

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།



26 May 1998

Try to cultivate the right motivation which is bodhicitta. The benefit of cultivating bodhicitta is that it overcomes all the shortcomings and faults that result from a self-cherishing mind. Bodhicitta, then, is our protection and refuge.

Generally speaking we say that engaging in Dharma or virtuous, positive actions is a refuge because it protects us from the suffering results of negative or non-virtuous actions. What we should understand here is that Dharma or spiritual practice is something which is practised within the mind. Whenever we face problems in life, or unease in our mind, we look for a solution or refuge, and that solution lies within our mind. Whatever spiritual practice we do in life should be like take-away food, which we can immediately eat and taste: in other words it can be immediately utilised to minimise our internal problems or faults. From this point of view it is essential that our spiritual practice must be directed towards cultivating a positive state of mind such as good heart to others, and towards removing all the faults in our mind and daily actions.

Measuring our Progress in Spiritual Practice

It is not enough just to believe that spiritual practice or Dharma is beneficial. You may recite all the benefits of practising Dharma, just like you accumulate *mani* mantras, saying that practising the Dharma guarantees achieving higher rebirth as a human or god, or even liberation from cyclic existence. However to actually reap the benefits from Dharma we must examine our own situation and mental continuum. Are there more causes to achieve a better rebirth or a better future, or are there more inner obstacles to such a better future destiny? This is what we need to do to remember what Dharma is. If all our daily actions accord with the lam rim teachings then all our actions are Dharma; if they do not accord with lam rim then they are not Dharma.

If possible try to review your actions on a daily basis, but if this is not possible then at least try to do so weekly or fortnightly. In this way you gain knowledge of the type of actions that are accumulating. If more negative actions have accumulated then one cannot feel complacent, since these actions can cause immense personal suffering in the future. So to purify those negative actions you should engage in some purifying practice. However, if at the same time one remembers having accumulated positive actions then try to rejoice in this and develop the wish to accumulate even more of these positive actions.

There is no reason to feel hopeless about the future in terms of this life and beyond. The scriptural teachings clearly show us that in a very short time, or even in an instant, generating a positive state of mind will accumulate enough merit to be the source of lasting happiness in the future. By understanding this we become more motivated to

undertake positive virtuous actions even over a very short time. We can also understand that the non-virtue created in an instant will be the source of great future suffering. This understanding will motivate us to purify any negative action, however tiny.

Of course we cannot completely avoid negative actions in our daily life, so it is necessary for us to keep purifying those negative actions that we do create. If we look into the lives of noble practitioners they too make mistakes and commit negative actions, but they still make spiritual progress because they keep purifying their negative actions.

We have to understand that we are not short of knowledge of the Dharma. We all have faith in Dharma, ie some belief in the existence of future life, and a belief in the law of karma, which is that positive actions give happiness, and negative actions yield suffering. Geshe-la says that with the length of time you have been studying Dharma both inside and outside these classes, some students might be more knowledgeable than him! However, although having knowledge is an advantage, to gain real benefit from that knowledge one must engage in practices to remove the negativities of daily life, and purify them with the four opponent powers. Even though the Sangha have taken vows this does not mean that they are free from negative actions, or that they do not break their vows, because they do. However if you break a vow, your deep regret (which is an integral part of the purifying practices) can become a cause for you to create even more virtue, and create more merit. Therefore if you engage in purifying practices you can minimise the accumulation of negativities, and conversely you will be increasing the positive qualities within yourself.

Qualities of the Thought Transformation Teachings

"It is like a diamond, the sun and the healing tree."

In the last teaching we finished the origins of the thought transformation teachings. Next is the qualities of these thought transformation teachings, which are explained by comparing them with:

- a Vajra (or diamond)
- the sun's rays
- the healing tree

1. Even a fragment of a diamond or vajra stone can surpass the beauty of all other jewellery or ornaments. Likewise we should realise the surpassing qualities of these thought transformation teachings by understanding that even a part of them can be a cause to free us of all cyclic existence, and thereby be a cause for us to be free of all the suffering of cyclic existence.

Unlike other ornaments even a fragment of a diamond or vajra stone has such value that it can remove poverty. Similarly, even a part of the thought

transformation teachings surpasses all the teachings of the lesser vehicles of hearers and solitary realisers.

2. Even a fraction of the sun's rays can dispel darkness. Similarly, understanding even a part of these teachings is enough to remove the darkness of self-cherishing.
3. Even a leaf from a healing medicinal tree can cure many diseases. Similarly even a part of these teachings is the remedy to all the illnesses of mental delusions.

The Five Degenerations

"When the five degenerations flourish,
transform them into the path to full awakening."

These thought transformation teachings are also a very helpful personal guide in the most adverse situations and circumstances. In this degenerate age there are many unfavourable causes, so it is very easy for the mind to be disturbed. It is said that in this time of degeneration, we need the thought transformation teachings because they can help us to transform these adverse circumstances into the path.

This degenerate age has five types of degeneration which are in terms of:

1. sentient beings
2. mental delusion
3. views or ideas
4. lifespan
5. the age or time

A brief explanation of these five types of degeneration follows.

1. Degeneration of sentient beings refers to those beings who still remain to be subdued. Most sentient beings have been subdued one by one, but there are some who have been left behind. It is just like butter lamps - the pure butter burns first and at the end all that remains is the impure fat. Similarly there are sentient beings who have been unable to be subdued.

These unsubdued sentient beings can be understood by considering their thoughts and actions. Their thoughts are all in the form of mental delusion, and as a natural consequence their actions are all evil ones: their thought is negative and so are their actions. Their mental attitude is completely opposite to the spiritual teachings in the sense that apart from themselves, when others experience loss or suffering, they take joy in that and are pleased, and when others gain happiness, they feel a jealousy so intense that it almost sickens them. In addition their verbal and physical actions are also harmful to others. From start of the day to the end of it, these degenerate sentient beings of degenerate times lead their lives, and pass their time in these ways.

It is important to relate this to yourself. From morning to night what sort of thoughts do you hold in your mind, and what actions do you do?

2. Degenerate in terms of mental delusion. We can also think of the degenerate delusions of the degenerate times. In Tibetan terms we use the word "old" as equivalent to degeneration, in the sense that we talk of delusions which have not been challenged or remedied for a long time. They have become so rough, forceful and vulgar that it only takes a tiny cause for them to manifest themselves. Not only do

these delusions arise easily, but when they do they can disturb the mind immediately and forcefully. In these degenerate times mental delusions arise so easily we must apply these thought transformation teachings in our spiritual practice.

3. A degenerate view is any type of view which obscures or covers the eye of wisdom. This wisdom shows us what actions we should accept and what actions we should reject. If such a view becomes very common, it indicates the degeneration of view.
4. Degeneration of lifespan means the lifespan shortens.
5. Degeneration of time simply means the time when all the previous four degenerations are present.

Geshe-la hopes you have understood these five degenerations. There is no reason to hurry, so whatever the topic we cover, try to understand it thoroughly.

Saka Dawa

This month is most auspicious because it celebrates four important events in the life of the Lord Buddha.

On the eighth of the month Buddha became a celibate, and the fifteenth is the date of his birth (which in Buddhism means being conceived in the womb), death and enlightenment.

The month is called Saka Dawa. The word 'saka' refers to the star which becomes obvious during this month, [whilst 'dawa' refers to both moon and month]. It is regarded as a very good opportunity for virtuous or spiritual practices which have more potential to create merit.

The Offering Prayer

In the offering prayer we say:

Guru is Buddha, Guru is Dharma, Guru is Sangha,
Guru is creator of all.

This verse has origins its origins in tantra. The last line seems to have the connotation of an all-creator god, whereas in Buddhism the fundamental creator is karma. This should be discussed to see how it compares to the view of other religions, which posit a creator god.

Addendum to the teaching of 5 May 1998

Three Types of Pride

The translation of the explanation of the verse from Shantideva's text which described the three types of pride was clarified with the translator.

Shantideva's text says "Bodhisattvas should abide in this pride". The word 'pride' normally refers to a delusion, but in this case the three types of pride are in fact virtuous, and all three should be cultivated. They are:

1. Pride in overcoming afflictions
2. Pride in action
3. Pride in ability

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

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¹ Editor: This paragraph is a summary of a long discussion between Geshe-la and several students so the entire conversation could not be included.

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ཅུ་ལམ་རིམ་རྣམས་གྲོ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



2 June 1998

Please establish the right motivation, which is to think that by receiving these lam rim teachings you will achieve the full state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. For the same goal, generate the strong thought of putting all these teachings into practice.

422.321.2 Training the Mind through Exchanging Self with Others

བདག་གཞན་མཉམ་བཟུང་གྲོ་ལ་སྒྲུབ་བ།

What we have so far covered is deciding to cultivate bodhicitta through the technique of exchanging self with others. The source for our study is *Seven-Point Thought Transformation*, the lineage of which came originally from Lord Buddha. We have also learnt of the special qualities of this thought transformation technique. What follows next is the actual teaching on exchanging self with others, which is presented under seven main headings. [These are:

1. Preliminary teachings
2. Actual teaching on bodhicitta
3. Transforming adverse or unfavourable conditions into favourable ones
4. Explaining how to integrate the practice into one's mind and life
5. Measurement of having trained the mind
6. Pledges of thought transformation
7. Instructions of thought transformation.]

422.321.2 Train in All the Preliminaries

སྒྲོ་ལ་འགྲོ་རྟེན་གྱི་ཚེས་འཇུག་བཞེས།

The root text says 'First train in all preliminary practices'. These preliminary practices are all covered in the stages of the path common to the persons of small and medium scope, so refer to those teachings in the lam rim text.

422.321.22 Actual Teaching on Bodhicitta

བྱང་ཚུབ་གྱི་སེམས་བཞིས་སྒྲུབ།

This has two sub-headings:

1. 422.321.221 Teaching on Ultimate Bodhicitta Mind

དོན་དམ་སེམས་བསྐྱེད།

2. 422.321.222 Teaching on Conventional Bodhicitta

ཀུན་རྗེ་བ་སེམས་བསྐྱེད།

For those bodhisattvas with a very sharp mind ultimate bodhicitta is best taught first. If we follow the root text, the order in which these two bodhicittas are taught depends on whether the followers are classified as having a sharp or dull mental capacity. According to the

traditional system of teaching thought transformation, conventional bodhicitta is taught first and this is the order followed in giving this commentary.

422.321.221 Teaching on Ultimate Bodhicitta Mind

Ultimate bodhicitta just refers to a realization of emptiness, which is gained when one enters into first level of bodhisattvas ground¹. A sharp minded bodhisattva will not vow to undertake this practice to achieve full enlightenment, unless they first see that this goal is definitely attainable. So they need to have gained a realization of emptiness before generating conventional bodhicitta mind, because without first understanding emptiness they cannot be sure of the possibility of attaining the state of buddhahood. To see this possibility it is necessary to realise that self-grasping, or the conception that grasps at self can be extinguished from the root, together with its seeds or latencies. Meditation on emptiness is a remedy to remove this conception of self. So it is only with the ascertainment of emptiness that one can see the attainment of the state of buddhahood, or the end of this conception together with its latencies. Therefore it is necessary to teach emptiness to Mahayana bodhisattvas or trainees of sharp mind before teaching conventional bodhicitta.

Of course having a dull or sharp mental capacity is a very relative term. We only say someone's mind is sharp or dull in comparison with other beings. In general when we talk of the mental capacity of all those beings on the path, we categorise bodhisattvas as having a very sharp mind, whilst solitary realisers have a medium sharpness, and hearers are duller. When we refer to sharp minded bodhisattvas as in the preceding paragraphs, they are sharp-minded when compared to other bodhisattvas.

422.321.222 Training in Conventional Bodhicitta

The source of the teaching on conventional bodhicitta is a story of a woman called Maitrakanyaka².

¹ Editor: There are ten bodhisattva grounds or bhumis. One achieves the first bodhisattva ground when one realises emptiness directly. The attainment of this first ground is also simultaneous with that bodhisattva attaining the path of seeing. The next nine bodhisattva grounds occur on the path of meditation.

² Editor: Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey from his *Lama Chopa Commentary* page 174, explains about these sutras that are the source for this teaching on exchanging self for others; "This second approach is taught in the *Do de pal po che (the Buddhavamsaka Sutra)*. There are six volumes of this Sutra and they are quite detailed in the bodhisattva practices... Following these six volumes of *Do de pal po che* Shantideva wrote two brilliant works *The Guide To The Bodhisattva's Way Of Life* and *Compendium of Instruction*."

For the generation of conventional bodhicitta there are two methods:

Seven-Fold Cause and Effect
Exchanging Self with Other

Here the focus is upon the method of exchanging self with other which has five headings:

422.321.222.1 Equalising Self with Others

བདག་གཞན་མཉམ་པར་བསྐྱོམས་པ།

The meditation on equalising oneself with others begins with the steps in the seven-fold cause and effect meditation from equanimity up to loving kindness. Then the meditation on equalising self with other begins by considering the ways in which we are all the same or equal.

The one fundamental way in which all beings are equal is in wanting happiness. One innately wants happiness no matter how small it may be. Likewise one does not want suffering, even the slightest form of suffering. All other beings have this same innate wish for happiness, and to avoid suffering. It is important to understand this from the depths of one's heart: it is not enough to know it theoretically, or to just say it. We must feel from the depths of our heart, that just as deep down in our own heart we want personal happiness and to avoid personal suffering, so do all other beings. We are all equal in having this heartfelt wish for happiness and to avoid suffering.

As you engage in this meditation you must keep in mind that its purpose is to generate the genuine thought of wishing to benefit others. It is said that because we are all equal in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering, there is nothing else that needs to be considered when engaged in the meditation of equalising self with others. In other words, we must realise that the reason we do not have much consideration for the needs of others is because we do not cherish them as we cherish ourselves, and the reason we lack this thought for others is because we have not equalised our self with others.

Not only do we cherish our self, but we always try to live in comfort and happiness while trying to rid ourselves of all unhappiness. We do this for our self but not for all others, because we have not equalised self with others. We must also realise that we are all the same in that, although we desire happiness and we believe that we are creating the causes for this happiness, we are in fact actually destroy these causes for happiness. Conversely, while we do not desire any suffering, we keep creating the causes of that suffering. So in this respect as well, we can see equality of self and others.

In practice, this means that when we see someone experiencing great misery or suffering, we should be able to show them genuine sympathy by understanding that what they are experiencing is totally unwanted, and think 'What a pity they do not have the happiness they wish for, and yet do have the suffering they wish to avoid!'

The focus of this meditation on equality of self with all other beings is the fact of wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. It is said that there is no difference between the methods of exchanging self with others, and

seven-fold cause and effect with respect to the first three causes, which are:

1. Recognising all sentient beings as one's mother
2. Remembering their kindness
3. Repaying their kindness

as well as the last two,

6. Superior intention
7. Bodhicitta

Both methods contain these five elements. What is special in this method of exchanging self with others is that the levels of loving kindness and compassion which it generates are said to be far stronger than the loving kindness and compassion generated using the seven-fold cause and effect method. The main reason that loving kindness and compassion are so strong and intense using the exchange self with others method, is because in it we not only remember the kindness of all other beings when they were our mother, but also when they were not our mother. Therefore this way of remembering kindness is much stronger, and so the love and compassion generated is much stronger. If we consider the way in which we remember the kindness of our mother in this current life, then it is obvious that the more of her kindness that we remember, then the more gratitude we generate.

The *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*, says 'All other beings are more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel. May I cherish all these living beings to achieve the ultimate great purpose.' It is said that as precepts, the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* and the *Seven Point Thought Transformation* are the same, because they have the same lineage. So if you receive commentary or transmission of one, it is same as receiving a transmission of the other.

422.321.222.2 Disadvantages of Self-Cherishing

བདག་གཅེས་འཛིན་གྱི་སྐྱོན་སྐོར་མ་ནས་བསམ་པ།

Having finished the stage of equalising self with others, when it comes to actually doing this one must face two factors: favourable and unfavourable ones. Unfavourable factors are the faults of a self-cherishing attitude, and favourable factors are the qualities of cherishing others. This heading introduces the topic of thinking about the faults of self-cherishing by every possible means. Prior to next week's teaching you should read the text on the disadvantages of self-cherishing mind.

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9 June 1998

As we are all ordinary sentient beings, we can neither listen to nor teach Dharma if we all remain in meditative equipoise. Only a fully enlightened being such as Lama Tsong Khapa can do so while in a state of meditative equipoise. This is indicated by his two hand gestures: the right hand at the heart symbolising teaching Dharma, while his left hand is in the gesture of meditation equipoise. These simultaneous hand gestures symbolise his achievement of full enlightenment.

Assuming you have established the right motivation of bodhicitta in the beginning, the next topics according to the outline of the teaching are reflecting on the disadvantages of the self-cherishing attitude, followed by considering the advantages of cherishing other beings.

422.321.222.2 Disadvantages of Self-Cherishing

བདག་གཅོད་འཛིན་གྱི་སྐྱོན་སྐྱོན་དུ་མ་ནས་བསམ་པ།

What is important in this meditation is to relate self-cherishing to our own mind. It is a different story if you are already a bodhisattva, who has already fully developed the attitude of cherishing others, and fully removed the attitude of self-cherishing. The rest of us, however, must first see the faults of self-cherishing as much as possible. By seeing all its shortcomings we can recognise self-cherishing as our enemy, and then think of removing this attitude. Because without ridding ourselves of self-cherishing it is impossible to develop the bodhicitta mind, let alone achieve full enlightenment.

A verse in *The Guru Puja* says,¹

"The self-cherishing attitude is a chronic disease which is responsible for bringing all unwanted sufferings".

Referring to the self-cherishing attitude as a "chronic disease" shows the seriousness of this disease. Shantideva's text *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, says 'All suffering and harm that exists in this world arises from this self-centred view'. This shows us that a self-cherishing attitude is the source of all the unwanted suffering in the world: the suffering of physical ill-health, mental ill-health or the harm caused by any human or non-human beings. So we do not need this self-cherishing attitude, as it has no advantages, it has a great many disadvantages and because it brings all unwanted suffering in life. Understanding this, we become

motivated to eliminate self-cherishing. ▮

A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life says²

"All happiness that exists in the world comes from the attitude of cherishing others whereas all suffering that exists in the world comes from self-cherishing".

This verse is saying that all suffering comes from the attitude of desiring personal happiness. We need to think about the meaning of this quotation, so as to see the causal link between the suffering we experience, and our attitude of seeking personal happiness, or self-cherishing.

The indication of the existence of this self-cherishing attitude is a deep sense of 'I' within us, or attachment to this 'I'. With this deep sense of 'I', or self-cherishing, it is natural for us to desire some things and to not desire other things. Thus thoughts of like and dislike arise. Out of this sense of 'I' a strong desire for personal happiness arises. If our selfish desires are not automatically fulfilled as they arise, then this selfish mind motivates us to undertake various types of actions. We can investigate the nature of these actions that we are forced to undertake as a result of being motivated by this selfish desire.

If you read the lam rim text you will find the disadvantages of self-cherishing and the advantages of cherishing others explained very clearly. However personal practice is the most important factor with which to make progress in spiritual development. In our own meditation practice we try to realise how holding onto this self-cherishing attitude results in more problems and suffering for ourself and others.

With this self-cherishing attitude we disregard others, even those who, like our parents, have been kind and helpful to us. Not only that but this self-cherishing attitude also induces all sorts of mental delusions, such as pride in even minor qualities that you might possess, or competitiveness with equals, or jealousy of the qualities, skills, possessions, or knowledge of others. Also it is easy to generate hatred, since we cannot endure even a minor loss or undesirable event. So we see how with this self-cherishing attitude we give way to all sorts of mental delusions, and with mental delusions in our mind there is no room for mental peace and happiness.

² Editor: The closest quotations that we could find to match Geshe-la's teachings were verse 113, Chapter 8, "Having seen the mistakes in (cherishing) myself and the ocean of good qualities in (cherishing) others, I shall completely reject all selfishness and accustom myself to accepting others." And verse 129, Chapter 8, "Whatever joy there is in this world all comes from desiring others to be happy, and whatever suffering there is in this world all comes from desiring myself to be happy."

¹ Verse 91, LTWA edition, "This chronic disease of cherishing ourselves is the cause giving rise to our unsought suffering, perceiving this, we seek your blessings to blame begrudge, and destroy the monstrous demon of selfishness."

With a self-cherishing mind our actions harm others, turning them into our enemies.

As the lam rim teachings say, this self-cherishing attitude is the source of all the problems in our life and relationships. Beyond learning about these disadvantages, we must also integrate this knowledge into our life, by making an effort to diminish this self-cherishing attitude, and to progressively transform it into the attitude of cherishing others.

One fault of a self-cherishing attitude is not being able to have harmonious relationships with others. Whether the relationship is between parents, or between siblings, or between parents and children, or between friends, in our society there are continuous problems and conflict existing in these relationships, and they are all due to this self-cherishing attitude. Without overcoming this attitude we cannot overcome the problems either of this life or future lives. Nor can your spiritual teacher do anything to solve your problems.

In general, everyone has a strong drive to meet their own needs. A self-cherishing attitude is not however, an appropriate or reliable means of meeting those needs, since in reality the self which we wish to protect does not exist by itself: it does not exist independently of all other conditions. From a philosophical point of view the self does not exist autonomously.

Even in relative terms, meeting the needs of the self depends upon the support of others. For example, we may desire a partner. Not only that but we desire the right person and a lasting, meaningful relationship. A self-cherishing attitude, however will become a great obstacle to fulfilling what we desire, which is a good relationship, because with self-cherishing we do not see the good qualities in others. All we see is that they are objects to blame for all the problems which we face in our relationship with them. So our self-cherishing attitude obscures our mind from clearly seeing things: all we can see is that we are perfect. If we see a fault in ourselves we cannot admit it, and blame the other instead.

In real life, and in television shows, people advance towards loaded guns with little more than a stone in their hand, facing certain death. This appears to be an act of great bravery and courage, but is in fact quite stupid! Likewise the self-cherishing thought motivates us to do actions which result in the opposite of that which we desire.

The next disadvantage of self-cherishing is that it is the source of all non-virtuous actions. The motivation behind killing other sentient beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and so on, is to bring some personal gain or happiness. Because of this self-cherishing attitude you want only happiness and not unhappiness; you want only gain and not loss; you want only success and not failure. In real life however we cannot gain anything without enduring a loss; we cannot achieve anything without putting in an effort. So self-cherishing gives us a wrong way of thinking about reality. As in the example of facing a loaded gun, a self-cherishing attitude can even lead to death. If you allow a self-cherishing mind to direct your actions, the end result is loss: in

attacking your perceived enemy, you are injured instead. So recognise this self-cherishing mind inside yourself, and try to see what kind of message it is trying to pass onto you. If you listen to those messages and follow them, then all your actions will be non-virtuous and a source of suffering within this lifetime.

By seeing more and more faults of this self-cherishing attitude, we can then learn how to blame all things that go wrong in life onto this self-cherishing mind, as is said in the thought transformation teachings. When these teachings say “All the blame goes onto one”³, they are referring to the self-cherishing mind. In this way we can recognise that if we want to keep this self-cherishing mind, we shall not find lasting peace and happiness in this life, let alone in future lives.

Geshe Doga welcomed Geshe Sonam Dhargyey to the teachings. Geshe Sonam Dhargyey’s father lived near Geshe-la in Tibet, and they were very close. Now, although the father was a lay person, his son is a geshe and also very close to Geshe-la.

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³ *Eight verses of thought transformation*, “Banish the one object of every blame”.

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16 June 1998

Try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation, which is the genuine thought of achieving the state of buddhahood for the sake of all beings. Remember too, that it is in order to achieve this goal you are receiving these teachings, and that you will put them into practice so as to tame your mind.

Disadvantages of Self-Cherishing (cont.)

It is important to recognise all the disadvantages of self-cherishing before seriously beginning to reduce this type of mind. You must see this self-cherishing mind as the cause of all the suffering you have undergone from beginningless time, and you can recognise it by seeing that deep down within us there is this strong self-centred view of "I". With a life based upon this self-centred "I", everything is directed towards bringing about personal benefit, and with this self-centred view as your base you will not yield to anyone else nor be willing to take any losses.

But does this self-cherishing attitude really secure personal happiness and benefits? You must investigate whether your life is happier and more meaningful as a result of living with this attitude. Shantideva said,

This self-cherishing mind has, over many aeons,
always had a selfish purpose
always desired things just for itself.

As a result one has undergone a great deal of
hardship.

The end result is just suffering¹.

Shantideva is referring here to the self-cherishing and the consequent suffering in the endless cycle of our lives. If we just concentrate on relating self-cherishing to our current life we see, as Shantideva said, that through the influence of this self-cherishing mind we have done a great many harsh and harmful actions. We see that actions done out of this selfish mind have resulted in hardly any joy, but have produced a great deal of suffering. Therefore we see the great disadvantages of this self-cherishing mind. So we come to understand that by reducing this self-cherishing mind, we shall have more rest in the mind. Thus we shall see the dawn of more happiness in life, and we shall be able to extend the benefits to those closest to us.

We are just going through the disadvantages of self-cherishing very briefly, because it is covered in great detail in the texts. What is important is to relate this whole teaching to your own mind and practice. Try to understand that in fact it is this self-cherishing mind which is really the cause of our restlessness, which makes our life and our relationships very unstable, which causes our mind to become afraid so easily, and which so easily turns a friend

into an enemy and vice versa. Regardless of your friends, relatives, wealth and so on, with a strong self-cherishing mind it is difficult to find meaning in life, or to find lasting peace and happiness, and it is difficult to get along with the people around us.

We can trace the cause of any problem that surfaces in our life, or our mind, to the self-cherishing mind. For example, if a husband has a very strong self-centred mind then it is very easy for him to think "Why do I have to work so hard when the money is being used by the entire family?" In the end this causes problems and unhappiness in the relationship, and affects the whole family. Others, on the other hand are very responsible family people. They think more of others than themselves. What brings joy to others brings joy to them. Try to understand the disadvantages of self-cherishing in life from your own experience. Then recognise self-cherishing as the enemy, and try to abandon it.

422.321.222.3 Advantages of Cherishing Others

གཞན་གཟེས་འཛིན་གྱི་ཡིན་ཏེ་སློབ་མ་ནས་བསམས།

The third heading, 'Advantages of Cherishing Others', can be understood by knowing that these advantages are the opposite of the disadvantages of self-cherishing. In regard to the advantages of cherishing others, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* says

All happiness that exists in the world
Arises from the thought of cherishing other beings.

The Guru Puja says "The limitless excellent qualities arise from cherishing other beings" while the thought transformation [*The seven point thought transformation*] teachings say "Meditate on the kindness of all other beings."

If we think of the advantages of cherishing other beings, we find that it is a source of all virtues. Without cherishing others no virtues can arise, and then there is no practice of moral ethics. Without the practice of moral ethics, there is no practice of single-pointed concentration. Without the practice of single-pointed concentration there is no practice of wisdom, and so there is no access to the state of liberation.

Likewise without this thought of cherishing others there is no bodhicitta, and without bodhicitta we cannot practise the six perfections, and without the practice of the six perfections we cannot achieve the state of buddhahood. Based upon this therefore, we can see the importance of this thought of cherishing others. We can meditate in this way, and extend it to meditating on the entire path to the state of liberation or to enlightenment.

Why do people practise moral ethics because of this thought of cherishing others? It is because moral ethics restrains us from engaging in the actions of killing other beings, stealing

¹ Editor: Chapter 8, verse 155:

Because of desiring to benefit yourself, O mind
All the weariness you have gone through
Over countless aeons
Has only succeeded in achieving misery

and so on. In order for us to sincerely adopt such moral actions there must be some respect for the life of others. In other words, with this thought of cherishing others we refrain from killing, and such moral practices are a substantial cause to obtain any type of higher rebirth. Likewise with this thought of cherishing others we shall not steal their belongings, but will instead engage in the practice of giving. These practices of giving and not stealing are a substantial cause to enjoy resources and wealth in future lives.

If we cultivate this thought of cherishing others then naturally we shall make progress in our spiritual practice, and ensure a better rebirth in the future, or even liberation or full enlightenment. On the other hand, without this thought of cherishing others there is no hope of achieving even a good rebirth in the future.

There are two stories that illustrate the advantages of cherishing others in terms of this current life, and future lives. The first story concerns a ferry boat carrying so many passengers it was in danger of sinking. One person, thinking of saving the lives of the others, dived into the water to what seemed like a certain death. However, because of the power of his strong thought of cherishing others he did not die, but instead reached the other shore just like the other passengers.

The second story concerns a mother and daughter who were caught in a river current. As both were drowning they were each thinking of the other's life more than their own. The mother thought "As long as my daughter survives, my own life is of no concern" while the daughter thought only of her mother's safety. As a result of this they both went into rainbows, and took rebirth in the land of the gods.

Both these stories are relevant to our practice. Think of the needs of the person closest to you and wish them happiness. If that person has the same attitude towards you, then you will become very close to each other because you share this thought of caring for each other.

The bottom line is that if we really want happiness and peace, and to enjoy very good relations with everyone else then we have to cultivate the thought of cherishing others. We are all the same in that none of us wants any pain or dissatisfaction in life. To achieve this we must remove, or at least minimise, this self-cherishing mind.

What most matters to us is how much we practise and how much we apply the teachings we receive. We might not sacrifice our life to protect the lives of others, but at least we can become more patient and tolerant. By reducing the self-cherishing mind we become less vulnerable to the situations we face in life, for example good or bad words. We have to consider that right now we have this opportunity to look at our life, and to see how to make it happier, and how we can bring more happiness to the lives of others.

As we always say, when we talk of practice we always have to direct our thoughts, and the focus of our practice, onto our self. For instance we all know how easy it is to criticise a very selfish person. It is so easy to say, "He always thinks of himself!" In fact from that person's point of view you are also just as selfish so what you are saying is laughable. Therefore in your own practice, it is most beneficial to first try to correct your own faults before pointing the finger at someone else. As we always say, in your practice the focus must always be inwards.

Geshe-la would like to give you some homework, which is to memorise the *Eight Verses Of Thought Transformation*. In New Zealand at Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey's Centre they

had a performance of a dance using the *Eight Verses Of Thought Transformation* as a song. Sometimes if you memorise such important verses by heart you can use them in meditation practice, reflecting on each verse without needing to refer to a piece of paper. It is very handy to be able to do that.

The *Eight Verses Of Thought Transformation* was composed by Geshe Langri Tangpa, a most famous thought transformation teacher. Whenever you recite it try to think of his kindness and make a strong prayer that, like him, you can put the meaning of these verses into practice in this lifetime, and that these eight verses will always be in your mind as a guide in this life, and the many lifetimes to come.

The compulsory question for the test can be on the first verse of the *Eight Verses Of Thought Transformation*. Geshe Doga says he wants to use the entire *Eight Verses Of Thought Transformation* as the subject for the last test this year.

Last week the subject of the line from the Offering Prayer, 'Lama is creator of all' was raised. What are your thoughts on this?

Sandra: Your own mind is the creator. Are we particularly referring to the offering verse praising the guru as the 'all creator'?

Jeremy: In *The Bodhisattva's Confession of Moral Downfalls* there is a buddha called Buddha Who Arranges Appearances For All. So is it possible for a buddha to arrange or effect the experiences of sentient beings?

Geshe-la: There is a verse in Kathleen McDonald's book to read on this subject.

The Offering prayer says 'Lama is creator of all'. First of all we have to establish that the term 'all' as used in this line does not include all phenomena. In Tibetan the term 'all' can just refer to a category, so here 'all' refers to 'all virtues'. That is, all virtues arise in dependence on the Buddha. There is no virtue which is not influenced by, or the activity of, an enlightened being. So from that point of view the guru is the creator of all. With an assembly or meeting one can ask "Are *all* the people present?" This does not mean the whole world but the people in this particular context. In the case of this prayer the 'all' refers to 'virtues'.

So the guru is indeed the source of all virtue, of all the excellent qualities that can be achieved along the path to final, or ultimate enlightenment. In order to achieve the state of buddhahood we have to rely on the gurus. The followers, or Sangha depend upon the guru, as does the Dharma, because it is the guru who gives the teachings or Dharma to the followers or Sangha, who progress to buddhahood, ie. become buddhas. So are all dependent on the guru, who is the source of all excellent qualities.

It is discussion night next week, which is a very good opportunity for all of you to learn from each other. In order to make that discussion very sound and beneficial, everyone should adopt a very positive attitude in order to learn from each other, and to help each other clear up doubts.

As we are currently studying the subject of bodhicitta, love and compassion, try to make a special effort to develop this, and to increase your love and compassion for others. The more qualities we develop the greater our progress in Dharma topics will be. Sometimes people studying for higher degrees in mundane topics become more proud and distant and arrogant towards ordinary people: inwardly they have developed more delusion. Our study of Dharma should not be like that.

TARA INSTITUTE

STUDY GROUP TEST-3

30th June, 1998

Answer any four from question no. 1-6

Question. no. 7 is compulsory

Time allowed one hour

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1. Describe the qualities of the thought transformation teachings based on the following verse:- "It is like a diamond, the sun and the healing tree".
 2. Explain the meaning of the five degenerations.
 3. "Guru is Buddha, Guru is Dharma, Guru is Sangha, Guru is creator of all".
What does it mean by Guru is creator of all?
 4. Why is it necessary to teach the ultimate bodhicitta first to Bodhisattvas with sharp faculties?
 5. Explain the meditation on equalising self with others.
 6. Discuss the disadvantages of the self cherishing attitude.
 7. **(Compulsory)**

Explain the meaning of the following lines from the "Eight Stanzas Thought Transformation" by Kadampa Geshe Lang-ri Tang-pa (1054-1123).

With a determination to accomplish
The highest welfare for all sentient beings
Who surpass even a wish granting jewel
I will learn to hold them supremely dear