

# 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་སྟེ།



11 June 1996

We should ensure that our motivation to practise and study Lam Rim is the highest, which is to achieve the state of enlightenment for the sake of all beings.

As we discussed in the last teaching, it is very important to identify not only the types of the delusions, but also their disadvantages.

According to Shantideva's text *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* delusions bring harm to our mind, but in a very pleasing way and so we tolerate them. In fact delusions are not worthy of that toleration. Essentially Shantideva is showing us that we have to be very alert and mindful in order to recognise the way delusion harms our mind and self, because any form of delusion is usually a very positive experience for us. What we need to do is ask ourselves whether delusions are of benefit to us, or if they in fact harm us. From this perspective we say the delusions are the inner enemy.

Delusion are not like an outer enemy, which we can usually recognise from their gestures or attitude towards us. If people come towards us with weapons raised it is very obvious that they intend to harm us. We need to be very thoughtful and look closely, otherwise it is extremely difficult to recognise delusion as an enemy which will destroy both our mind and self.

It is easy to identify the inner enemy of delusions by examining the delusion of desire, which is usually seen as something most necessary and beneficial. In our experience it is not something we regard as being a very destructive force. Rather our experience is that it is a friend which is of help to us. Likewise with the experience of anger. Through anger we classify objects such as a particular person as the real enemy, and then retaliate in order to destroy that enemy and protect ourself. We do this because of what we have perceived as these rather friendly aspects of delusion, we tolerate them and let them dwell within us.

So why do we tolerate delusion? It is because we haven't recognised their negative effects. If we do recognise the negative effect it is like having dust thrown in our eyes, which we can't tolerate as our eyes are so sensitive to dust. However with a clear knowledge of the harm that delusions cause, we can do something to counteract them.

The text *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* says that the more we show respect and consideration to the outer enemy, the more friendly and close to us they become. However showing the same friendship, consideration or

compromise to this enemy of delusion only makes them more powerful in their capacity to harm us.

This is really quite self explanatory. From our own experience with outer enemies, it is natural that if we show respect, and consider their views and needs, then they will become closer to us. With the inner enemy however, we should not be so lenient and friendly because this means that we let the delusions remain unharmed within us, thereby becoming stronger and more difficult for us to overcome.

The most important thing is to recognise that all our problems are derived from delusions. For most of us the major cause of problems is with our relationships. The suffering and difficulty people have to endure in relationships is not usually caused by being physically beaten up by our friends. The main cause for so much of the confusion which arises in our relationship with others is our own attitude. It is our own delusions which cause all the problems in our life.

If we compare the effects of delusions on one hand, and virtuous states of mind such as loving kindness, and compassion on the other hand, we can clearly see which of these two is more beneficial, and which is more harmful.

Think of any instance of unhappiness. If we examine the immediate cause, we find that the main cause is delusion within our own mind. It is the delusion in peoples' minds which brings disharmony at home and in the work place, and we all know how unpleasant it is to be in an unharmonious environment.

Imagine being part of a workplace with ten staff, where there is no mutual help for each other - not even a friendly and open gesture for each other. Everyone working in such an environment would feel very miserable. Even though we don't have the motivation to work in such a disharmonious place, we have to, since work is important to our livelihood. So we don't have motivation to go there in the morning, and returning to work each day brings more misery.

The main cause of such misery is the attitude of the people to each other. If your attitude to your superiors is one of jealousy, if to your equals you feel competitive, or if you are inflated with self pride when you deal with those below, then it is easy to say bad things and do harmful things to each other. The outcome of such disharmony is less productivity in your work, and it is very difficult for all the people who work there. On the other hand if the attitude of the people is one of loving

kindness and virtue (such as honesty), then this can bring harmony and friendship to the workplace. When the workplace is very harmonious, and where everybody is very understanding and helpful towards each other, it makes everyone very motivated to go to work and, there is less cause for friction there.

It is very obvious then, that delusion is the main cause of disharmony. The effect of such disharmony is not only on those who are directly concerned, but it also affects anyone else walking into that environment. They feel the lack of warmth and friendship there. As it makes a difference for us to live in a harmonious place (whether at work or home), we have to think what we can do to create harmony, and what we can do to prevent disharmony. Since the main cause of disharmony is delusion, we have to watch our own mind to minimise delusion, and in its place develop love and compassion.

Even if we cannot uproot delusion, we could at least reduce the very gross form of delusion of our own mind stream. Even that would make a great difference to our life, and make great contribution to those living close to us. It would give courage, and the interest and inspiration to practise tolerance, and generate a virtuous state of mind.

Through our effort we can work to the point where we feel different. Even though we can't always be satisfied and happy with life, but overall if we experience peace and joy, we can feel very stable and live a very happy life. If others see us in this way then that is a great success.

It is said that the elimination of delusion involves recognising

- the fault of delusion,
- the definition of delusion,
- the remedy to delusion and
- the cause of delusion.

In our discussion we have covered all these points. At the moment we are discussing the drawbacks of delusion, and the purpose of knowing this is to recognise all the faults of delusion, so that we can recognise the enemy.

It is said that in our practice we should be as serious as the famous Geshe Baen who said "My job is just to wait in front of the door of my mind with a spear as a weapon. When my enemy of delusion is very alert and influential, then I shall show more readiness to strike it, but when the delusion is relaxed so too I also relax."<sup>1</sup>

Similarly Geshe Langri Tangpa said in his famous thought transformation text "examine one's continuum throughout all actions including sitting, walking, lying, sleeping. Examine all the actions, and if any delusion is perceived, then knowing that it will destroy both oneself and others, one immediately exerts an effort to apply the antidote." This also is a guide as how to overcome delusions, which requires us to practise mindfulness, and

through that to try to overcome delusion as soon as it arises.

We finish tonight's teaching here.

The next teaching will be on how karmic action is created through force of delusion.

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

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#### *Edit methodology*

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*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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<sup>1</sup> The translation on page 521 of the text *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* reads: "I guard the entrance to the fortress of my mind with a spear - the antidotes. At no time am I not doing this. When delusions are at the ready so am I. When they relax so do I"

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ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལཱ་བྱེད་པའི་བཀའ་སློབ་ལྟར་དུ།



18 June 1996

Make sure that you generate the best motivation.

The text now leads us to the topic of the law of karma. We covered this in some detail in the lower scope stages of the path, however the topic of karma is also relevant here. Having discussed the topic of delusions at length we now see how these mental delusions are the driving force which cause us to create karma or actions. In terms of the causal links we see how delusion is the main root or source to cause us to create that karma and its ripened results.

There are two meanings to the term "action" or karma. Here the term "action" specifically refers to actions driven by delusions, whereas "action" or karma in general is not necessarily driven by delusions.

## 422.221.2: How Karma is Accumulated

དེས་ལས་གསོག་པའི་ལཱ།

Karma is a mental factor which influences the way other minds and mental factors (secondary minds) engage with objects. That is, it causes the mind to engage with, or be directed towards an object.

Karma can be understood at both a gross and a very subtle level.

The subtle meaning of karma refers to a type of mental factor which has the specific function of affecting both primary and secondary minds concomitant with it. In other words it affects both the mental factors and the sensual consciousnesses. Take for example the eye sense consciousness. If there is a visual object, in front of us we see it with our eye sense consciousness. In seeing it our eye sense consciousness is engaging with that object, and may judge it to be appealing. It is the mental factor which we call karma which is the main cause for our eye sense consciousness and all its mental factors to engage with that object.

In terms of the grosser way of looking at karma there are two aspects of karma. □

## 422.221.21 Karma Of Intention<sup>1</sup>

སེམས་པའི་ལཱ།

This is the mental thought which occurs prior to doing an action. Before we engage in any action we have the thought or intention to engage in that action. So all verbal and bodily actions are governed by this intention to perform that action. Therefore it is karma which

motivates us to perform our actions. We have this thought *prior* to performing the action.

## 422.221.22 Intended Karma<sup>2</sup>

བསམས་པའི་ལཱ།

This is the thought which is there while actually performing the karma. It is also the action we perform using our speech or body.

## Three Types of Karma

With delusions in our mind it is inevitable that we will create karma, and this karma will be of one of three types. All of them throw us into cyclic existence or samsara. Study the text for details about these three types of karma. In brief they are:

1. Unmeritorious karma
2. Meritorious karma
3. Immutable or inflexible karma

The main driving force behind all these three types of karma is any form of mental delusion.

## Unmeritorious Karma

The cause of creating unmeritorious or non-virtuous karma is the desire for a goal within this life. Out of desire for meat, for example, we create unmeritorious karma by killing; through desire for wealth we steal; or we engage in sexual misconduct out of sexual desire. Thus we search for satisfaction within this life out of desire. The karmas so created are non-meritorious, and act as a cause for our rebirth into any of the three lower realms.

## Meritorious Karma

The main thought behind creating meritorious karma is to seek some happiness in a future life. With this mental scope we desire to come back as a human or godly being. Influenced by this desire, we create the cause by meditation or spiritual practices such as accumulating merit or purifying negativities, to allow us to take rebirth as a human or godly being. However our life is still subject to cyclic existence. Despite it being meritorious karma, the result of our action is to remain in samsara because the main cause behind our actions is desire for the pleasure of cyclic existence.

## Immutable Karma

To create this karma we seek an even higher form of pleasure or happiness. In creating this karma we see that happiness in the human or godly realms is very gross but we still seek the happiness or peace which exists in the

<sup>1</sup> Page 521 "Liberation in the palm of your hand", the title used in this translation is "Mental Karma".

<sup>2</sup> Page 522 "Liberation in the palm of your hand"

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upper realms of samsara - the form and formless realms of godly beings. The karma we subsequently create will still confine us to cyclic existence because of desire for those realms.

Of these three karmas the third is called immutable karma and is unmovable whereas this is not so for the first two. This is because the meritorious and non-meritorious karmas are a propelling cause to be born in the desire realm and are changeable. Consider a person who is destined to be born into the lower hell realms. On entering the bardo state leading to the hell realm, then the karma in the bardo or intermediate state can be changed through the force of virtuous practice or prayer by the people left behind. Then instead of going to the hell realms that person will go to higher states.

Whereas the karma to be born in the form and formless realms of godly beings is fixed at the time of creation of that karma. For instance the propelling karma to be born in the first level of concentration of the form realm cannot be changed to bring about rebirth in other realms.

You should go over the text which gives a very clear explanation.

### **Applying our Knowledge**

We should try to obtain some benefit from studying dharma. Not creating any non-virtues or sinful karmas is extremely difficult or almost impossible for us. In other words even though we know all about dharma and karma, we still cannot prevent ourselves from creating non-virtuous actions.

In what way should our learning benefit us? It is best if we use our learning to be always mindful and cautious, so we prevent the creation of any non-virtuous actions right from the start. But if this is not feasible in the early stages of our learning, we should at least feel strong regret for any non-virtuous karma which we might have created. Know the spiritual practice for purifying negative karma (which is by applying the four remedial forces of purification), then we know that even if we have not stopped ourselves creating negative actions at least we have purified those we have already created. This way we are not adding any more negative karma.

As we learnt before, whether the main cause which determines the shape of our actions is a cause to attain liberation from cyclic existence, or a cause to be reborn in cyclic existence, it is the mental intention behind our action which determines its quality.

Therefore it is essential that whenever we create an action, we do so with the motivation of renunciation, because with this motivation we ensure our actions are a cause to free us from cyclic existence. Similarly using the bodhicitta mind, or the wisdom realising emptiness will ensure that our meditational practice, or our actions are not a cause for rebirth in cyclic existence. Rather they ensure the achievement of the state of liberation, or even complete enlightenment.

What is most important for us in following the spiritual teachings is making progress in our practice. If that is our goal, then it is very important in pursuing dharma study that our motivation is not just to gather more

information. Rather it should focus on how what we have learnt is of the most help to us, and what are the most useful things we can apply to our practice?

Of course we are not saying that learning is unimportant, because of course it is important. But it should not be our main purpose for being here and studying. With the right motivation for studying dharma, we shall regard what we study as guidelines for practice, for calming our mental continuum, and instructions for the remedy of our mental delusions. With such a way of focussing on our spiritual pursuit, then every effort we make brings more gentleness, more calm to our mind-stream and in our daily actions. Therefore as long as we follow it, our spiritual practice will always be beneficial.

Whereas with a wrong motivation for learning dharma it is possible that no matter what we learn, we shall feel that it has nothing to offer. Instead of calming the mind and minimising delusions our learning will only increase the delusions and confusion in our mind.

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25 June 1996

Just ensure that you generate the right motivation.

## 422.221.3 How You Die and are Conceived into Another Life

འཆི་འཕོ་བ་དང་ཉིང་མཚམས་སྤྱིར་བའི་ཚུལ།

We are now going to discuss the topic of how, following your death, you are conceived into future rebirths.

Under this heading we learn about the way in which we die, and the way in which we are conceived into a future rebirth.

### 422.221.31 What Happens at Death?

འཆི་བའི་ལྟར་འབྱུང་ཚུལ།

Firstly, the way in which we die.

There are three causes of death which are:

- the ending of our lifespan
- the ending of our merit
- because of immediate unpredictable conditions or factors we may die, even if we are not short of lifespan or merit.

## The Three Causes of Death

### 1. End of Lifespan

This means that the lifespan of each person depends on the karma which they created in the past. A person may live for up to sixty or seventy years, and the length of the lifespan is influenced by their past life karma.

When the length of karmic lifespan finishes then death will occur unless there is some effort to extend that life. The end of lifespan does not mean that the lifespan is completely fixed, because it can be extended by, for example, engaging in the meditation of White Tara, and accumulating mantras of that long life deity. It can also be extended by receiving a long life initiation from others.

In general though, it is said that our body is like a guest house and we are a guest in it. We book the house for a period of time. When that time comes you either have to extend your stay, or you have to leave. So unless we extend our stay we must leave it. In any case we cannot live forever in a guest house.

### 2. End of Merit

The end of merit as a cause of facing death means that a being faces death because of being deprived of living conditions such as food or drink and so on. It is said that lacking resources for living is the indication of the weakness of their merit.

To prevent such circumstances as a cause for death one has to engage in the practice of making offerings to the three jewels, or being generous to beggars. In this way merit can be increased and negativities purified.

We must understand that the fact that we enjoy all these good living conditions, with an abundance of food, drink and so on is the result of the meritorious actions which we have created in the past. If we wish for the same conditions in the future, we must create the same causes.

### 3. Immediate Causes of Death

The immediate cause of death may be because of overeating, others die because of indigestion, and others die because of some immediate disease.

Overall how long, and in what conditions, we live is all determined by our very own karma. Therefore in order to enjoy a long life with all the comforts, the necessary positive karmas need to be created. Even though three main causes of facing death are mentioned above, each one of them can be avoided. If facing death due to the end of a lifespan, then that life can be prolonged by receiving long life initiations or engaging in practices relating to the long life deities. Even if one is facing death due to a lack of, or end of merit, the actual death can still be prevented by creating merit.

As we study this topic, we should also reflect upon our own life to realise how fortunate we are. Firstly we have obtained this human life. Then, in this life we are not short of any suitable conditions of living. We also find ourselves with the opportunity to cultivate a good heart, and other such positive qualities of mind. We can appreciate our life if we imagine what it would be like if we did not have these suitable conditions. There are people who starve to death, or who suffer throughout life due to poor living conditions. We should not only think of our own life, but also of the beautiful living conditions around us. Then knowing their causes and how we created them in the past, we realise that it is not easy to attain such good fortune. The main cause for these conditions is to safeguard pure moral ethics. On top of this we have to accumulate enormous virtue and merit in order to create all the good living conditions for future lives. These good living conditions are very important, because without them being born as a human would mean having to face unbearable suffering in life.

In fact our living conditions are so comfortable that they can even seem to be the cause of day to day problems. Some people have so many clothes and shoes that they worry about choosing what to wear. When we dress to

go out we can only choose to wear one set of clothes. However some people feel concern that they cannot also wear the others in their wardrobe. So they worry, and it is so unnecessary because all these possessions are the result of the accumulation of virtue and merit in past lives. Good living conditions are not something we can have without having created the cause, as is shown by the many other people who do not have these things.

We have found a very fortunate form of life at the moment - a human life, with a sound mind and surrounded by life's suitable conditions. So we should make a prayer to create the causes and conditions for such a life in the future. Gaining a human life is achieved by practising pure moral ethics, and in addition it is necessary to accumulate merit and virtues. Then we should generate a prayer to have a life where a positive state of mind can be cultivated, as well as all the suitable conditions for living.

In learning any topic of Dharma the most thing important is to apply it to develop our way of thinking, which means subduing our minds.

### **The Dying Mind**

Although we leave this body behind at the point of death our mind goes on to take future rebirth. Just before the actual moment of death, when we stop breathing our mind is called the dying mind. If we go into detail here we can identify both a gross and subtle level to this dying mind. Gross death is when the external breathing stops and subtle death is when the internal breathing stops. The dying mind is just before the approach of death. At this stage it is said that the actual death occurs when our karma for the future rebirth is activated or nourished by the two causes of craving and grasping. These two are part of the twelve links.

With craving we have strong attachment to our own body and a sense of not wanting to be separated from it. This craving activates the karma to take future rebirth. This karma is further ripened by grasping, which has some thought of wishing to take future lives. So grasping is clinging to future rebirths. Then the karma to take rebirth is fully activated by the craving and grasping, and so when death occurs, we take a future rebirth.

This dying mind can be virtuous, non-virtuous or indifferent. It is said that having a very virtuous mind is the vital cause which determines a better form of future life. So focussing on this topic of death and beyond, is not meant to frighten us, rather it is meant to inspire us to prepare ourselves for a better future.

To a large extent, the frame of mind in which we die all depends upon the type of mind with which we have familiarised ourselves during our lifetime.

The point here is that we should try to get ourselves used to sustaining a positive state of mind within, by familiarising ourselves with virtuous states of mind; by making as much effort as possible to cultivate a virtuous mind; and by removing any non-virtuous thoughts which occupy us. If we do this then it takes very little effort to have a positive or virtuous state of mind at the time of death.

Next teaching we shall discuss the types of karma which get activated or nourished at the time of death, and also discuss the twelve links.

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Please note below corrections to transcript 18 June 1996.

Under the following headings:

#### **422.221.2 How Karma is Accumulated**

དེས་ལས་གསོགས་ཚུལ།

replace para beginning "The subtle meaning of karma .." with:

The subtle meaning of karma refers to a type of mental factor which has the specific function of affecting both primary and secondary minds concomitant with it. In other words it affects both the mental factors and the sensual consciousnesses. Take for example the eye sense consciousness. If there is a visual object, in front of us we see it with our eye sense consciousness. In seeing it our eye sense consciousness is engaging with that object, and may judge it to be appealing. It is the mental factor which we call karma which is the main cause for our eye sense consciousness and all its mental factors to engage with that object.

#### **Immutable Karma**

replace para beginning "whereas the karma to be born .." with:

Whereas the karma to be born in the form and formless realms of godly beings is fixed at the time of creation of that karma. For instance the propelling karma to be born in the first level of concentration of the form realm cannot be changed to bring about rebirth in other realms.



compassion for other beings, which is said to be the most essential teachings of the buddhadharma. When we cultivate love, it is more than just wishing happiness for other beings; it also counteracts our own hatred and anger. It is a contradiction to say “I wish you happiness and send you my love”, and yet inwardly hold anger and hatred towards that person.

Love is not just something which affects other beings and contributes to their happiness, but it also affects our own happiness by reducing our hatred and anger. Likewise when we cultivate compassion wishing that no harm falls on others, simultaneously we diminish our own negative thoughts towards other beings.

### **The Mind at the Time of Death**

We have finished the causes or conditions by which death occurs. Now we discuss the type of mind at death. This primarily refers to the two states of mind, or the mental factors called craving and grasping which mature the propelling karma to take future rebirth.

We may have stored within us both white and black types of karma. The mind, at the time of death, will nourish one of them. Whether it is black or white karma will depend on:

1. the one which is most powerful or **forceful** will be nourished at the time of death.
2. if the force of the white and black karmas within us is equal, the determining factor will be the one with which we are **better acquainted**.
3. if our acquaintance with both these karmas, and the force of both these karmas is the same, then the next factor which will nourish this karma is the **time** of that karma’s creation. That is, whichever is created first will be nourished and ripened first.

So at the time of death whichever karma is ripened depends upon firstly force, then the degree of familiarity or acquaintance, and lastly the time of creation of the karma. This will then take us into the next rebirth.

This further detail shows us that we should act to practise virtuous karma as much as possible, and make ourselves as familiar as possible with virtue, since this type of karma can determine our future rebirth. Similarly we should try to refrain from negative karma which is powerful and also diminish our familiarity with such karma.

These teachings are not just about our time of death, but also concern what practice we should do now. This is because the practice we do now can be the most important cause to ensure that we have the most favourable state of mind at death. Next week we study what happens at the time of death.

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