

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།



7 July 1998

Ensure that you have the right motivation for receiving these teachings, which is the bodhicitta motivation.

In fact the refuge prayer which we always recite at the very beginning is to generate this motivation. This prayer distinguishes the spiritual path, which is implied by taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha, from wrong or perverted paths. Following the teachings the Buddha gave as a perfect and fully enlightened being is the perfect path, and this is the significance of taking refuge. Generating bodhicitta as you do in this refuge prayer shows that not only is the chosen path the correct path, but it is also the supreme path of the Mahayana great vehicle.

When you follow the Buddhist path it is essential that at the beginning of your practice you take refuge in the Buddha, his teachings and the Sangha to show that your practice is a genuine Buddhist one.

With regard to the topic of our teachings we have been discussing how to cultivate bodhicitta using the method of exchanging self with others. We have previously discussed the sub-headings of How to Equalise Self With Others and The Disadvantages of Self-cherishing.

We are now up to the third sub-heading which is Thinking of the Advantages of Cherishing Others.

422.321.222.3 Thinking of the Advantages of Cherishing Others

གཞན་གཅེས་འཛིན་གྱི་ཡོན་ཏན་སྐོ་དུ་མ་ནས་བསམ་བཤ།

In previous teachings we have touched on the advantages of cherishing other beings. In following this method of exchanging self with others the most important elements are knowing the disadvantages of self-cherishing, and the advantages of cherishing other beings. Without developing these understandings it is impossible to exchange self for others, and thus to develop bodhicitta. It is assumed that you have gained some understanding of this from your own experience, and related this to the context of your own mind.

In regard to the advantage of cherishing other beings we can understand that the great many advantages that we have found in our life are the result of this attitude of cherishing others. This wonderful human body that we have now obtained is the result of this attitude of cherishing others. Likewise all our possessions and surrounding friends are the result of this attitude of cherishing other beings. So relating the teachings to our own personal life means realising that all the benefits that we enjoy now, and in future lives, depend upon cherishing other beings.

From our own personal experience as a human being in this life we know that we are healthy and face no shortage of material needs, and that we have many friends around us. Does this situation exist by accident or as the result of causes? We have to understand that it is because we have created the causes for this favourable situation. The main cause for obtaining this good form of human life is the pure practice of moral ethics, and it is other living beings who give us the opportunity to practise this pure morality. When we think further we realise that pure morality is a practice which begins with the thought of not harming other beings, and with this thought we refrain from actions such as killing. It is these moral actions of not killing other beings which are the cause to attain the higher rebirth that we presently enjoy.

What motivates us to engage in such moral practice? It is the thought of consideration and care for all other beings. Without this benevolent thought we would not engage in any form of moral practice, and with this benevolent thought of cherishing others we turn away from any immoral practice. We should also be able to see the causal link between the moral action of not stealing others' belongings, and possessing personal wealth in the future. There is also a causal link between thoughts of subduing anger or hatred, and gaining the friendship of other beings.

If we cultivate this attitude of cherishing other beings in our mind, then we can naturally develop a great many spiritual qualities. With this thought of cherishing others we are motivated to engage in spiritual practice. This cherishing thought can be a cause to bring about the harmony and happiness we wish to enjoy in day-to-day life. On the other hand if we do not cultivate this attitude of cherishing others, then we cannot stop our very uncivilised and harmful actions hurting even those closest to us. As a consequence of our own harmful actions, we in turn receive harm from others, even our closest friends.

Generally when we listen to, or study Dharma, we learn more about its advantages or benefits in terms of our future life, rather than the benefits to this immediate life. Why is the focus on future rather than immediate benefits? It is because it is said that the benefits of Dharma in this life are very obvious. Of course these benefits only become obvious if we put the Dharma into practice seriously.

Imagine a person who really cherishes others, who never harms any other beings, who is always generous,

compassionate and helpful to others, and who never shows even a shadow of anger or hatred. Would we not admire such a person? Would we not wish to be close to them?. We must realise that adopting virtuous practises such as showing love and compassion and never harming others, not only results in more personal peace and happiness, but also creates peace and happiness for others.

We must train ourself in this practice with those who are closest to us: by caring for them, helping them, and by making every effort to prevent any anger to the best of our ability. Then just as we admire anyone else who behaves in this way, we too shall be admired, loved and trusted by others. This practice is a true spiritual or Dharma practice, and the benefits in this immediate life are very obvious. When we realise that Dharma is about practices that create personal happiness and prevent personal suffering then we shall be inspired to practise it. Essentially having a self-cherishing attitude brings more unhappiness to everyone - ourself and others. Whereas the mind of cherishing others brings happiness to your own life and to that of others.

Shantideva summed up the difference between self-cherishing and cherishing others in his *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, when he said

There is no need to go in detail
Think of the difference between
A buddha who only thinks of the
welfare of others and
Ordinary beings who only think of
their own welfare¹

We learn from Shantideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* that even the Lord Buddha was once an ordinary sentient being like us, whose actions were only driven by the thought of self-cherishing, and so he wandered in cyclic existence. However the Buddha saw the faults of this self-cherishing attitude and destroyed it, and in its place cultivated the attitude of cherishing other beings, and in this way he eventually achieved complete enlightenment.

As ordinary sentient beings we still hold this self-cherishing attitude in the depths of our hearts. Because of this attitude there is no end to the problems in our life, there is no end to complaints and work in life. If we think of our future destiny we cannot be confident that we shall avoid a lower rebirth. If death came right now, we could not be certain that we would not go down to the lower realms.

However just as the Lord Buddha achieved full enlightenment, so too we have the same potential. If we follow spiritual practice then it is possible that just like the Buddha, we too can achieve the state of liberation. Of all the people in this room some may achieve liberation in one hundred or two hundred years. Whereas others will remain the same, the only word that comes to their mouths is "I" or some problem related to this "I". The self-cherishing or self-centred attitude is so diffused within our mind, yet change is just a matter of applying training to eliminate this self-cherishing mind.

As Shantideva said

There is no object or thing which does not become easy through the force of familiarity.

So if it is only a matter of familiarising ourself with this spiritual practice and then, as Shantideva said, anything is possible, diminishing the self-cherishing mind is not hard at all.

Of course if we do not engage in spiritual practice then we shall make no progress, nor will our practice become any easier. To think that we can practise later in life when we are closer to death is very deluded. The fact is that if it is so difficult to meditate, calm the mind and bring it inwards now while we are relatively young, healthy and free, then how much harder will it be at death when we may be overwhelmed by so many undesirable or unhappy experiences?

If, however, we are used to spiritual practice, and have faith and understanding in Dharma, and this attitude of cherishing others in order to benefit them, then over time and with this training, our practice becomes easier, and we can do it naturally. Then at the time of death we can recognise that the painful, frightening experiences that we are going through are the result of our negative karma and delusion. If we are familiar with the practice of cherishing others, we can transform that undesirable experience at death into a cause for further development on the path, by thinking "By accepting this pain, fear and suffering that I undergo may no other being undergo the same experience." If we could produce such a positive and virtuous state of mind at this last leg of our life, then it is said that this positive state of mind is a protection against falling into lower rebirth. We say the practice of Dharma is our refuge. This practice of Dharma which is a refuge only exists within our mind. To pinpoint this state of mind, it is the virtuous mind which we cultivate at the time of death.

If this human life is completed in this virtuous state of mind, then this life will not have been wasted since we have taken its essence. There are three levels of purpose, or essence, of this human life.

1. The small purpose is to achieve a better rebirth in future life.
2. The medium purpose is to utilise this life to achieve liberation from cyclic existence.
3. The supreme purpose is to utilise this life to achieve complete enlightenment or state of Buddhahood.

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

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Note on authentication

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

¹ A Guide to the Bodhisattvas way of Life Ch. 8, v. 130

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ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུང་ས།



14 July 1998

Try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation which is a genuine strong wish to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and for the same purpose develop the strong determination to put into practice whatever you learn about the lam rim.

Advantages of Cherishing Others

We are up to the topic of the advantages of cherishing other beings. Earlier we contemplated the disadvantages of self-cherishing from many perspectives. Now we try see the advantages of cultivating an attitude of cherishing other beings, by thinking of the benefits and good qualities to be gained by cultivating this attitude.

It is said that if this cherishing attitude were a material thing then it would be a priceless and most precious object. Of course what we need to consider in meditation are the many reasons for cultivating this attitude, and one reason is that this attitude is like a field which yields excellent fruit.

Recollecting the Kindness of Others

In order to cultivate this attitude of cherishing other beings we must develop an understanding of the kindness which we receive from others, not just when they served as our parents, but at all other times.

We can understand this by realising how our survival in life is dependent upon the support of others. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said 'It is through the love and compassion shown by other beings that life on this earth is sustained.' We know very well for example that without the kindness and care shown by our parents we would not have survived. We can understand that even for our day-to-day needs such as food, clothing, and shelter we depend upon others. We might think that all our possessions, and the advantages we gain from them are because we bought them with our own money, which we earned by our hard work. This way of thinking is very self-centred, because in reality we only gain money and qualifications by depending upon the support of others. Our qualifications are useless if we cannot find a job, and this job must be provided by other people.

So we cannot assume that all the things we enjoy in life are created entirely through our own effort. Rather it is through the effort put in by many other beings that we now enjoy such good conditions. For instance, this very building gives many people the opportunity to accumulate enormous merit through listening to teachings, and at other times gathering for pujas. However this building which we enjoy is the result of the effort of the people who actually constructed it. We do not know who they were, but it is important to remember the kindness of their labour, since it is through their efforts that we now have this opportunity to practise Dharma and accumulate merit. In this way, we try to develop our understanding that it is through the kindness of other beings that we survive in life, with good

living conditions, with sufficient food, clothing, and shelter, and with the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills.

We can also think of how important it is in human society to share love and caring thoughts for each other, because happiness and living harmoniously are interdependent. It is very obvious therefore that when there is a deterioration of human love, either between nations, within the family or between friends, then more problems arise, which means more conflict and suffering in our life.

Basically what we are trying to do is adopt the right mental attitude of feeling grateful to others. We should make every effort to develop and display this attitude at all times, and to see it as true Dharma, or spiritual practice. True spiritual practice does not mean being isolated from society, closing one's eyes and sitting somewhere. Rather it has to be done by mixing with other people. If you cultivate love and compassion, then have some interaction with others, you have the opportunity to put it into practice, and really be of benefit to them.

Even in your workplace you have to see that your attitude should not be self-centred. You should think of your employer's needs, by understanding that you have been offered this job by your employer, and through this job you earn a livelihood so that you can provide the basic necessities of life. Therefore, your practice should include making an effort to cultivate a sense of gratitude to your employer. When you have cultivated this, then naturally you will seek the best way to serve them. Not only will this please your employer, but it will in turn secure your job. So it is important to relate these teachings to daily life and try to see their value.

We can also see the value of a cherishing attitude by reading the commentary teachings, which say for example 'This thought of cherishing others is like a wish granting jewel'. The explanation for this can be found in the text. In short our training is one of developing a sense of gratitude to other beings, by understanding that all the goodness we enjoy results from them, and that all the temporary goals that we seek in life are dependent upon them, and that our good living conditions which sustain this life are dependent upon others. Our very existence is not possible without a mother. The Chinese government has imposed a one child policy [for population control]. The birth of a girl is resented, since she is regarded as a potential for further increase in the population. Thus our very existence in life depends upon other beings.

Our spiritual goal is to achieve full enlightenment or buddhahood, and we reach this goal by initially generating bodhicitta, and then engaging in a bodhisattva's deeds, which are regarded as very profound and very precious. However without other beings we cannot follow this path to full enlightenment. Because without other beings we

cannot generate love and compassion, since love and compassion can only arise by observing the suffering of others and their wish for happiness. So the development of love and compassion is dependent upon other beings. Without love and compassion we cannot generate bodhicitta mind, and without bodhicitta we cannot engage in the bodhisattva's practice of the six perfections - generosity, morality, patience, etc. These practices of generosity, morality and patience are all causes to attain the state of buddhahood, but we cannot practise them without other sentient beings. Thus fulfilling our spiritual goals is totally dependant upon other sentient beings.

Even worldly goals such as education depend upon other beings. Being able to write even a single letter depends on being taught by others. During our schooling our parents took an interest in, and responsibility for our education, and met with our teachers to discuss our educational progress. So even our education has been supported by the kindness and effort of other beings.

By developing such an understanding of the kindness you have received, you then generate the thought of love, compassion and care for others. As a result of such contemplation you come to some understanding that although up you have received so much kindness from other beings, yet you have always ignored them and in the core of your heart only considered yourself. This leads you to resolve to make an effort to change this attitude and to cherish other beings instead of cherishing yourself.

In his text *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Shantideva says,

Both the Buddha and all other sentient beings
Lead one to the ultimate state of enlightenment,
Why is the Buddha regarded as worthy of homage
And not the other sentient beings?¹

So from this we try to understand that if we cultivate a thought of cherishing other beings, we find ourselves very peaceful and relaxed, and because of this all those around us automatically receive benefit. They can sense the love and compassion which we hold for them, just as animals are very relaxed and calm when they are close to those who look after them with great care and affection, but become fearful and insecure, and run away from anyone holding harmful thoughts towards them.

This thought of cherishing other beings serves is a source of personal, peace and it also brings harmony between ourselves and all other beings. Because there is harmony we see others in a friendlier light, and they in turn will show more faith in us. If however we only hold a self-centred attitude, then we shall face problems such as loneliness and rejection. Why are some people disliked? Why do they have difficulty making friends? It might be because they are very selfish and do not open their heart to others. For example, some parents might have many children but the children choose to live far away, having nothing to do with them. Of course there are two sides to this, the children might have done something wrong, but it might also be that the parents harmed the children. Usually people harm others out of self interest.

What we are doing here is training our mind, and through this training trying to develop more love and compassion

for others, or in other words adopting the right attitude. The love and compassion which we develop in our mind through this mind training are the true Dharma. If Dharma is something precious and worthy of homage, then these qualities which we cultivate in our mind are worthy of homage, as well as a source of happiness in the past and future.

Geshe Doga always gives this advice. Make an effort to train your mind in order to keep increasing good qualities in your mind such as love and compassion. To make progress in this mental development spend as much time as possible studying Dharma, while at the same time continuing to work and earn money. Save some of your earnings, but do not be too stingy, making sure that you provide yourself with healthy food and good clothes. Then, when you reach old age you will have equipped yourself with good inner and outer conditions. Thus one of the main causes for living a good life is maintaining a good positive frame of mind. What is this positive frame of mind? It is as we are studying here, diminishing the self-cherishing mind and developing the thought of cherishing others.

The Difference between Self-Grasping and Self-Cherishing

The common feature of both these minds is that both hold the "I" as their object. However the way this "I" is held by these minds is different. The "I" which serves as the object of self-grasping is non-existent, whereas the "I" which serves as the object of self-cherishing does exist, as it is the relative "I". With the self-grasping view we hold the "I" or self to be truly existent, whereas the self-cherishing view is one of cherishing the "I" or self.

The "I" apprehended by self-cherishing does relatively exist but the "I" apprehended by self-grasping does not relatively exist. When we say "I am eating" or "I am shopping" that "I" does exist. The owner of a beautiful pet dog, will always care for it and keep it close. In the same way you cherish the "I" that relatively exists. All your concern is directed to the needs of that "I" and because of this you then ignore others.

Some Tibetan scholars assert that those who have achieved the state of Foe Destroyer of Hearer or Solitary Realiser do not have a self-cherishing attitude because they have abandoned self-grasping. They assert that self-cherishing arises from self-grasping. Other scholars do not agree with this, and assert that eliminating self-grasping does not necessarily remove self-cherishing, and so Hearers and Solitary Realiser Foe Destroyers still have self-cherishing.

Most of the time both self-grasping and self-cherishing are mixed together. Even though they are separate it is very hard to distinguish between them. If you observe in extreme circumstances such as great fright or fear when you feel "My life is in danger!" it is possible to differentiate between the "I" which you are holding onto with great concern, and the "I" which exists to you as a view of inherent or true existence. [This latter view is the view of self-grasping, whereas the former is self cherishing].

Sometimes when you come to the subject of identifying the object of negation in the teachings on emptiness, the teacher advises students to go out and look for the "I". Some students think that they can find it, and go outside to look, and then return to report that they could not find it!

¹ *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's way of Life* Ch6 v113

A Buddhas qualities are gained
From the sentient beings and conquerors alone
So why do I not respect them
In the same way I respect the conquerors

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ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལཱ་ལུགས་བཟང་པོ།



21 July 1998

Make sure that your mind is not wandering outside, and then cultivate the proper motivation for listening to these profound teachings on the lam rim, which is that we receive them in order to achieve the complete state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Along with this bodhicitta motivation also generate the strong intention that you will put into practice whatever you study to achieve this goal.

422.321.222.4 The Actual Meditation on Exchanging Self with Others

བདག་གཞན་བརྗེ་བའི་བསམ་པ་དངོས།

The fourth subheading of the method of Exchanging Self with Others is The Actual Meditation on Exchanging Self with Others.

Your previous meditations on the disadvantages of the self-cherishing mind resulted in the understanding that it is the source of all undesired things. Then, after thinking of the advantages of cherishing other beings, which is the source of all the things that you desire, you come to the point where you realise that it is necessary to exchange these two attitudes.

What is the meaning of exchanging self with others? It does not imply that you actually imagine exchanging yourself with others. Rather the meaning is to exchange the self-cherishing mind for the mind of caring for other beings.

In this meditation you replace the self-cherishing mind with the mind which cherishes others, because you understand the advantages of the latter and the disadvantages of the former. Where you had the mind that totally ignores others, you now cherish them.

Thus in our mind we change the object of cherishing from ourself to other sentient beings. This is possible to achieve since it is just a matter of training our mind, and we do this by thinking over and over again of the shortcomings of self-cherishing, and the advantages of cherishing others. At the same time this also maintains our motivation to continue to strive to eradicate self-cherishing and replace it with the mind that cherishes other beings

The most important thing in this meditation is to see the faults of self cherishing, and realise that if it is not overcome then our whole mental attitude becomes fixed and inflexible, which makes it very difficult to develop any qualities in our mind. Thus the underlying meaning of "exchanging" is the same as the way we exchange material goods. Here we are exchanging one attitude for another because the mind which cherishes others has more advantages.

If our inner mental continuum cannot be subdued by engaging in meditations such as this, then there is no hope of subduing our uncontrolled, untamed mind. We have to try to understand how effective this meditation is in

subduing this untamed mind, and thereby enhancing our inner peace and happiness.

422.321.222.5 With these serving as a basis; The Meditation on Giving and Taking:

དེ་ལ་རྟེན་ནས་གཏོང་ལེན་བསྐྱོན་ཅུ་ལ།

The first two headings of the Seven Point Thought Transformation text are:

1. The preliminary teaching on type of life.
2. The actual teaching on true bodhicitta mind.

Within this second heading there are five subheadings:

Equalising self with other

1. Disadvantages of cherishing self
2. Advantages of cherishing others
3. The actual meditation on exchanging self with others
4. The actual meditation on giving and taking

This giving and taking meditation involves having all sentient beings as an object, focussing on them with a strong compassion, and then performing the meditation of taking. Then one focuses on all beings with strong love and performs the meditation of giving.

The root text says

Practise a combination of giving and taking.

Commence taking progressively from your own side.

Usually at this point in teaching about thought transformation there is an elaborate teaching on love and compassion. However as we have already discussed the definition of love and compassion in detail we shall not go through it again.

In essence compassion is what we feel whenever we see any other beings caught in suffering and pain. When we have compassion we can never be indifferent, as we have this spontaneous wish for that being to be free from suffering. With compassion it is unpleasant to observe the suffering of other beings. If you drag a hard metal on the floor it creates an unpleasant sound that goes right through your body. Likewise compassion pervades your whole body driving you to help beings to be free from suffering. Similarly, love is the genuine wish or desire to give happiness to other beings, and it arises when we observe any being who is lacking happiness pleasure or joy. With love we feel a strong to wish for them to have this happiness.

To actually develop love and compassion, as opposed to just wishfully thinking about it, we must train in the meditation on giving and taking. In practice the intensity of our love and compassion determines whether we actually do something to free others from suffering, or to provide them with whatever they seek. This intensity does not necessarily depend upon whether we can actually solve all of their problems, or give them what they want. Consider the situation of someone who is begging for food or money.

There are those who, without giving it a thought give all that they have, perhaps even more than they can afford, and there are others who do nothing despite having the capacity to give.

The question of whether or not we actually help others is not so much a question of our resources but one of our motivation. So we can understand the importance of this meditation in which we train our mind in love and compassion. With a fully trained mind we shall actually perform actions which benefit other beings. It is also said that this meditation on love and compassion is very powerful for accumulating a great amount of merit.

It is important to try to understand the whole process of this meditation with a rational understanding of the benefits of cultivating love and compassion. If we recall the story of Asanga, cultivating compassion can purify all one's negativities and enormously increase merit. All the benefits that you wish to give to others come from love and compassion, because without love and compassion you will have no care for the welfare of other beings. Without love and compassion you will not care if they lack happiness or if they are suffering. Think for example of the way people treat you. Think of the friend who truly loves or cares for you, who is always there whenever you need help with health or finance problems. Whereas if that friend has no love and compassion the way they relate to you is the complete opposite: if you face problems the friend is not there, if you lack enough money even to buy food then the friend does not care. They even try to avoid you when you have health problems.

You have to view the way you relate to others in this light. How much care and support you show to other beings depends upon how much love, compassion and sympathy you have. For example, if you have love for a friend then naturally you will try to help solve their problems. Their problems become your concern, so you benefit them.

In mundane life situations, where you must live harmoniously with others, giving each other essential mutual support, then the most important cause to create this is cultivating thoughts of love and compassion for each other. It is the same with our spiritual path where the basic cause of progress towards full enlightenment is love and compassion for other beings. Conversely without this attitude there is no way of achieving full enlightenment.

So if we seriously wish to follow a spiritual practice, we should not look outside ourselves since spiritual practice lies within, and that practice is to cultivate, nurture and increase this love and compassion for all other beings. The indication of your progress on the spiritual path is the growth of your love and compassion, rather than being able to perform supernatural acts such as levitation or walking through walls.

Whether we use the words 'Dharma' or 'spiritual practice' or 'meditation' the real cause to reach full enlightenment is to develop love and compassion, and as a way of developing this compassion we engage in this meditation of giving and taking.

We begin this meditation by developing compassion: wishing all sentient beings who are suffering to be free of their suffering. Then having cultivated this compassion, imagine taking from them all their suffering and its causes. If you are doing this meditation elaborately, then when you contemplate suffering, consider the First Noble Truth of suffering and the various types of suffering it describes. Then for the causes of suffering consider the Second Noble

Truth, and all the different types of causes of suffering. Having done this imagine taking from others all this suffering and its causes. Then do the 'giving' part of the meditation by cultivating love for all beings, then motivated by that love you imagine giving all other beings happiness, and the causes of happiness.

It is said that the taking and giving in this meditation should be done from your heart, because that is where the self-cherishing attitude resides. It is all to do with eradicating the self-cherishing attitude. We shall discuss this further next week.

Regardless of whether we are teaching or learning from others, it is important to relate the material to one's own mental continuum. For example if we say "Love and compassion is the root cause of all joy and happiness in the world", then to understand this, we must see that compassion and love are the source of all peace and happiness in our own life. When your practice is based upon your own personal experience, then whether you are a teacher or a student whatever practice you do can have some effect on your own mind, and be of benefit to listeners. Without some reference or connection to your own life, then no matter how elaborately you teach, it is just a gathering of knowledge, and there is no effect upon your own mind, nor does it inspire others to practise.

The Reincarnation of Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey

A number of students have been asking about the reincarnation of Geshe Dhargyey. It has been three years since he passed away. Friday must be auspicious for Geshe Dhargyey, he passed away on a Friday. Then he remained in meditation posture until Tuesday night.

It was decided to cremate his body, but that was technically illegal. However through having a good contact with the Mayor of that area, permission was granted within two hours. There were some auspicious signs. Although it was overcast earlier in the day, the sky cleared by the time of the ceremony and some saw a rainbow. Geshe Doga and Khensur Rinpoche were in a tent and saw three white birds fly over. Khensur Rinpoche interpreted this as Geshe Dhargyey's connection with Vajra Yogini.

Later some students went to India to make offerings, where they sought an audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He took great interest in finding the reincarnation, and said that the reincarnation would appear, and when this happened he would check whether the reincarnation would be of benefit.

On his last visit to New Zealand, His Holiness said that the reincarnation had already been conceived and was in the womb, the father being from Eastern Tibet. At this time Thubten Rinpoche who is very specialised in performing rituals, sent search parties to Shilong in North-East India. The search party found eight candidates. The number was then reduced to five names, which were taken to His Holiness. He replied that he would check whether the reincarnation was one of these five candidates, and if not would indicate where the reincarnation would be found. Geshela has received notification from New Zealand that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has now stated that one of these candidates is the boy. They know the boy's name and that of his parents.

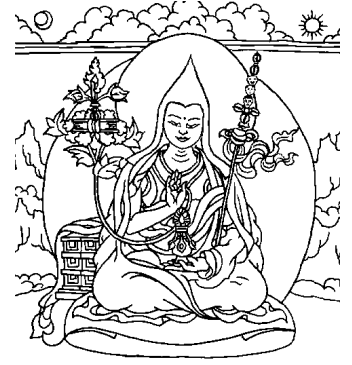
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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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With a pure bodhicitta mind listen to these profound teachings, and then think of putting them into practice.

Compassion in Buddhism

Meditating upon compassion is different to those meditations which use a particular topic as an object of mind, because it is a transformation of your mind into a compassionate one.

Compassion is one of the unique teachings of the Lord Buddha. The other unique elements of the Buddha's teaching are the teaching on peace and non-harmfulness; the uniqueness of the teacher the Lord Buddha, who is without fault; and the teaching on selflessness which is the unique feature of Buddhist philosophy. These unique qualities distinguish Buddhism from other teachings.

Meditating on Taking

The Taking meditation begins with the cultivation of a true feeling of compassion for all beings by sincerely wishing that they all be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

As said in the last teaching, when you think of the suffering that other beings undergo, you have to recall all the types of suffering listed in the Noble Truth of Suffering, and all the causes of suffering which are discussed under the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering. You have to observe other beings so clearly that you can actually feel their suffering. Compassion is when you have the spontaneous, sincere wish for them to be free from suffering.

Then having generated this compassion you undertake the meditation of Taking, the purpose of which is to train the mind so that eventually you are able to actually help all beings out of their suffering. In it you mentally imagine taking upon yourself all the sufferings, and the causes of suffering, of all beings. If it is not possible to imagine all the beings in the universe, then just consider the beings you know, and imagine taking their suffering and unhappiness and its causes into you, and dissolving it into your heart and its self-cherishing attitude.

One example to help in this visualisation is when you shave your hair, the blade cuts away the hairs which fall away. In the same way you imagine taking the suffering and its causes, which then float into the self-cherishing attitude at the heart and both the suffering and self cherishing are dissolved. It is important to imagine that all of your self cherishing completely vanishes as soon as you take upon yourself the suffering and its causes. Not only does the suffering of others and its causes disappear, but at the same time your self-cherishing attitude also vanishes. This is useful because some people might think that they may feel some discomfort when they do this meditation on Taking. Finish your meditation on Taking with a strong feeling that all sentient beings are now freed from suffering and its

causes.

A Detailed Meditation on Taking

One way of doing this meditation on Taking in detail it is to take upon yourself the suffering of the living beings of the different levels of existence. For instance you can first observe the suffering of the three lower realms of existence, and take that upon yourself. Then subsequently you can take upon yourself the suffering of the demigods, the gods and humans. You can consider the suffering of bodhisattvas, even those on the tenth ground. As you know bodhisattvas on the tenth ground, and the Foe Destroyers or Arhats of the lesser vehicle do not experience the suffering of cyclic existence since they have uprooted its causes. However they are not perfect beings as they still have obstructions to omniscient mind, so consider taking upon yourself these sufferings of the obstructions to the omniscient mind.

Having taken upon yourself the suffering and the causes of suffering of all beings from the lowest hell realm to the tenth bodhisattva ground, you then feel that all their suffering is removed, and all the causes of suffering (including the negative actions and obscurations) are purified. You can feel very certain about this purification of the negativities and obscurations, and the removal of all types of suffering.

It is said that there are two exceptions which should not be used as objects in the meditation of Taking. They are one's spiritual lama, and the Buddha

As the Buddha is a being who is perfect without any faults so it is not appropriate to use him as an object of Taking, and it is regarded as both inauspicious and inappropriate to think of one's guru as experiencing suffering, or having any type of fault.

For spiritual development it is very important to view one's spiritual guru or lama as a perfect being or buddha. The guru is like a mediator through which one receives the blessings and spiritual attainments of all the enlightened beings.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama said 'Ordinary beings have to rely upon someone with a flesh body to receive the blessings of the buddhas'. Thus to understand the crucial role of one's guru in spiritual development we have to view the guru as the Buddha, and so as faultless. We should train ourself to understand that any faults we see in the guru are just reflections of the faults in our own mind. The only way to transcend our ordinary frame of mind is training ourselves to see the guru as an enlightened being.

An example of how the guru is a mediator for the blessings of Buddha is to see the guru as being like a magnifying glass. In bright sunlight then we can use a magnifying glass to focus the sun's rays to light a fire in tinder. Without a

magnifying glass however, we cannot make fire using sunlight alone. No matter how powerful Buddha is in giving blessings to sentient beings, without the guru as mediator, sentient beings have no access to these blessings. Therefore guru devotion is emphasised in spiritual practice. We should regard any faults we see as being due to our own mistaken view or misconception. This even applies to physical faults: Geshe-la has white hair or we may have a guru who is blind. Everyone can see this so our observation unmistakably concurs with ordinary perception. However we should see our guru as perfect. If we see what we believe are imperfections or mistakes, then these are due to our mistaken ordinary perception. When Lama Yeshe passed away many students believed Lama Zopa was very upset, so they included Lama Zopa's sorrow in their meditation of taking others' suffering. Without being critical of their motivation, this was a misunderstanding of the practice, because we have to understand that the guru is faultless, and such things as misery don't occur.

Taking Your Own Suffering

In relation to this practice, the root text says

Commence taking progressively from your own side.

According to one common interpretation, doing this meditation of first taking your own suffering is suitable for those of lower mental capacity, or those who cannot perform this meditation on taking the suffering of other people straight away. In any case taking your own suffering is mind training. Train by thinking of your own suffering, and progressively take it up: in the morning take the afternoon's suffering, take tomorrow's suffering today, take next year's suffering this year, and the suffering of the next life in this one. In this way the mind can be trained in respect to yourself, then extended to all other beings.

Whatever the order you use, or class of beings you choose, whether they are found to the East or to the West, whatever the connection they have to you the actual meditation is the same: imagine their particular suffering and its causes, take it upon yourself dissolving it into your heart where it vanishes along with your self-cherishing.

Of course the success of this meditation depends upon how seriously and carefully we undertake this meditation practice. If we are not really concentrating, or do not understand the suffering of other beings, if we only have a vague thought of other beings, and imagine we take up their suffering, then there is not much effect upon our mind. We shall achieve little and we then question the effectiveness of the meditation. Whatever we feel depends upon our state of mind. If our mind is well trained in this meditation it has a very clear picture of the suffering of other beings, it does not just imagine but really feels their pain and agony. It is not easy and we have to concentrate with clear focus and single-pointed concentration to really feel their suffering. Then when you clearly feel their suffering it is natural to feel sympathy, because you understand how unbearable their suffering is. So sympathy or compassion arises, and we wish to take that suffering upon ourselves. Just as their suffering is real to you, so taking it upon yourself is more than just imagining it, and you see it coming to you in the form of a black light. As this suffering dissolves into your self-cherishing mind you know you have freed them from their suffering. Thus you have effectively reduced self-cherishing as well as the suffering of other beings. This teaching of Giving and Taking is therefore very effective in quickly accumulating the two collections of merit and wisdom, or in other words it is very

effective in the accumulation of merit and the purification of obstructions. So do this formal practice very sincerely, and with full concentration.

Then in daily life be very mindful of maintaining as positive a mind as possible, showing good heart to others. Make an effort to keep a calm mind, then as a benefit you will find more happiness, peace and stability in daily life. If your mind is calm, then peace and happiness comes even if you do not actively seek it. However when the mind is not calm then you will not find peace and happiness even if you want it. If you maintain a good heart and even a little compassion in daily life it will lead to a more harmonious and happy life.

For the discussion night the compulsory question is the last verse of the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*, which concerns the eight worldly dharma or concerns¹. His Holiness the Dalai Lama frequently says that this last verse has been very beneficial for him. So we should all make some effort to try to practise that last verse.

In the past Geshe Doga has recommended reciting the *Thirty-five Buddhas' of Compassion* prayer as a means of purifying negativities, but tonight we recite the *Heart Sutra* for the same purpose, as it incorporates all four forces of purification:

1. Visualise as vividly as possible in the space in front of you all the objects of refuge, before which we take refuge and generate bodhicitta. This is the application of the **Force of Base or Object**.
2. Remember all the negativities that have been thus far gathered, such as breaking pledges or vows, or causing harm to others. Then understand that the result of these negativities can only be suffering. Unless these negativities are purified suffering is the inevitable result. That suffering is going to ripen now and not in the distant future. There is an analogy used to explain this. There are three people who have taken deadly poison. The first has died, the second is about to die and you are the third. You have watched the others die and have become sick. You know what is in store for you! Similarly, consider how many beings have taken rebirth in lower realms, and who are suffering immensely. There are also other beings are about to fall into those suffering realms. Unless you purify the negativities that you have created then you too will certainly fall into the lower realms. Therefore feel great regret for having created these negativities. This is the **Force of Regret**, which comes from contemplating how this suffering result has already ripened.
3. Apply the **Force of Resolution** which is being determined not to commit such negativities again.
4. A remedy such as reciting a profound sutra on emptiness like this one is applied, wherein we contemplate the emptiness of our negativities, as their reality is their lack of true or inherent existence. This is the **Force of Remedy**.

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¹ The traditional listing is: Gifts or no gifts, comfort or discomfort, fame or notoriety, praise or criticism. *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, 1993, p.335.

They are listed as gain or loss, fame and disgrace praise and blame, pleasure and pain in *Advice from a Spiritual Friend*, 1996, n.17, p.141.