germany, admired Australia. They would comment on the high standard of living here. There must be some reason for foreigners to feel this way. Just knowing all the good things we enjoy makes us wonderfully positive about where we are living.

Geshe-la also said that while he was in Sera Monastery he met two women who recently came from Tibet. One was a close friend of Geshe Doga's only sister, who is still in Tibet. The other was a very close neighbour. They came to talk to Geshe-la but could not stop crying for over fifteen minutes, which didn't leave much time for discussion. They described how they were treated by the Chinese in Tibet - how they were completely robbed of their freedom. At one stage they nearly starved to death

because no food was provided. At night they would go to the empty fields to seek leftover barley. The more they related the problems in Tibet, the more Geshe-la felt how lucky he was not to be caught in Tibet when the Chinese came.

There are so many people in other parts of the world who undergo so much suffering, starvation, torture and who lack freedom. You do not have to think much about this to feel so good about life in Australia. Even to have freedom is such a great gift. We have such freedom, and such a lot of opportunity to do whatever we like - study, meditate and receive teachings.

---

**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 Bunnett then compares her notes against the typed transcript and prepares this edited version.*

*Edited version checked by Alan Molloy*

**© Tara Institute**

# 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།



10 December 1996

Cultivate a bodhicitta motivation, by thinking that the purpose of listening to, and practising the teachings is to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

Last week we briefly discussed how the state of liberation from cyclic existence can be achieved. To reach this state one must first see all the faults within cyclic existence. Then through this a sense of renunciation, the very strong thought to leave cyclic existence, is generated.

Having briefly discussed how to achieve liberation, the text then elaborates this under two headings:

1. What sort of life basis is suitable or needed to achieve liberation,
2. What is the suitable path which leads to liberation.

We have finished section one.

## 422.222.2 The Suitable Path which Leads to Liberation

ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུང་ས།

The suitable path leading to liberation, involves examining the root cause of cyclic existence, which is the innate conception of grasping at the 'I' as being inherently existent.

We should meditate in order to recognise this ignorance, (which grasps at the 'I', or self, in the wrong way). Try firstly to get some feeling or idea of how this ignorance gives the wrong notion of the way the 'I', or self, exists in reality. This is knowing what sort of picture of the 'I', or self, comes into the mind. Such a picture appears to our mind as if it were something that exists inherently and independently. If we check our experience of such notions of a self sufficient or independent 'I', it is so vivid and concrete, and it arises so spontaneously.

This spontaneous and innate conception of grasping the 'I' as inherently existent, is the root cause from which we experience all the mental afflictions or delusions, which then bring forth all the sufferings and problems in our life. We have to realise that we cannot completely end our suffering unless we apply the right antidote to this root cause of that suffering.

We can realise this by investigating the immediate source of our problems, or suffering in life. This immediate cause of why we cannot find lasting happiness and satisfaction in life is our unceasing desire for more and more things. For example, the immediate cause of discontent could be desire for something, or some hostile feeling. These are immediate feelings. If we investigate, then we can see that the reason why we develop desire

for example, is because of our ignorance of reality or ultimate truth. So the greater our ignorance, the stronger the mental delusions of desire, hatred and so on.

If we apply a specific antidote to a mental delusion (such as desire) by doing a specific meditation, then we can be successful in reducing desire and find some inner peace and satisfaction as a result of reducing that desire. But this inner peace and satisfaction is only temporary. It only lasts a short time. Because we have not dealt with the root cause, it is easy to generate desire again. In fact if we do not apply an antidote to the root ignorance, then we must suffer over and over again. If, however, we apply a correct antidote to that root cause of ignorance, and so minimise it, then we also automatically minimise all other mental delusions, such as desire and so forth.

To uproot that ignorance of grasping at 'I' or 'mine', our only antidote is the wisdom of selflessness or emptiness. This is because ignorance, and wisdom realising selflessness, directly oppose each other in terms of the way in which an object is apprehended. It is said the wisdom of selflessness is the only direct antidote to the ignorant mind.

It is important to contemplate and explore the impact of ignorance on our lives, on the basis of our own experience. We need to direct our attention within, instead of always blaming outer objects as the source of all the troubles and difficulties which we undergo in life. This is a different way of seeing the actual source of our daily problems. The actual source is not something totally hidden or mysterious to us since our mind is something with which we are very familiar indeed. If we direct our attention inwards, and watch our mind continuously we can learn a lot about it. In our life we go through periods of joyfulness, peacefulness and happiness, as well as periods of misery, chaos and a lot of difficulties. In both these situations, if we focus our mind on those outer things, we become distracted by them. We see them as the source of happiness or suffering.

If we direct the mind inward, we shall observe its role in our daily experience of peace and happiness. When we feel fulfilled and positive, enjoying immense peace and relaxation we hear from others about our obvious enjoyment of a good life. If at such times we look inwards, we see a state of mind which is very positive. It has kindness and understanding. On the other hand when we are in a very difficult situation, we see that our mind is very occupied by very negative thoughts and emotions, such as anger or uncontrolled desire.

Knowing how our experiences are determined by our mental attitude, then what is it that determines that attitude? The root cause is ignorance of the wisdom of emptiness. When there is ignorance there will be a stronger sense of ego - of 'I' and 'mine'. With such ignorance it is easier to lose our temper with even a very close, or intimate, friend. The anger is derived from this sense of 'I' and 'mine' which is an ignorant perception in the way 'I' and 'mine' exist.

Within our own immediate experience, think of a situation where we have a very close friend, who we hold so dearly to our heart, and for whom we would sacrifice everything, even taking on that friend's discomfort. But, if one day that friend does something wrong to you, and bruises your ego or sense of 'I' and 'mine', then it is possible to lose one's temper and strike out at that friend. There is no tolerance for that friend's actions, and there is resentment. Such hostile feelings immediately bring disturbance, and the loss of mental peace.

If, however, there is no ego, and this 'I' and 'mine' are reduced, then you will not feel so negative about what your friend has done. Rather you would be more tolerant, and even if something wrong was done you would not lose your temper, and consequently your inner peace. So it is important to understand that by turning the focus of your mind inward, you can see how so many unsatisfactory aspects of life are due to this ignorance and sense of 'I' and 'mine'.

The difference between the ignorance of self-grasping, and the wisdom of selflessness is in their mode of apprehension of the self. As said before, ignorance views this person who performs and experiences the results of those karmic actions, as existing independently, or self sufficiently without depending upon:

- any causes or conditions at all
- any cause or conditions collected together
- any single cause or conditions
- any part of any cause or condition.

So as a result of ignorance we view the self as; existing independently; existing by way of its own side; existing by way of its own self characteristics; a self sustaining existence.

The wisdom of selflessness cognises the person in a way directly opposite to that of the ignorance of self grasping. The wisdom of selflessness means the wisdom which realises that the person lacks, or is void of such inherent existence, such as existence by way of its own characteristics. Therefore it is said that having accustomed our mind to this wisdom of selflessness by meditation on selflessness, we can eventually totally uproot ignorance, and attain the state of liberation.

In terms of actual practice however, the actual realisation of such wisdom might be very difficult, and seem almost impossible to attain in this life. However, any effort which we put into trying to realise this wisdom, through studying this view of selflessness, will leave some impression on our mind. This will serve as a cause to bring us closer to liberation, and further from cyclic existence. It also serves as a cause to make progress to liberation after many future lifetimes.

As we have just learnt, the wisdom of selflessness, in particular the higher training of wisdom whereby you gain superior insight into the view of selflessness, is the main cause or path to liberation.

To actualise such higher wisdom, which is superior insight, we need to engage in the training of higher concentration because without overcoming the subtle internal mental distractions (by higher concentration) we cannot actualise this special, or superior insight. However it is said that before engaging in the training of higher concentration, one must engage in the training of higher moral ethics. This is because subtle internal distractions cannot be overcome without first overcoming gross external distractions by morality.

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. Moral ethics is likened to the body of the person. It is the base which supports the hand, shoulder and axe. So it is said that morality is the base that supports both concentration and wisdom.

---

**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 Bunnett then compares her notes against the typed transcript and prepares this edited version.*

*Edited version checked by Alan Molloy*

© Tara Institute

---

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

འདྲེན་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུང་ས།



17 December 1996

---

Try to cultivate the proper motivation by thinking that the reason we are here is to cultivate the full state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. We are listening to the teachings in order to fully control our mind, so that we can achieve that spiritual goal.

## The Unique Opportunity this Life Gives to Us

When we generate such a motivation to achieve the highest possible spiritual goal, we are not wishing for something which we have no potential to achieve. In fact if we check ourselves, we see that both mentally and physically we do have the full potential to achieve the highest possible goal of full enlightenment.

As far as our physical potential goes, the main factor is possessing a form of life having leisure and endowments. If we check then we find that our current life does possess both of these qualities. With regard to our mental potential we have a clear sense of discrimination as to what is right and wrong. As well as this sense of discrimination, we also have the faith and aspiration to follow the spiritual path. So there is no better opportunity than now to create the cause to achieve this highest enlightenment.

What is the use of being born human if we pass up this opportunity, and instead bring misery to ourselves and others? Not taking advantage of the potential of this unique form of life which we now possess, and wasting time with a strong attachment to the trivial affairs of this life is, as Shantideva said, the worst form of ignorance, and the worst form of self delusion. So we should utilise this life, and make it meaningful by engaging in the practice of transforming our mind. If we do not make some progress while we have this opportunity, then there is no hope of making any spiritual progress once this opportunity is gone.

## The Spiritual Path as Inner Development

On the spiritual path, inner development is at least as important as outer or material development. To be really inspired by these spiritual teachings, we must see the benefits of making progress within ourselves. To experience greater mental stability, and take a broader view of things means cultivating a more positive mental attitude, and a lasting peaceful state of mind.

As spiritual practitioners we are not content with the commonly held idea that material objects can provide all the happiness and pleasure which we need in life, because these outer things can also become a source of restlessness. Rather we see that it is the inner cause of

happiness which is indispensable to bringing stability to our life.

Material development must be supported by spiritual development. By relying on just the outer living conditions such as friends, wealth and so forth, then we can see that there is no end to problems. Even material success does not reduce problems. Some millionaires think that they have everything, but feel they have nothing. They have friends, reputation, money and so on but they feel empty, and that there is no fulfilment. This is because they have found everything in the outside world, except anything to rely upon. On the other hand some ordinary working people of modest material wealth can live a life of great contentment.

So we can see there are great benefits in developing the inner knowledge of knowing that although friends, money and so on can give some security to life, their nature is impermanent. If you are aware that this is their very nature, then it is not a very great shock when undesirable circumstances occur, as for example when a friend leaves you, or you lose your business. Understanding this gives you some support and the strength to accept such things when they happen. Whereas without that understanding we are totally vulnerable to those outer conditions of friends, wealth etc. Then we are always subject to change because of the changes in our outer living conditions, and these are out of our control since their nature is to change.

So developing wealth is not just in terms of outer objects, but also includes inner wealth. This inner wealth is the knowledge that not only do outer objects change, but so do we, and death is definite - although the time of death is indefinite. This knowledge generates strong faith, and through this knowledge we shall cultivate a different mental attitude and way of thinking.

At the moment we have this opportunity to learn and practise dharma, which if we wish, can save us from falling into lower rebirths. Also, if we wish, it can lead us to a state of permanent liberation from cyclic existence. Furthermore this dharma can lead us to the state of buddhahood, which is free of all faults and possessing all excellent qualities.

We have the opportunity to hear, study and understand this holy dharma. However seeing any result depends upon our practice, and it is the fruit of this practise which is the most important thing for us, rather than the learning process, or the knowledge. Otherwise we are no different from someone who has gained a high certificate

---

---

from college. More important than the knowledge gained in study is the outcome, which is utilising that knowledge to secure one's life. If you see a very highly qualified person spending all their time smoking and drinking then people will say "What a waste of those qualifications." So it is very important to very seriously consider practising what we have learned.

As we have heard over and over again this practice is thought transformation, and it brings positive internal development. We have to always watch our mind, and through this develop knowledge about it. Is the mind we generate useful, meaningful, beneficial and positive, or is it negative, destructive and harmful to our own life and that of others? It is best to use our own experience to identify the difference between the positive and beneficial, and the negative harmful states of mind. This might mean for example being able to identify the impact of a particular state of mind upon one's thoughts, feelings and actions.

If we do these investigations of the mind continuously, then eventually we gain discriminating wisdom. Through that, we then understand how when a certain state of mind arises, it will then influence us to do particular actions, which will lead to further results. In this way we can see in our own mind, the causal link between a positive state of mind and its results, which is a cause of happiness to all. We can also see that negative states of mind result in harmful actions for all.

Our basic human nature is to avoid suffering and seek happiness. The most effective means to bring about this basic goal of human nature is by controlling our own mind. Through this control we can find true mental peace and happiness. This is then reflected in our attitudes to other people, and so we become a good human being who is content in their own peaceful happy life, and very much admired by others. So in this way we see how the positive qualities in our mind can be seen to be the source of joy and peace in our lives, and as something that we can share with others.

It is appropriate to describe the inner quality which we cultivate through spiritual practice as an inner jewel, a true friend, protector and refuge in the sense that this inner quality is the source of all the peace and joy which we seek in life. It provides the strength to combat any hindrance in life, including any negative or very disturbing thoughts. This inner quality is a jewel that can fulfil all one's wishes; it is a friend, protector and refuge because it can be fully trusted and it leads one into the right future direction, or destiny. It always directs us onto the spiritual path, or path of dharma. Whatever spiritual practice that you choose to do, the focus of that practice is nothing other than your own mind. In other words, the practice you do must come from within your own mind.

---

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

---

*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*

© *Tara Institute*