

# 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་བཅངས།



25 May 1999

Ensure that your motivation to study and practise these teachings is bodhicitta - the altruistic mind wishing to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Before beginning any spiritual practice it is important to make sure that our motivation is pure, and not tainted with any selfish purpose or reason. Rather we should make sure that our motivation is wholeheartedly to benefit other beings.

## Perfection of Giving (cont.)

In the lam rim commentary we are up to the topic of the Six Perfections, the first of which is Giving, or generosity. There are three types of Giving:

1. Giving material objects
2. Giving Dharma
3. Giving fearlessness, or protection to those whose life is threatened

### 1. Giving Material Objects

In the last teaching we briefly covered the first two types of giving. We could go into in great detail about each of these types of giving. For example, in the giving of material objects there are ten classes of recipients of generosity. However what is important for us is, to know how to practise this Giving properly and effectively.

Although we can study this topic extensively, what we really have to understand is that we have the opportunity to practise giving at all times. To practise Giving Material Objects we do not have to be rich, nor do we need to find someone begging for such material objects. Rather what is most important is that our thought to give has to be pure: we have to have this intention of giving in order to benefit others.

As mentioned in the last teaching, to make our practice of giving even more profound and complete, we can incorporate an understanding of the emptiness of the three circles of giving.

You should also understand that our actions of giving - even offering someone just a cup of tea - can be a true practice of giving if, when offering the tea, we do so from the depth of our heart, seeing it as an opportunity to serve and benefit others. Even if there is no obvious being to whom we can give, it is also said that whenever we eat or drink we can transform that into an act of giving, by thinking that we offer the food and drink to the countless living beings (such as bacteria) in our body. As said before, what counts is our mental intention of giving to benefit others. As we give to the living beings in our body we can think: "Right now I can at least fulfil

the material needs of these beings in my body by this act of giving, and I pray that in the future I may fulfil their spiritual needs by giving them Dharma."

### 2. Giving Dharma

Giving Dharma is benefiting others by giving spiritual teachings, or helping them in their spiritual practice.

It is said that Giving Dharma particularly suits celibate monks and nuns who live in monastic orders. Whereas Giving Material Aid suits the householder, or lay person. This does not mean that as a celibate monk or nun you do not have to practise Giving Material Objects, nor does it mean that as a lay person you do not need to practise Giving Dharma. However, generally it is the case that celibate monks and nuns do not have many material possessions, and spend their time in spiritual study and practice. So generally they have more experience and knowledge of spiritual matters. Whereas the lay people generally have more wealth, and have less time to devote to spiritual learning and practice.

### 3. Giving Fearlessness (or Protection)

This generally means protecting others from various types of fears, such as the fear of threats to their life. For example if you could help a thief facing execution to be free of that fear of execution, then that is Giving Fearlessness. This form of giving is also protecting all other beings from threats to their life, such as saving an insect from drowning, or protecting a living creature from scorching heat by moving them to a cooler place.

Giving Fearlessness also includes saving people from fire, flood or other natural disaster. We hear stories of very brave, courageous people who do not have spiritual knowledge of the benefit of giving, but because of their compassion, they put their own life at risk in order to save other beings. These are highly admirable people. We can only say that they have performed these acts of bravery, because they have become accustomed to giving sometime in the past.

To practise Giving Protection or Fearlessness we have to do whatever we can, within our capabilities. If we have the capacity to save someone's life, such as a prisoner or any other being whose life is at risk, then we should do so. However if we do not have a such capacity, even thinking of alternative actions that we can do to help that person to be free of that situation is also said to be the practice of Giving Fearlessness. As part of that practice we must not cause harm to any other living being: we have to refrain from any actions that cause harm, or even death to other beings, for example, by not slapping and

killing an insect which is biting our body. So this practice of preventing harm to other beings is also the practice of Giving Fearlessness.

Now we can clearly see the benefits which this practice of giving can give both to our own life, and also to the world. It is a great cause of securing peace and harmonious conditions in the world. So we should try to do whatever we can to practise it.

We should not allow ourselves to be discouraged if we cannot practise something that is very difficult because we are not ready, and then not do any practise at all! Rather we should think "If I cannot do one aspect, then what else can I practise?" and then do that. If, in day-to-day life we cannot always act according to the spiritual teachings, we should at least always have an appreciation of them, and some wish to practise them. We should pray at all times "May whatever actions I do in this life benefit other beings, and never be a cause of harm to others", as it is important to remind oneself not to create any harmful action, and create only beneficial ones.

We do have the potential to always engage in actions of benefiting others. It is just that we have not yet familiarised ourselves with such actions, or the thought of helping others. We can look at other beings for examples of lives of dedication to the service of others. They may not be religious-minded, yet they have this incredible compassion, and the determination and courage to undertake acts of bravery.

Geshe-la saw a television report about a flood in South Australia. There was a small child being carried away by the current of the flood. There were many onlookers, but one large, strong man put his life at risk, jumped into the water and rescued the child. Many of those who were watching may have had compassion, but they did not have enough determination and courage to actualise that compassionate wish, and jump in the water.

We can understand that to achieve a worldly goal we need courage and determination. In spiritual practice too, not only do we need to generate compassion and the thought of benefiting others, but at the same time we need to develop the courage and determination to actually put our thoughts into action.

In the text it says that the 'Perfection of Giving' means a practice of Giving which has reached its fullest development. The practice of Giving mainly refers to the intention to give, such as giving one's body, one's material possessions or one's root virtues, and to give from the depth of one's heart, without any sense of miserliness. It becomes the Perfection of Giving when such a thought of giving is fully developed, and perfect.

Our practice of giving reaches to the state of perfection when this thought or intention of giving reaches perfection. Then we have fully developed the capacity to give. For example, if we have the thought to give in relation to our body, then we would have the capacity to actually give our life and body. Until we actually have the capacity to give our body, we have to mentally train ourselves. In other words, until that time, for us the practice of giving means to develop and intensify this thought or intention of giving for example, our body.

How do we develop our intention to give? For example in relation to the practice of giving our body or material objects, we meditate on the impermanence of these things. Not only are they subject to decay and disintegration, but at the time of death we have to leave them all behind. They become useless, and we are even separated our own body.

So before you have the actual capacity to give, the main practice of giving is training the mind. However at the same time we should not think that our only practice is [restricted to] developing this true intention to give from the depths of our heart. We should also think of giving any object we have the resources, capacity and desire to give. So our practice of giving is training the mind in the practice of giving, as well as giving the things that we can give.

As said earlier, it is the motivation of giving which is the most important factor in giving. A student once told Geshe-la about how he had given some money to a beggar who said that he needed money for a train ticket. The student was unsure as to whether the beggar would in fact buy alcohol. Whatever the intention of a beggar, as a way of familiarising yourself, it is important to get into the practice of giving. Even if it is something small, it shows that the action you have done is a worthy one.

Geshe-la said once, as he was returning from India, he stayed in an upper Tantric college hotel in Delhi. As he walked out of the restaurant late in the evening, he saw someone sitting on a flat stone looking very sick. This person's friend said that he desperately needed the money to travel to Rajpur. As he was about to leave India, and would not need Indian currency, Geshe-la gave the beggar his last 65 rupees. On returning to the hotel, a Gyuto monk told Geshe-la that that person would only use the money to buy drugs. On a subsequent trip Geshe-la thought he met the same beggar asking for money, and when Geshe-la said that he had given him money last time, the beggar said "No it was not me." Who knows? The point here is that it is still worthwhile from your side, as long as you maintain a pure motivation, to not let the person who begs to go away empty handed.

Of course there are certain exceptional situations. You do not give poison or weapons to a suicidal person, with which they could kill themselves.

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

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#### **Note on authentication**

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1 June 1999

As usual we should try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation, by thinking that the reason for studying this Lam Rim teaching is to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient being. Then think that we shall put these teachings into practice by controlling the mind, and through this achieve complete enlightenment.

There is also benefit if, before any of our actions in everyday life, we try to set the right frame of mind or motivation, because our actions will be good if a positive state of mind presides over them.

## Faults in the Practice of Giving

As to the teaching on the Lam Rim we have nearly finished the first of the Six Perfections, the Perfection of Giving, learning that there are three types of the Perfection of Giving.

In order to make the practice of Giving more fruitful we should be aware of, and avoid these faults:

- **Wrong view** or a disbelief in the results of the practice of giving, for example doubting that giving will yield all the fruits mentioned in the texts.
- **Directing our practice at an inferior cause**, for example focussing our practise of Giving upon protecting one single being, with the result of causing harm to many other beings. In other words ignoring the welfare of many other beings by focussing upon benefiting one single being reduces the scope of our practice.
- **Holding a very wrong view as the supreme view**, for example, believing that making animal sacrifices is a worthy cause. Such a completely wrong view about the practice of Giving should be avoided.
- **Using the practice of Giving to belittle or undermine others**. The implication here is that when we practise Giving we should try to please other beings in all ways. Physically we should give in a right manner with the right outer gestures. In both our mental attitude and manner we should not distinguish between those of low or high status.
- **Being influenced by competitiveness**, for example, giving in order to compete with other practitioners. Nor should we hold any **pride**, such as feeling proud that you have given to a particular charity, or to a large number of beings, or given a large amount of money.
- **Avoid the motivation of gaining fame and reputation** when engaging in this practice.
- **Being small minded**, thinking that we have over-performed this practice of Giving by giving more than

we should.

- **Avoid feeling regret** after you have given. It is said that to feel regret about the performance of any virtuous act is a negative action, whereas feeling regret about a non-virtue is a positive action.
- **Showing discrimination** in our practice of Giving, such as practising Giving to friends but not to enemies and others.

## The Ten Types of Recipients of Giving

Lama Tsong Khapa's *lam rim chen mo*<sup>1</sup> lists ten categories of the types of beings who are recipients of our practice of Giving.

1. Friends or the class of people who benefit us
2. Enemies or the class of being who harms us
3. Strangers or the class of being who is neither friend nor enemy
4. Those beings endowed with excellent qualities such as moral ethics
5. Those beings not endowed with such excellent qualities as morality
6. Those beings who are equal to oneself
7. Those beings who are below oneself
8. Those beings who are above oneself
9. Those beings who are very well off in terms of material possessions and who lead a happy, comfortable life
10. Beings who are impoverished in terms of material possessions and who lead a very miserable life.

In terms of our practice, the reason why we engage in this practice of Giving is to benefit other beings, because we have previously generated bodhicitta, and with that mind resolved to devote ourselves to fulfilling the welfare of other beings.

Therefore we have to understand the ways in which our practice of Giving benefits other beings, and fulfils the aim of bodhicitta mind. We have to see how giving material objects can truly benefit others, by immediately solving their problems and fulfilling their needs. The giving of Dharma is an excellent guide for others in terms of what they should practice and what they should abandon or avoid. The giving of fearlessness gives other beings protection from the various types of fear.

We also learn here how all living beings, whether fully enlightened, or just ordinary sentient beings, can be an object of Giving, which shows us that we can practise

<sup>1</sup> Editor: The lam rim chen mo is known in English as "The Great Stages of the Path"

Giving to any other being.

### The Four Characteristics of Giving

Shantideva's *Condensed Instructions* further explains the practice of Giving in terms of four characteristics. These are explained in the Lam Rim commentary<sup>2</sup>. The four characteristics are:

1. Giving
2. Protecting
3. Purifying
4. Increasing

We shall discuss these four features very briefly. The four characteristics can be applied to each one of the three types of Giving, and they also apply to the types of object to which we give.

For example, in relation to the practice of giving of our body, our practice should incorporate these four qualities in this way.

1. The first feature is **giving** from the depth of our heart. Of course here our practice is more one of training our mind with the thought of the pure sense of giving, [rather than actually giving our body].
2. The second feature is **protecting**. We need some sense of protecting our body because at this stage we are only training our mind to give our body, and our actual body is not to be forsaken or given away. It also means protecting our body against engaging in any negative or non-virtuous action.
3. The third feature, **purifying**, is combining an awareness of or the emptiness of the three circles of giving:
  - the emptiness of the object of giving
  - the emptiness of the giver
  - the emptiness of the act of giving
4. The fourth feature is **increasing** which is dedicating our practice to the cause of enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. In this way we increase the merit of our practice of Giving, and we can also increase our merit by rejoicing in this practice.

To summarise it is said that if we include these three factors:

- motivation of bodhicitta
- dedication of bodhicitta
- realisation of emptiness

our practice of giving will be classified as the Perfection of Giving.

### Combining All Six Perfections In the Practice Of Giving

Furthermore, there is also the method whereby we can include the other five perfections into our practice of Giving or in other words, there is the method by which we qualify each of the Six Perfections as an incorporation of the practice of all of the Six Perfections. In the past Geshe-la has taught the Seven Limb practices of Mahayana, where he explained how the limb of

prostration could include all of the six perfections.

Maybe you can discuss how the practice of the Six Perfections can be incorporated into the practice of Giving. If we can understand this in relation to Giving then we can apply the same logic to each of the other Perfections.

In the practice of **Giving**, our motivation to engage in the practice is the bodhicitta motivation, while at the same time restraining our verbal and physical actions from non-virtuous actions. This combines the practice of **Morality** with Giving. It is important to combine these two, because it is said that that if we do not, then the result of our giving will ripen in a bad rebirth. So therefore, it is important to practise Morality at the same time as Giving.

We must also apply the perfection of **Patience** to the practice of Giving, because without Patience we are easily disturbed or provoked by other people, or by outer conditions. When we practise Giving we may hear harsh or abusive speech, or see a poor response to one's generosity, and when this happens we might show them anger or hatred, and in doing this, it is said we lose the merit or virtue accumulated by our practice of Giving. So anger destroys one's virtue. Therefore in order to prevent such anger it is important to practise Patience in conjunction with the practice of Giving.

It is also important to practise the Perfection of **Joyous Effort** otherwise we shall practice Giving for a day or two, then fall under the influence of laziness, and stop practising. However with Joyous Effort we make continuous, consistent progress in our practice.

It is also important to apply the Perfection of **Concentration**. Combining single-pointed concentration with Giving is a great advantage as it allows us to maintain the virtue we are accumulating through our practice. Without single-pointed concentration, distractions will arise, just like a thief entering your house and stealing your wealth. Instead of practising Giving, your mind will be overpowered by mental delusion because you have allowed distractions to enter your mind. As one engages in the practice of Giving one develops full knowledge of the benefits of practising Giving, and the shortcomings of not doing so. With this sense of discernment one then tries to engage in the practice of Giving single-pointedly.

Finally the practice of Giving should also incorporate with the Perfection of **Wisdom**, qualifying the practice with the wisdom realising the emptiness of the three circles of giving.

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<sup>2</sup> Editor: In fact the commentary text, "Liberation in the Palm" discusses four groupings of four! Each of these groupings has a different connotation to the meaning of these four features. The text implores us to practise all sixteen of these features of the act of giving.

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8 June 1999

Try to reinforce the bodhicitta motivation which you have just generated, and try to think that you are studying and practising this lam rim with this same motivation.

## 422.331.12 Perfection of Morality:

Having finished the Perfection of Giving we shall now discuss the second perfection - the Perfection of Morality.

What is morality? It is the thought of not harming other beings and the thought of abandoning all the causes of harm to others.

Given that the meaning of morality is the thought of refraining from harming other beings, achieving the Perfection of Morality means fully developing the thought of non-harmfulness, and becoming completely familiar with this thought. So the Perfection of Morality is not achieved by simply ensuring that others are actually free from harm.

Let us look into this meaning of morality as the thought of abandoning the very basis of causing harm to other beings. It is also said that abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions is the main practice of morality. What is the relationship between this and the definition of morality as being both the thought of abandoning harm to other beings as well as the basis of harming them?

The definition [of morality in terms of the ten non-virtuous actions] has two parts which we need to know.

1. What is the harm which we cause to other beings? In terms of the ten non-virtuous actions, the harm refers to the actual harm that we cause to others by our three non-virtuous actions of body, and four non-virtuous actions of speech.
2. The three non-virtuous actions of mind (covetousness, harmful thought and wrong view) are the basis, or cause, or driving force to harm others.

As we learn more about the practice of morality, and its three types or divisions, then we might ask questions about the definition of morality as the thought of abandoning harm towards others. Of the three types of morality, neither the Morality Of Gathering Virtuous Dharma, [nor the Morality Of Working For The Sake Of Other Beings] is implied by the definition of morality [in terms of abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions]. So that definition of morality is principally based upon the first type of morality which is the Morality Of Not Harming Other Beings or the vow of not committing any negative actions. Furthermore the reason why this definition is based upon the first division of morality is that the first type of morality is the main one, which

serves as the basis for the other two types of morality.

## 422.331.121 First Type of Morality: Refraining From Negative Actions

The topic of morality mainly focuses upon the first type of morality, the Morality Of Refraining From Negative Or Harmful Actions. Therefore, what we need to study is the negative harmful actions which we should abandon in our practice of morality. This question then raises the morality practices which relate to the different types of vows that we have taken, such as Individual Liberation<sup>1</sup> vows or Bodhisattva vows.

Generally it is said that the negative or harmful actions which we must abandon are the ten non-virtuous actions, and that this is the main practice of morality. We have to understand that if we abandon these ten non-virtuous actions we are abandoning all harmful negative actions.

Here we must also be clear in our mind that practising the morality of abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions is not a lesser practice, just because it is presented in the teachings on small stages of the path in the lam rim. Even though this teaching is presented in the small scope of the path it is something which spiritual practitioners of all three stages of the path must follow. The only difference between practitioners of each of these three scopes in the way they practise [abandoning] each of these ten non-virtuous actions, is that their motivation differs; in the lower scope the motivation is to prevent lower rebirth; in the middle scope the practice of morality is to achieve personal liberation from cyclic existence; and for a spiritual person of great scope the practice of the morality of abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions is motivated bodhicitta, or the wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

It is important to understand generally, the importance of the practice of morality in one's spiritual path, and how this practice of morality comes down to abandoning the ten non-virtuous acts. It is important to see this as the primary practice of morality. This can benefit us, because there is no [great] difficulty in understanding and learning this, as it is not a practice which is beyond our capabilities. Some practitioners take no notice of those practices which they know, and which they can do, and which are so beneficial, relevant and essential to their spiritual growth. Rather they apply themselves to practices which, let alone practising, they cannot even comprehend!

<sup>1</sup> Editor: the vows of Individual Liberation are also known as the Pratimoksha vows

If we refer to the first type of morality as a form of vow, then there are three main types of vows.

1. Individual Liberation Vows
2. Bodhisattva Vows
3. Tantric Vows

Regarding the Individual Liberation vows, it is said in Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, "Without possessing any one of the seven types of Individual Liberation vow one does not have the merit to take Bodhisattva vows". However, in the commentary the meaning of this is not viewed as literally as this verse might suggest. Rather the implication is that anyone who possesses any of the seven vows of Individual Liberation has the most suitable form of life basis to possess the Bodhisattva vows. It is not saying that possessing Bodhisattva vows is subject to the possession of any [or all] of the vows of Individual Liberation. Furthermore, it is also said that to possess Tantric vows, the most suitable form of life is the celibate life.

For those people who possess any of these three types of vows, protecting their vows means refraining from the negative actions which they [have vowed to] abandon. This is the meaning of protecting the vows. In everyday life this means always staying mindful and conscientious about safeguarding those vows, and checking as to whether one's actions concur with or contradict one's vows. Whereas for those who do not possess any of the Individual Liberation, Bodhisattva or Tantric vows, the practice of morality means abandoning the ten non-virtuous acts.

We should try to emulate the way in which the early Kadampa masters diligently observed the practice of moral ethics. Whenever they committed a non-virtuous action they gathered a black pebble, and for every virtuous action they collected a white pebble. At the end of the day they reviewed their day by counting whether they had more black or white pebbles.

In daily life we are trying to abandon negative actions by applying mindfulness and alertness. Just as the Kadampas collected black and white pebbles, at the end of the day we should also review our actions. If we have created positive actions we should rejoice and feel positive, which is a further cause to multiply the virtuous merit we gathered from that action. Also we should pray to accumulate even more virtuous actions.

It is also important that we do not forget about all the negative actions we have created. We should feel bad, and regret them and even more importantly resolve not to repeat that same action again. To purify any negative action, we apply the four means of purification<sup>2</sup>. If we are prone to any particular negative action, or desirous attachment, or any other strong and forceful delusion within us, we should make a special effort to counteract that delusion, by using whatever meditation we can learn.

As we mentioned earlier in the discussion, the meaning of morality is a sense of restraint from harmful actions. It is not just preventing physically harmful actions such as killing other beings. Of course this is a positive thing to

do, however developing the practice of morality means not just developing the actions of non-harmfulness, but also developing, increasing and strengthening the thought of non-harmfulness. It is said that progress in the practice of morality comes mostly from developing the thought of restraint. By generating thoughts of restraining from killing more sentient beings, then we accumulate even more merit. So if one cultivates the thought of not killing all sentient beings, this accumulates merit towards all sentient beings, and in an instant we can accumulate enormous merit. Likewise if we do not restrain our thoughts, then in an instant we can generate enormous negativities.

#### **422.331.122 Second Type of Morality: The Morality of Gathering Virtuous Dharma**

It is said that the Morality Of Gathering Virtuous Dharma includes basically all the virtuous actions we perform with the bodhicitta motivation. This includes the virtuous actions we perform by doing prostrations, making offerings, listening to, contemplating or meditating on the meaning of Dharma, any virtuous effort we make with our actions of body, speech and mind, or any of the Six Perfections which serve as a cause to ripen our own mind, or the minds of other beings. These are all the Morality Of Gathering Virtuous Dharma.

#### **422.331.123 Third Type of Morality: The Morality of Benefiting Others**

In fact all the deeds of the buddhas and bodhisattvas can be included in all three types of morality. Of the three, the first two (the Morality of Refraining from Non-Virtuous Action and the Morality of Gathering Virtuous Dharma) fulfil the purpose of the bodhisattvas.

The Morality of Benefiting Others fulfils the welfare of all other beings, because all the bodhisattvas' deeds are fulfilling their own purpose, and fulfilling the purpose of other beings.

This [type of morality] is obviously understood by the purpose of the bodhisattvas' deeds, which is to benefit others. There are eleven different ways in which a bodhisattva can benefit others. These are listed in the lam rim text. We can list those eleven next week, but if you have a commentary you can refer to it to understand the meaning for yourself.

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<sup>2</sup> Editor: The four means of purification (also known as the four forces of purification are: Base, Regret, Antidote and Resolve

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15 June 1999

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As you did before when you cultivated the bodhicitta motivation, try to reinforce your thought of benefiting as many beings as possible.

If we could always maintain a good heart within us in our daily life, then we would find more happiness, as well as contributing to the happiness of all those people close to us, and to the society in which we live.

With a good heart, then automatically all our outward physical and verbal deeds are very beneficial and meaningful; we also become better human beings. It does not matter [who we are], or what we do, or where we live, maintaining a good heart and doing good deeds brings happiness to our life, and creates the same for other beings.

We can gradually cultivate this good heart, or the mental attitude of benefiting and showing care towards other beings, by training our mind. Cultivating this caring thought, or good heart, is very important - not just for the sake of others, but also to secure personal peace and happiness. With a good heart we can make the best use of our life, and whatever we achieve in this life. Without this good heart, our achievements such as wealth or education will bring harm and trouble to ourself and others, rather than bringing happiness and security.

The best way to produce this good heart is to firstly understand our own life situation, by knowing how precious our life is to us. We have this strong desire for personal happiness, and a strong aversion to personal suffering and dissatisfaction. Generally speaking we think that our own life is our most precious possession. It is only under the influence of intense delusion that we inflict harm upon ourselves, sometimes even intentionally. However this is very rare.

If we think about others, then we can understand that they too have the same strong thought of only wanting personal happiness, and not wanting personal suffering. Then we shall cherish them like we cherish ourselves, and seek happiness for them; we can then be sure that at least if we do not bring them happiness, then we shall not harm them.

You have just meditated on cultivating bodhicitta mind. In practice bodhicitta means cultivating the same sense of benefiting and caring for others that we have for ourselves. We can develop this in a step-by-step process. First train your mind to extend this caring thought to two or three selected beings, then gradually extend this thought to all other beings. It is said that when we do

this, all other beings become our supreme friends, and benefiting them becomes the supreme purpose of our life, and that gives us satisfaction.

Once we have cultivated this genuine thought of benefiting others, it will occur to us to actually benefit them in whatever way we can. Then our knowledge, our education, our material possessions, or whatever we achieve in life will serve all sentient beings in some way.

We have compared our own needs and the needs of others, and found them to be the same. Just as we want as much personal happiness as possible, and make an effort to achieve that happiness, and just as we do not want suffering, and try to avoid suffering, we must also make the same effort for other beings.

If we go further, we need to know why we need to love and benefit other beings. In the Buddhist teachings there is an extensive elaboration about the kindness of other beings towards us, like the teaching on recognising all other beings as one's mother. Even in worldly terms it is considered very polite to repay any kindness or support given by others. Once we have realised the kindness other beings have shown us, then naturally we shall wish to repay that kindness.

Another reason [for knowing why we need to cherish others] is that our survival and development, indeed our very existence in life, is dependent upon other beings. The reason we live safely is because of the compassion of other beings. The necessities of life - food, clothing, drink - all depend upon other beings. At the beginning of this life, if it were not for the love and affection we received from our parents we would not have survived - we were totally dependent on others. At the end of life we are also dependent upon the care and support of others. As well as at the beginning and end of our life, even in the middle of life, our survival depends upon others; it doesn't make any sense to think that we are independent of others. In this way we can develop a good heart, by understanding how much kindness we receive from other beings, and how throughout our life we are dependent on them.

What we are discussing here is creating the right internal conditions for finding more happiness, and hence the betterment of our life. However suitable external conditions are also essential for securing our happiness. For example, we cannot be happy if we do not have enough to eat, or adequate clothing, or a place to live, or good friends to accompany our inner conditions. Therefore we must think about suitable external

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conditions and these come down to one word – money! So we have to realise that we must work, and that work is important.

Happiness needs external conditions, but we must also make internal progress. We have to realise that external conditions alone will not fully satisfy our needs. By directing all our effort at external factors, we may make good external progress, but without the right internal conditions these external conditions can actually be a source of more suffering.

External conditions alone cannot satisfy all our needs, and will not automatically bring happiness. Therefore even at an early stage of life we should try to be aware that not only should we seek good external material conditions, but we should also seek good internal conditions. This means cultivating and developing positive states of mind.

We also have to realise that we have to do those spiritual practices which best suit our capacity. Not all practitioners can be like those who, in pursuit of their goal, renounce the world and are completely careless of their outer needs. For such practitioners, whatever they have is enough, and outer needs do not cause any problems. For most beings however, however, this is an extreme approach to practice. Therefore in general, it is better for us to do our spiritual practice, while at the same time not losing sight of our material needs. Both spiritual practice and material needs are necessary for us to secure happiness and freedom.

By cultivating the caring thought of benefiting others, then a lot of the unnecessary problems and suffering we experience can be removed. With this mind we can find more joy, and more reason to feel happiness and delight. If we have trained our mind with this thought of benefiting others then even the way we work in our job will be different. If we work with the same care that we would if we were working for our own business, then our job becomes an opportunity to fulfil the wish of another being - our employer.

With this mind we can prevent most of the unnecessary problems and suffering which we create in our own mind. For example, the problem of jealousy can arise and trouble us when we see another person wearing better clothing or having more money. For no other reason, as soon as we see someone making more money, or wearing better clothes we feel bad, and become mentally very disturbed. The only cause is our own jealous mind, and the only reason why there is this thought of jealousy is because we lack the thought of benefiting others, wishing for them to have happiness.

If we did have this thought of wishing others to have happiness then instead of feeling jealous, we would be delighted to see others enjoying such good circumstances. Of course it is not very hard to understand this [intellectually], but normally this is not the way we think. However if we do think like this, we can understand very clearly that when we see people we love and care for having success and happiness, then this brings us happiness as well. This is all because of having this kind-hearted attitude to other beings.

For the discussion evening, discuss the five main sub-headings under the subject of cultivating conventional bodhicitta mind. They are:

1. Meditation on Equalising and Exchanging Self with Other
2. Thinking about the disadvantages of Self-Cherishing in various ways
3. Thinking about the advantages of Cherishing Others in various ways
4. The Actual Method of Exchanging Self with Others
5. Depending upon this, the Meditation on Giving and Taking

These five headings are for discussion. The compulsory question for the test, taken from Maitreya's *Ornament for Clear Realisation*, regarding the meaning of bodhicitta, is:

"Bodhicitta is a mind which wishes to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all other beings."

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

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**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.



## TARA INSTITUTE

### STUDY GROUP DISCUSSION NIGHT - 22nd June 1999

#### **Seven Point thought transformation - Development of Conventional Bodhicitta**

##### **1. Equating Self with others**

What is the main contemplation that allows us the 'equalise' self with others?

What stages here are in common with the seven-fold cause and effect meditation?

Why is the development of loving kindness and compassion more intense using the method of exchanging self with others when compared with the seven fold cause and effect method?

##### **2. Contemplating the many faults resulting from self cherishing**

Define 'self cherishing'. How does it give rise to desire and hatred?

Discuss how self cherishing leads to problems in our relationships with others.

Why is self cherishing the source of all non-virtuous actions?

##### **3. Contemplating the many good qualities resulting from cherishing others.**

Define 'cherishing others'.

Discuss the benefits of cherishing others and how is this the source of all virtues?

##### **4. The actual contemplation on the interchange of self and others**

Discuss what is meant by 'exchanging' self with others.

##### **5. With these serving as the basis, the way to meditate on giving and taking**

What is the practice of 'taking' and what is its purpose? Give an example of a meditation on taking. Which exceptions should not be used as objects in the meditation of taking?

What is the practice of 'giving' and what is its purpose? What are the three objects of giving? Describe the technique of combining giving and taking with breathing meditation.

##### **6. Compulsory Question**

Discuss the meaning of the following verse from Maitreya's text 'Ornament of Clear Realisation'

“Bodhicitta is a mind which wishes to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of others.”

# TARA INSTITUTE

(Study Group Test)

29th June 1999

Answer any four from question no. 1-6

Question no. 7 is compulsory

Time allowed one hour

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1. What does it mean by 'equalising' in the context of the meditation of equalising & exchanging self with others"

2. Define self cherishing. How is this the source of all our problems?

3. Discuss the benefits of cherishing others. How is this the source of all happiness in the world?

4. How can we put the yoga of exchanging self with others into practice?

5. Explain the meditation of 'taking'.

6. Explain the meditation of 'giving'.

7. (COMPULSORY)

Discuss the meaning of the following verse from Maitreya's text "Ornament for clear realisation".

"Bodhicitta is a mind which wishes to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of others."