

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་སྟེ།



17 August 1999

As is always the case, we should begin with the bodhicitta motivation which is the genuine thought that "I shall achieve the state of buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings, and it is for this reason that I am listening to this lam rim teaching, and that I also resolve to put it into practice."

422.331.132 The Patience Of Voluntarily Accepting Suffering

We are up to the second type of patience which is the patience of voluntarily accepting suffering. This means accepting any harm or any problems that confront us.

This practice of patience is summarised in the text in this way:

You practise patience if, whilst remaining unattached to happiness, you regard suffering as being like an ornament¹ to adorn your body, and a medicine to heal yourself.¹

This clearly shows how a bodhisattva practises.

Benefits of Patience

We need to know both the reason why it is appropriate to accept suffering as well as the benefits of this practice. Firstly, what are the benefits? As spiritual practitioner, the benefit for us is that any suffering that we experience does not hinder our spiritual practice. Whether the suffering is physical or mental, through the practice of patience we shall be able to cope, and endure and accept that suffering, and it does not become a cause to discourage us from our practice.

The practice of patience helps us to be successful whatever our goal. Even if the goal is a very mundane success, it depends upon us being able to cope and handle any difficulty or obstacle that arises. In his text Lama Tsong Khapa quotes these lines from Shantideva's text, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

The causes of happiness are very scarce
Whereas the conditions for suffering are many.

Lama Tsong Khapa also quotes these lines from Shantideva's text, *The Synthesis of Instructions or Advice*, "If we are not able to take the suffering that we confront as a path, then these conditions can serve as a cause to increase hatred, and also be a cause to discourage one's meditation practice. So it prevents one from engaging in

virtuous practice." If we contemplate these quotations we can clearly see how, as Shantideva said, there are very few conditions for happiness. If you think about that, then you can understand the conditions for happiness are so scarce because even those conditions which we normally consider as conditions for happiness, can also become conditions for suffering and misery. When we think about our situation and the conditions in which we live, then we can see how many causes and conditions for suffering and unhappiness there are.

If we understand this very clearly then we can see that the most effective way of bringing happiness and overcoming suffering is to transform our own mind. If we know the technique of mind transformation, then though there are many causes of suffering they will not affect us. The practice of patience is one such method of mind-training, and through it we can lessen or even prevent the causes of suffering, despite their [vast] number.

Why Suffering Is Inevitable And Appropriate To Accept

Lama Tsong Khapa also said that while some of our suffering is caused by others, some is also caused by our previous-life karma. When there are immediate conditions present in addition to one's previous karma, the combination of these two causes us to experience some suffering, or form of problems from which there is no escape, at least in the immediate time frame. Some suffering will also be experienced depending on whether or not we practise Dharma, and this will be explained later.

As there is no way out it is essential to apply the patience of accepting this suffering situation. Why? Because if, for instance, the suffering is to do with physical illness or pain, and you do not accept it, then on top of your physical suffering you will mentally suffer because of your physical suffering. Therefore when suffering is not accepted there is additional suffering, because of the lack of acceptance.

Conversely, if you have learned to accept suffering, then by the virtue of this practice of acceptance there is no additional mental suffering on top of your physical suffering.

It is important to try, as much as possible, to train the mind in being able to accept any suffering and any undesirable or unwanted things that happen in our life. There may not be any specific problem to worry about

¹ *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, page 639 reads, "Not only should you be unattached to happiness, but you should regard suffering as a form of adornment and use it as a medicine"

right now, but it is quite possible, indeed inevitable, that some day undesirable or unwanted things will happen to us.

We might think that we have received a wealth of spiritual teachings, and feel that we know how to apply the practices to various situations. However if we have not trained ourselves well in the practice of patience, then when we actually confront these sudden, unexpected, unwanted situations, then we can easily completely lose all hope and allow ourselves to be completely shocked and disturbed by that situation.

By putting the teaching on patience into practice, and trying to broaden our knowledge and our view, then somehow that situation becomes acceptable, rather than horrible or very shocking, and we understand that it is something that was probably inevitable anyway, and is part of life. If we do that, then even if the situation is such that we have to physically experience a lot of suffering and pain, or some material loss, we can mentally cope with it, and not be continually worrying and over-concerned about it.

The cause of what we call mental suffering and problems is worrying too much, and it is this continual over-concern which brings us our mental pain and misery. If we think more realistically then we do not waste our energy with worry. Most importantly, try to understand how that worry or mental suffering is [merely] adding further causes of suffering on top of the existing suffering, it is [certainly] not solving or reducing the problem. Try to understand that worry is not going to bring mental happiness, nor will it decrease the problems in one's life. If worrying about the problems which existed in our life was the solution, then we should have solved all our problems by now!

It is especially important to realise that now is the moment which provides the ideal opportunity to learn about, and to familiarise ourselves with this practice of patience. Unless we have already familiarised ourselves with this practice, it is extremely difficult to do anything when undesirable things actually happen to us.

To inspire us to practise this patience of accepting suffering it is good to remind ourselves of what Shantideva said in his text, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

If there is something that can be changed then why should we worry about it, for it can be changed,
If something cannot be changed then why should one worry because it cannot be changed?

We have to understand that it is in fact mainly the way we view a situation that determines what we experience. If our view is very negative, then with that view even a very minor unfavourable or undesirable situation can become a very major cause for unhappiness. It is important to understand how the practice of Dharma is so relevant to our daily life, and to understand how, just by applying this practice of voluntarily accepting suffering, we can bring a great deal of happiness in our life, and solve or [even] eliminate a great deal of the suffering in our life. If we understand the benefit of the Dharma well then we can see that it is indeed priceless,

and that it can be the best refuge and protector in our life.

Transforming Suffering

The practice of patience should be applied to the various circumstances in which we experience physical suffering, or difficulty in perceiving spiritual practice, or in situations where we receive harm from our enemies, or it is said, even in dreams. Whenever we experience anything undesirable or receive any harm, we should try to apply the practice of patience in such a way that integrates with Thought Transformation and recognise that it is all an outcome of one's own previous karma.

Try to see that it is worth accepting this result now, and see it as a fortunate result in the sense that the result of one's karma can be even worse. Through applying Thought Transformation one can generate the feeling of joy and delight instead of seeing this as a bad event and hating either it or the other person. Rather try to see it as the best thing that has happened in your life, and celebrate it as if you had received the death sentence, but you have been reprieved and instead sentenced to have your hand amputated. Try to understand that this situation is in lieu of falling into lower rebirth, and that it is positive in the sense that it is a good opportunity to learn about suffering, not only your own, but that of other beings. So through this you cultivate compassion towards other beings. Through applying the Thought Transformation teachings, and the practice of patience, we can see how a bad event in our life can be transformed into a positive one.

Here it is also suitable to contemplate the benefits of suffering.

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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24 August 1999

Generate the bodhicitta motivation by thinking "I shall achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings, and to achieve that state of buddhahood I shall listen to these lam rim teachings, and put them into practice in order to fully calm my mind."

The Patience Of Voluntarily Accepting Suffering (cont)

We are continuing with the teaching on the patience of voluntarily accepting suffering. To practise this patience we need to contemplate and understand both suffering, and the benefit of contemplating and understanding suffering.

Concerning the contemplation of the benefit of suffering, Shantideva's text, *A Guide To The Bodhisattva's Way Of Life* says that by understanding suffering one is inspired to seek the state of liberation. In other words, without recognising suffering it is not possible to have a genuine wish to be released from suffering, and therefore it is not possible to generate renunciation, which is the definite thought of seeking liberation.

Benefits or Qualities of Suffering

1. As stated above, the first benefit or quality of suffering is that it is a cause to generate the thought of seeking liberation.
2. The second quality is that it is a cause to eradicate, or diminish pride. For instance, as soon as suffering is inflicted upon a person whose mind is inflated with a great pride, that pride is diminished.
3. The next benefit of suffering is that suffering can be a cause for us to refrain from negative actions. Generally speaking, all beings have the natural instinct of wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. However they lack the knowledge as to what brings happiness and what brings suffering, and so their actions are not always the right actions. As a result, even if they do not wish for suffering that is what they experience, while the happiness that they desire eludes them. Our thought of not wanting suffering is much stronger when we are actually experiencing suffering, or when we know what it is like to experience it.

Under such circumstances we think more about what causes suffering, and if we have a knowledge of Dharma, then we realise that suffering is the result of our own negative actions, and so we develop a sense of refraining from negative actions. This is because we not only hate suffering, but also its causes. Therefore, it is said that understanding or recognising suffering leads one to refrain from creating the causes

of suffering.

4. Another benefit or quality of suffering is that it encourages us to follow virtuous practice. Why? Because it is when we are afflicted with suffering that our desire for happiness is even stronger and more obvious. Therefore the circumstance of suffering can compel us to find about the causes of happiness, because we know that the happiness that we so strongly desire (and of which we are now deprived) is dependent upon its causes. If we view the circumstances of suffering in this different way, then we can see how suffering can be viewed as beneficial, rather than our usual view of it as harmful to us. From the positive perspective, the experience and understanding of suffering can inspire us to engage in virtuous practices.
5. The fifth quality of suffering is that it can be a cause to generate compassion for those who, like ourselves, are undergoing suffering as they wander about in cyclic existence. Because of personal experience and an understanding of suffering, we have a better understanding of the suffering of other beings, and so have more feeling of compassion and sympathy for them.

Thinking about these *qualities of suffering* enables us to practise this patience of accepting suffering. This has the benefit of overcoming or diminishing the amount of suffering we experience, and as we discussed in the last teaching, it can also help us to at least ensure that we do not add to our existing suffering. For instance, without this patience of accepting suffering, then if we are inflicted with some physical pain or problems, we might mentally create more suffering to add to what we already endure.

The Importance of Contentment

This practice of accepting suffering is also very relevant and indeed essential for ordained practitioners to be able sustain their life of moral purity. For ordained people it is important to try to accept hardship in terms of shelter, food, clothing and so forth, with the understanding that accepting this hardship is very worthwhile, because it enables them to increase their practice of virtue and pure morality in the life that they have chosen. It is said that ordained individuals should learn to live a very contented life, bound by the four natures of Arya beings - contentment with very simple shelter, clothing and food, and taking delight in the practice of meditation and abandoning negativities. Applying this practice of patience also helps to develop this sense of contentment.

The text refers to practising by having less desire and more contentment. To do this it is important, first of all, to know how this practice can help to sustain more mental peace and happiness. In terms of pursuing spiritual practice, without some sense of contentment, we never stop looking for more and better things. Without contentment our life, at least from the spiritual point of view, can be easily rendered meaningless, because then we shall always be thinking about and constantly trying to increase our wealth, without achieving any satisfaction in our life. There is benefit if we practise having less desire, achieving some contentment, and trying to understand how this practice is of benefit.

What does this practice of less desire and more contentment mean? As we have learnt in the past, having contentment and less desire does not necessarily mean that we should materially possess less, or that we have to lead a very poor life. What it does mean is to be happy with whatever we possess.

With reference to living our life skilfully there is a saying that we have to know how to eat and drink, which means that we have to be adaptable to our living conditions. If we are wealthy then in terms of budgeting we can afford to spend more. If there are times when we do not have much wealth, then we have to be able to adapt to those reduced living conditions.

There are some people who have no control of their spending regardless of how much (or how little) they are earning, or how much money they have. When they have a reduced income, they still tend to lead the same life as when they were wealthy; they find it very hard to break their old spending habits. So in a sense they are not able to adjust to living in a different way from that which they led in the past. What we are saying here is that when we talk of contentment we have to have this skill of knowing how we should live when we are wealthy, and also of knowing how to live when we do not possess much wealth.

We are also talking about mind training, and about how the way we feel about our possessions is in fact dependent on our mind. Our mind can be trained and changed to different ways of thinking, and there are certain ways of thinking and certain views which we must change, otherwise we shall suffer as a result of them. From his own experience Geshe-la says that years ago he always used to feel more comfortable just wearing very simple robes. In fact, he used to feel embarrassed when he had to wear new robes. When you think about it, it was a way of thinking, a particular view that meant he used to feel happier and more relaxed in older clothes when he was out with the other people, even if they were all dressed in new clothes. Unfortunately, Geshe-la says, he has a bit of difficulty practising that contentment here because it often happens that if he goes out in a pair of old shoes, someone brings him a new pair!

We should also understand how it is the same view that makes us feel very bad about ourselves if, when we go out to some function, our clothes are not really up to the standard of all other people, or not as good in some way. Our feelings are due to our mind, which we can change and overcome by applying mind training.

Basically it is important for each person to know the type

of life they want to live. You always have to ask yourself what you value in life. Is it material possessions, or some inner wealth in terms of greater peace, satisfaction and happiness? If you had a choice between being externally affluent and materially well off but inwardly very miserable, and full of problems, or being outwardly poor, but inwardly very happy, with peace and stability, which of these would you choose? When we think seriously and deeply about the kind of life we want to live, we realise that we want to live a life of satisfaction and happiness. Therefore we have to realise that one of the most important things is a healthy body, maintaining a very good frame of mind which shows love and compassion towards others and living a life which as much as possible is helpful and kind towards others.

If we become very good with this practice of having less desire and more contentment then we shall find that we have fewer unfulfilled desires and thoughts, or even none; [because we desire less] then not only mentally, but also materially we shall never be short of any desired objects. There are no stories of early masters who practised having less desire and more contentment living a life with unfulfilled desires, or short of any desired objects.

Geshe Doga says there are a lot of people here in Australia and other developed western countries who suffer because of their lack of knowledge of the skill of eating and drinking. Geshe-la has been asked what he means by this. He says isn't it true that there are many people who rely on government benefits for their livelihood? Isn't it true that the government gives them the money say once every four weeks and then they use all that money in the very first week? As soon as they have got the money in hand they go to the hotel or gamble and spend it all, so for the next three weeks they have no money. There are so many people who, because they do not know how to manage their money, have their money managed for them by some other organisation or person. It cannot go directly to them because even though they are mature people, with money they are like children.

What we really mean is that in this developed country no one would face this problem of lacking food or clothing if we all had the skill of eating and drinking and so on. Geshe-la says he knows that even with a dollar or two you can buy very good long lasting clothes. The lack of basic conditions here is caused by the lack of money management.

Of course you have all observed how people can acquire great material wealth and then lose it all. There are many such examples. Geshe-la says, in the past he has met many people who have had great wealth and much property and so on, and then a few years later they have lost everything through bankruptcy. These examples can also be used to show the uncertainty of relying on material possessions.

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ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལཱ་བཅུངས།



31 August 1999

Try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation thinking "I shall achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings, and it is for this purpose that I am listening to this lam rim teaching, and that I shall also put this teaching into practice.

The Patience Of Voluntarily Accepting Suffering (cont)

We have studied the patience of voluntarily accepting suffering, and how that patience can help us whenever we confront any problem or any suffering situation, so that the problem or suffering situation is no longer a cause to discourage us, making us feel that everything is hopeless. With patience we are still able to continue to make progress along the path.

Types Of Suffering To Be Endured

In addition to what we have already studied, we can also list here the various types of sufferings that should be endured with this patience of accepting suffering.

1. Enduring the suffering or pain which we go through when we are being abused or disparaged by other people. Without the patience of accepting it this harm can be very painful and hurtful form of suffering, which can affect our way of thinking, our self-esteem and so on.
2. Enduring the suffering or hardship that we face in our spiritual practice, specifically in meditation. For instance there is the hardship of sitting in the correct meditation posture with a straight back. We need to have the patience of accepting such hardship so that we do not allow these difficulties to divert us from practising meditation.
3. Enduring the hardship we face in other practices such as making offerings or performing prostrations and so on. Needless to say, if we lack patience we shall neither continue nor succeed with these practices.
4. Enduring suffering because of the lack of adequate food, clothing and also the lack of a good physical appearance. Here we also have to apply patience so that these things are neither a hindrance to our practice nor a cause of problems for us. We have to learn how to be contented with a simple livelihood and way of living.
5. There is also mention of enduring the suffering or hardship one has to face in benefiting and serving other beings.
6. Enduring the difficulties of sustaining our perseverance in practising virtue. For instance, we even have to put up with harm that we receive from others, such as threats to our life.

As Shantideva said, there is nothing which will not become easy if we become familiar with it. So the most effective way

of developing the patience of accepting all forms and degrees of suffering is that we first should try to train ourself in accepting smaller amounts of suffering or hardship or difficulty. This becomes an armour which we gradually strengthen by gradually increasing the degree of suffering. Then we shall gradually be able to endure a greater amount of suffering, and even enduring the greater amount becomes very easy. As Shantideva said, how much we can cope with all depends upon our degree of familiarisation with it.

422.331.133 The Patience Of Definitely Thinking About Dharma

The third type of patience is the patience of definitely thinking about Dharma. To understand this patience we first need to recognise the Dharma about which we should be thinking.

Aspects of Dharma

1. Dharma as an object of pure faith, which refers to the qualities of three objects of refuge or the Three Jewels.
2. Dharma as an object to be realised or actualised, which refers to the two types of selflessness or suchnesses.
3. Dharma as an object of longing, which refers to the powerful empowering qualities of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, which are the six perfections and the attainment of the miraculous powers and so on.
4. Dharma as an object to be accepted and to be rejected, which refers to the teachings on positive and negative karma, and the respective results of each.
5. Dharma as an object of meditation which refers to the ultimate spiritual goal of complete enlightenment, as well as the method, which is the skilful means and wisdom to reach that complete enlightenment. In other words we can talk of the path of both the result and the method which leads to that complete enlightenment in terms of the three-fold training.
6. Having contemplated all of the above, the patience of definitely thinking of the Dharma also includes trying to gain a definite understanding and a firm conviction in the Dharma such that there is no element of doubt in your mind, and you do not see any contradictions in your understanding of the Dharma. This practice of patience means trying to maintain and sustain the conviction which you have gained in the Dharma.
7. Dharma as an object to study and to contemplate, which refers to all the teachings of the Buddha. You practise this patience by engaging in the study and practice of the teaching of the Buddha.
8. It is said that even trying to remember the words in the teachings on the Dharma is also an example of this

patience of definitely thinking of Dharma.

Through learning the meaning of the Dharma and so trying to gain the firm conviction in the teachings, not only do you gain knowledge, but you also make an effort to try to maintain and safeguard your knowledge at all times.

When To Apply The Three Types Of Patience

In terms of practising the three types of patience, it is said that practising the first type of patience, the patience of being indifferent to harm which you receive from others, is the type of patience which is appropriate to specific circumstances. Whereas practising the other two types of patience is not dependent upon any such specific circumstance.

For instance, in order to listen and concentrate single-pointedly, you need to practise these two types of patience when you are receiving teachings from the lamas which last for many hours.

This completes the Perfection of Patience.

422.221.14 The Perfection Of Joyous Effort

Next is the Fourth Perfection of Joyous Effort. It is said that joyful effort is taking joy and delight in virtuous actions. The sign that there is joyful effort in our actions is when we engage in virtuous practice taking delight in that practice.

The main benefit of cultivating joyful effort is achieving success in our life and in our spiritual practice. It is very obvious that all our effort and enthusiasm, and even our patience and tolerance comes from having a genuine interest and delight in whatever tasks we are undertaking.

Of course it is very important to know that it is not just beginning a task that is important, but it is the completion of the task which is the most important part of the action. We have all begun a spiritual practice and it is very important that we gain some benefit from our practice and that we see the end result. Completing our practice is dependent upon sustaining our interest, and it is joyful effort which helps to provide that sustenance. It is of no benefit to us if we discontinue our spiritual practice in the middle of our life, and do not continue with it to the end of our life.

In order to maintain this genuine interest and joyful effort in the spiritual practice we should, as much as possible, try to put a high value on our practice both now and in the future. By value we mean benefiting oneself, benefiting other people and benefiting society.

Try to see that before we talk of the benefit of spiritual practice, we have to be very clear about what that spiritual practice means to us. As we have heard over and over again, spiritual practice is essentially cultivating a positive state of mind such as a good heart. Try to see that when we talk of the importance of maintaining our spiritual practice over an entire lifetime, and that when we talk of Dharma as being beneficial to oneself and to others, both now and in the future, then this means cultivating a good frame of mind within ourselves.

What cultivating joyful effort means is taking great delight in personally cultivating and sustaining this very positive state of mind at all times, as well as diminishing our negative aspects. The more we develop an understanding of how much we gain from practising this Dharma of cultivating positive states of mind, then naturally the more joyful effort we shall make with the Dharma; greater joyful effort then guarantees the continuity of our practice; and with continuity in our practice there will be a completion of

our practice.

We need to cultivate joyful effort in addition to knowing about the benefits of practising Dharma, which as we said is knowing the benefits for one personally, for one's life and in terms of benefiting others. We need to practise Dharma because cultivating a positive frame of mind is indispensable to finding happiness even in a mundane sense. Without that positive frame of mind we cannot even find worldly happiness, let alone spiritual progress.

Dharma practice must be integrated into our daily life. It is wrong to think that we can practise outside of our normal life style, or apart from where we live, or at special times. We must apply the practice which gives us the greatest benefit, peace and happiness in the world in which we live, and which also brings about harmony in our relationship with those with whom we share our life. Therefore, the best practice is to cultivate positive states of mind within us like the good heart.

In addition it is also important to make sure that you are very relaxed about your efforts, and that you are not over-zealous. If we begin a task over-zealously it is very likely that we shall soon become exhausted, which can affect our effort. We should not try to push ourselves onto greater efforts, nor should we become too lazy; we should make the right amount of effort consistently, depending upon our own individual capabilities and resources.

How do we know if we are making any progress in Dharma? Has it resulted in any benefits to our life or not? [These are normal questions], and if we do not see any gain, then we begin to think that it is of no use, and that there is no point in practising Dharma. Here we have to consider that Dharma refers to the qualities to be cultivated within our mind, and that the result of Dharma is positive feelings and a positive way of viewing things. The question of whether or not we are gaining any benefit of Dharma refers to whether we have developed more positive feelings and qualities inwardly.

Let us say you have been practising and following the Dharma for the last five years, and you now want to assess your practice. The way to do that is to compare your feelings and mental attitude over the past five years, with the previous five years when you didn't follow Dharma. It is very obvious that whether or not we gain benefit from, or make any progress in Dharma, depends mainly upon how effectively we practise. Practising Dharma so that it has an impact means always completely relating our practice to our mind.

We are so used to judging things externally, and to looking for tangible benefits that we can see or feel. Dharma is different because we have to focus within us and not judge by external factors. The aim of Dharma is not to exhibit supernatural powers or miracles, and we should not expect to see a physical result from our spiritual Dharma practice.

If, say, you have taken the Kalachakra initiation, you may wonder about the benefit you have gained. That benefit is not necessarily something that can be recognised by others just by looking at you. Yet, Geshe-la says, many people who have taken the initiation say that they have experienced very positive feelings as a result. So you have to talk about the benefit of Dharma in terms of some positive feeling that you experience within your mind. Why we emphasise this is because it tells us that we have to practise within our mind, because our practice relates to our mind.

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༄༅ ལམ་རིམ་རྣམ་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



7 September 1999

Set the bodhicitta motivation by generating the thought "I shall attain the state of buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings, and in order to achieve that state of buddhahood I shall listen to the teachings and put them into practice". We have to make sure there is no selfish interest in our motivation for generating this bodhicitta mind.

The Perfection Of Joyful Effort (cont)

We are currently discussing the perfection of joyful effort, which is defined as the state of mind which takes delight in undertaking virtuous actions. It is said that in order to generate such joyful effort we need to gain an understanding its benefits, as well as the disadvantages of not generating this joyful effort.

Benefits Of Joyful Effort

1. In his text, *An Ornament to the Sutras*, Maitreya Buddha says "Joyful effort is the supreme of all the collections of virtues, because by depending upon it you will achieve your spiritual attainments." So a benefit of joyful effort is achieving a set goal.
2. Obviously very mundane goals also depend upon making an effort: without effort we cannot even complete ordinary tasks. Therefore to complete our spiritual journey, and to achieve all the spiritual realisations and attainments joyful effort is a most important cause.
3. Furthermore, the benefit of making a joyful effort includes achieving spiritual feats or attainments like siddhis, and also attaining the state of happiness within cyclic existence, and also beyond this cyclic existence, which is nirvana.
4. By depending upon joyful effort we can free ourselves from extreme views such as the view of transitory collections.
5. By depending on joyful effort we can also achieve the supreme state of enlightenment, or buddhahood. Therefore it is said that joyful effort is the supreme virtue.
6. In the text *Supplement to the Middle Way*, Chandrakirti says that all the excellent qualities follow from joyful effort. This means that you have to make an effort if you want to possess any excellent, admirable qualities. On the other hand without making an effort we shall not achieve any [special] quality at all, because without an effort at the beginning we shall not even bother to perceive such [special] qualities. If we begin but do not maintain our effort in the middle, or if we are not consistent with our effort,

then we shall not see the end result, or goal of our actions.

The more we understand the benefit and importance of generating joyful effort in our spiritual practice, the more we shall be motivated to actually do something with respect to our spiritual practice.

As we discussed in earlier teachings one of the things we have to remember in terms of developing this joyful effort, is that we cannot expect to generate a great deal of joyful effort instantly. Rather it is something we have to develop gradually, bit by bit. At first we have to try to make the amount of effort that suits our own mental capabilities and resources, trying to make sure that we are consistent with that effort so that we become used to that effort. Then once we are used the amount of effort with which we started, we can slowly add to it and build up that effort over time.

It is important not to force oneself to do too much in spiritual practice because achieving spiritual goals takes time. In spiritual practice the goal is to develop particular qualities within our mind, and such mental development does not happen instantly, quickly or rapidly. Rather, it is something which can only happen through making gradual progress. Even the development of material technology takes time. For instance it took generations for the aeroplane to be invented, as men progressed through all the stages necessary [to create the aeroplanes we know today].

Whether or not we are going to achieve our goal and make any progress in our spiritual practice, depends upon whether or not we are making a genuine effort in our practice. If we compare our practice now with our practice in previous years, we can judge whether we are making more or less effort this year. Making more effort means that we are in fact making more progress. If we are not making the same effort as in the past, then that is an indication that we are not going anywhere with our spiritual practice.

Whether it is spiritual or worldly activities, success largely depends upon making an effort, which in turn depends upon our motivation and determination. In other words the main cause of success is our own motivation and the power of our mental determination. It is not as if the [mere] act of cherishing or desiring is enough to accomplish what we desire. For success, a wish to achieve has to be accompanied by a very strong intention to achieve. When we have joyful effort then naturally there is very forceful determination in our mind, and there is no room for any laziness to hinder our

activities.

In a way joyful effort is the antidote to laziness. If as a student we fall into laziness in our study, then we cannot finish our course [and so we fail to achieve our goal]. We can talk of different forms of laziness. In the context of lazy students, it is said that it is laziness if you desire to do any other activity rather than your studies, because this serves as a hindrance to study.

So it is very obvious that to anything of benefit to us in this life or future lives, we have to physically and mentally depend upon the efforts of our three doors of body, speech and mind. However, we have to understand that making an effort in our mind is the most important element because our aspiration has to come from the mind. Only then can we make some physical effort.

As we said earlier we need to understand the importance of both making an effort, and the way we make that effort. We are making an effort to develop qualities within our mind. This means that we have to understand our mind well by observing it, and by trying to recognise all the faults that we need to remove. In fact the faults that we see within our mind are our own faults too. Of course when we make an effort with our practice, our primary focus is on our mind, and on trying to understand what we can do within our mind in order to achieve all that we wish, and to overcome all that we do not want.

Of course we also need to examine our mind when we want to undertake some physical or verbal action. In other words, we cannot afford to just follow the instincts in our mind. If we can, we have to examine the intentions of our mind, to see whether it is something driving us to do positive, virtuous actions, or whether it is driving us to do non-virtuous, negative actions. If we do not examine our mind before putting our intention into practice, then we may be driven to perform some negative action. Of course if we accumulate negative actions, they leave some negative seeds in our mind which then serve as a cause of some future problems and suffering.

We cannot just act out of a strong desire, or even a sense of delight in our mind, because we can also take a delight in negative actions. Joyful effort is a state of mind which takes delight in **virtuous** actions, not just a state of mind which takes delight in doing things. This means that all delightful thought is not necessarily positive or beneficial. So if we feel some sense of joy, or happiness, or pleasure within ourselves, it is important to check, because we cannot assume that what we are experiencing is something very beneficial or positive. Sometimes we can have that sense of joy or delight when we are pondering about doing all sorts of negative actions.

To add to the benefit of joyful effort and the destruction of laziness we also need to consider what the great Lama Tsong Khapa said "One who is overpowered by laziness has no chance of finding happiness in the immediate or the long run."

422.331.141 The Laziness Of Procrastination

The opposite of joyful effort is laziness. The first type of laziness is Procrastination. This is the form of laziness which causes one to lose interest in undertaking any practice. It is also a cause to delay practising. In other words, when you have this form of laziness you never actually undertake your practice, always thinking that I shall do it tomorrow, or the next day. Due to the laziness of procrastination you never actually undertake your practice. In order to overcome this type of laziness, the most effective meditations are on death and impermanence, and on the precious human life and its rarity.

When we talk of meditating on death and impermanence it has to have some deep affect on us, rather than being limited to a theoretical understanding about the topic of death and so on. A theoretical understanding is not going to help to remove this particular form of laziness. On the other hand if you have gained a deep experience on the subject of death and impermanence, then you know that you cannot postpone spiritual practice. You know that every moment is valuable, and you understand that the only meaningful thing to do is the Dharma, or spiritual practice. Then there is no room for any laziness to hinder spiritual practice.

Meditating on the rarity of the precious human rebirth is also very effective in impelling one to undertake spiritual practice. We have already covered this topic in the past so we shall not go over it again. However if we think about this precious human body like Shantideva did, we see that in addition to the various qualities which make this human life precious, we give so much to this body throughout our whole life: how much food goes to our body, and how much clothing acquired at such effort goes to the body. As Shantideva says, when we consider how much we sacrifice to this body, then don't we have to take some advantage and meaning out of this body? Somewhere we have to make good use of this body. Then you think 'What is the meaning of this life?', and when you understand the meaning of life, as well as all the other preciousness of this human life and so on, then naturally you can generate a strong motivation to undertake spiritual practice.

According to Geshe-la, next week will be Discussion night. The compulsory question for the next study group test will be on differentiating the three objects of refuge in terms of the stages of the path for the person of great, medium and small scopes.

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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STUDY GROUP DISCUSSION NIGHT - 14 September 1999

The Six Perfections

1. With regard to the practice of patience, what are the benefits of voluntarily enduring suffering?
2. If one is suffering from some physical illness or pain, how can one's mental attitude to that suffering effect one's experience of it?
3. Why is suffering inevitable and why is it appropriate to accept suffering?
4. Why is it that practising the patience of voluntarily accepting suffering can be a cause for us to refrain from negative actions and an inspiration to engage in virtuous practices?
5. It is said that practicing having less desire and achieving some contentment can be very beneficial to sustaining more happiness and peace in one's mind. What does this mean?
6. What is the meaning of this quote from Shantideva:
`There is nothing that does not become easier with familiarity`?
7. What is the Patience of Definitely Thinking about Dharma?
8. What is Joyful Effort and what are the benefits of the perfection of Joyful Effort?
9. Why is Joyful Effort 'supreme in all collections of virtue'?
10. How do we develop Joyful Effort and what analogy can be applied to the development of Joyful Effort?
11. What is the opposite of Joyful Effort and what meditation should we engage in to develop Joyful Effort?
12. **Compulsory Question**
Differentiate the three objects of refuge with the three stages of the path.

YOU ARE IN GROUP C

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(Study Group Test)

21 September 1999

Answer any four from question no. 1-6

Question no.7 is compulsory

Time allowed one hour

1. What are the benefits of voluntarily enduring suffering?
2. How can one find more peace and happiness through the practice of achieving contentment and desiring less?
3. What is the meaning of the following quote by Shantideva? "There is nothing that does not become easier through the force of familiarity."
4. What is the patience of definitely thinking about Dharma?
5. What does it mean by joyful effort? Why is it called 'supreme in all collections of virtue'.
6. What meditation should we engage in to develop joyful effort?
7. (Compulsory)

Differentiate the three Objects of Ruffige with the three stages of the path.