

# 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།



23 July 1996

Generate the altruistic mind of bodhicitta.

## The Mind in the Moments near to Death

In the last teaching we began a discussion on the type of mind which we should have in the moments before death.

The mind which occurs at the time of death is the mind which will be nourished by the two mental factors of craving and grasping, and whether it is virtuous, non-virtuous or a neutral state of mind depends upon the type of mental factor which influence that mind.

This mind near the time of death will have a great influence on the type of rebirth which we shall take, so this time when we are close to death is a very crucial moment of life. In the last moments of this life, it becomes evident that all the possessions in which we placed all our hope and trust have to be left behind. From this angle, that last moment before death is the most tragic and worst thing which can happen to us in this life. Yet it is also a very important moment as it determines our future destiny. The best we can hope is that we face that last moment with delight, and if not with delight then at least with no fear or regret in our mind.

In terms of their experiences, this moment can also differentiate between one who practises dharma and one who does not. To a large extent we can control our experience if we remind ourselves of our practice, and cultivate compassion towards other beings, or if we generate faith in the triple gem. By reminding ourselves of virtuous thoughts in this way it is possible to generate a virtuous type of mind. To a certain extent others can also help us to cultivate such a virtuous state of mind at death by reminding us to do such practices at death time.

In terms of shaping or moulding our mind, the kind of shape we achieve, and the difficulty we experience in creating that shape, all depends upon our familiarity with that practice of shaping the mind. So as much as possible, it is important for us to train and familiarise ourselves now with virtuous states of mind. If we become very successful, then our mind can be transformed very easily into the shape we want. All we need to do is to remind ourselves of that practice, or for others to remind us of that practice.

We should train ourselves in the practice of freeing our mind from being overpowered by desire or hatred. On a constant and very regular basis we should place our mind on an object which does not arouse desire or hatred and, without any distraction, try to stay on that object for

a period of up to five or ten minutes. The benefits of practising such single pointed meditation is that our mind immediately becomes more peaceful, subdued and tamed and so we enjoy more inner peace and tranquillity. In the long term if we become very used to the practice of single pointed concentration, and thus free of the dominance of desire and hatred, then we can do this practice as we approach the moment of death.

## The Gross Mind at Death

There is a time before completion of the death process when our mind is still in a very gross form, in that the mind can function as normal and remember the things of this life. At this time it is very important to have a very virtuous frame of mind, which will be nourished by the two mental factors of craving and grasping which bring us closer to a future life. If at that time we generate a peaceful state of mind then there is great benefit to us, because at the time of death the only thing which can help us is our spiritual practice. Our body, wealth and friends cannot help. If we are very familiar with our spiritual practice we can make this experience very peaceful. In other words we can prevent disturbing emotions such as desire and hatred from arising because such afflictive minds means that our mind will be non-virtuous. Then craving and grasping will be nourishing a non-virtuous mind which is a very fearful, frightening and unpleasant experience as well as causing a bad rebirth in the future.

During our lifetime we are very distracted by external objects. We place all our hope in them by thinking that they give us security in life. At death however we realise that there are in fact no external objects which can give that comfort. It is said that if one is used to following spiritual practice, and has developed faith and conviction in that practice, then it becomes evident at this moment of death that true security is within the mind. So the true spiritual practitioner, even when all other things have failed to help, experiences a feeling of being secure and having safe direction, because they know the answer lies within. It all makes sense to the spiritual practitioner, whereas on the other hand someone who lacks belief finds this extremely difficult to accept.

It is said that physical sign of having a virtuous state of mind is that the heat of the body begins to withdraw from the lower part of body towards heart. Whereas the sign of a non-virtuous state of mind is that the heat of the body withdraws from the top of the body towards the heart.

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There is also the experience of the mind. If a virtuous state of mind exists then a white bright light, or the feeling of being in a very pleasant place, or house, or a feeling of delight or joy filling the mind is experienced. On the other hand if the mind is non-virtuous, then there are very unpleasant appearances or feelings in the mind, such as sadness or fear.

### **The Subtle Mind at Death**

After the gross process of death, one undergoes the subtle process of death wherein the mind becomes neutral - neither virtuous nor non-virtuous.

At the very moment that the subtle process of death finishes, that is the ceasing of the very subtle state of mind, then simultaneously one assumes what is called the intermediate state of being. This is the state of existence after death, where the physical body is left behind, and cannot be carried with you but still the mind goes on.

### **The Intermediate State of Being**

The features of the intermediate state being are now described. Their form is made of mind and wind, rather than a form of body which is made of bones and flesh. The shape is similar to the shape of the next rebirth. If the next rebirth will be human, then this form will reflect the shape of that human. If it is to be a godly being, then that shape will be reflected.

The size of this intermediate state being is equal to the size of an infant between the ages of four to five.

The intermediate state is also complete with all the sensory organs of the body. It would also have super perception or clairvoyant power. Furthermore no object can obstruct its movement towards its rebirth. The only object that can obstruct it is the womb (or place) of its next rebirth<sup>1</sup>.

The maximum lifespan of the intermediate state being is up to one week. If, after this, there is no rebirth they must die again, and again be reborn as an intermediate state being.

We shall stop here. You can refer to the Lam Rim text where the features of this intermediate state of being are clearly described.

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#### *Edit methodology*

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*Edited version checked by Alan Molloy*

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<sup>1</sup> Editor: It is also stated the only other object that can obstruct the movement of the intermediate state being is the sacred reliquary or other sacred objects.

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30 July 1996

Try to cultivate bodhicitta and use that as your motivation.

## 422.221.33 The Way One is Conceived in Birth

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།

Having discussed the intermediate state of being, the next topic is the way one is conceived in a new rebirth.

After death, but before finding the next rebirth, there is an intermediate state of being in the sense of being between death in the former life, and beginning the next life.

In the text the stages of birth and death are presented in terms of a being who is to be conceived in a mother's womb. Such an intermediate state being will have a shape which is similar to that of its future life. As this intermediate state being wanders around seeking its next rebirth, it is said that when the time is right it will be attracted to, and then see those beings of the same species as its current shape (which resembles its future rebirth).

As for the actual moment of conception into the next rebirth, it is said the intermediate state being will actually see the future father and mother having sexual intercourse. Then, it is said, if the intermediate state being is to be reborn as a female, it will feel aversion towards the female organs and attraction to the male organs. If it is to be reborn as a male, then the attraction and aversion is opposite. The intermediate state being sees only the male and female sexual organs, and no other parts of either body, so it becomes very frustrated and generates hatred, and it is with this feeling of hatred that the intermediate state being is conceived into the womb.

Now for a very general explanation of the actual process of conception. What happens is that out of very intense desire, the father and mother engage in this sexual activity, which results in an orgasm. First there is the thick semen; this is followed by the more refined semen, from which the sperm impregnates the female egg. This mixture then becomes like milk which having been boiled and allowed to cool, becomes a thick cream. In general, conception or rebirth occurs when the sperm impregnates the egg in this way. Then the intermediate state being ceases, and the new life begins. There are exceptions. In general though, conception or rebirth occurs in this way.

This is one explanation of the stages of a being entering cyclic existence. The next explanation is mainly derived from Lama Tsong Khapa's *Lam Rim Chenmo, The Great*

*Stages of the Path*, and is based on the twelve links of dependant arising.

## The Twelve Links of Dependent Arising

Concerning the twelve links of dependent arising, the related sutra states:-

"Because this exists that will arise. Because this is produced that will be produced."<sup>1</sup>

The twelve links of dependent arising are:-

1. dependent arising of Ignorance
2. dependent arising of Karmic Formations
3. dependent arising of Consciousness
4. dependent arising of Name and Form
5. dependent arising of Six Sense Sources
6. dependent arising of Contact
7. dependent arising of Feeling
8. dependent arising of Craving
9. dependent arising of Grasping
10. dependent arising of Existence
11. dependent arising of Birth
12. dependent arising of either Death or Old Age

## 422.221.331 Ignorance

མ་རིག་པ།

The first dependent arising, ignorance, serves as the root cause of cyclic existence.

This ignorance is the ignorance which grasps at the self of a person, and is the direct opposite to the wisdom which realises the ultimate nature of reality. We should understand how these two are opposite in terms of their view of an object.

In general there are two forms of ignorance

(1) Ignorance of the law of cause and effect, that is being ignorant of the fact that virtuous action brings positive results, and non-virtuous action brings suffering.

(2) Ignorance of the ultimate nature or the truth of things. This is the ignorance of the first dependent arising.

The ignorance of the second type, which is the ignorance of dependent arising views oneself as if we exist inherently and independently by way of our own character without depending upon any other causes or conditions. We can recognise this ignorance in our experience of the sense of "I", as an experience of our self identity.

Generally speaking it is not necessarily the case that any

<sup>1</sup> Editors note: The complete quote is "because this exists, that will occur. Because this has arisen, that will arise. Similarly ignorance serves as a subsidiary cause for the compositional factors...." *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* p. 527

sense of “I” or self which we experience is identical to this self grasping. However we can still identify an ignorance of self grasping that is holding onto some inherently existing “I” or self. By holding onto this ignorant view of self, we can see how we are led to create various actions which have the consequence of binding us into the endless rebirths of cyclic existence.

As a result of ignorance of the first kind (that is, the ignorance of the law of cause and effect) we create non-meritorious, or black karma. We do this because we do not fully understand that non-virtuous action creates suffering, and so we make no effort to prevent or minimise these non-virtuous actions, nor do we purify those we have completed.

On the other hand with knowledge about the law of cause and effect we can be more mindful of our actions, in that we minimise non-virtue and increase virtuous actions. Because we know the consequences, we then create positive, meritorious or immutable actions, and this ensures a better form of life in cyclic existence.

However if we are ignorant of the nature of self grasping, then any action whether it be meritorious or non-meritorious will be a cause to be reborn in cyclic existence, and the root cause of this is ignorance of the ultimate nature of things.

An action leading to continuing rebirth must have at its basis this ignorance of self grasping. It is just like the way this body supports all the other organs - the eye sense organ and so on. Chandrakirti said: “Initially there arises a sense of ‘I’ and attachment to this sense of ‘I’, from there follows all the actions which bring us into cyclic existence.”<sup>2</sup>

Within our own experience we can trace all our non-virtuous actions to this ignorance of the ultimate nature of reality, which underpins this sense of self. From this strong influence of such a sense of ‘I’ or the ego, we see how we lose control over our actions, and engage in conflict with, and abuse and hurt others. Then we find ourselves rejected by others - even those closest to us - and lead a miserable life.

So the true benefit of learning is calming ourself, therefore it is important to relate our learning of dharma to our own experiences.

#### 422.221.332 Karmic Formations

འདྲ་བྱེད།

Ignorance serves as the motivation to create the next link of dependent arising called karmic formation. Motivated by the ignorance of cause and effect, negative or non-virtuous actions are created, and this is karmic formation. Taking the life of another, for example is karmic formation.

#### 422.221.333 Consciousness

རྣམ་ཤེས།

After the karmic formation the third link is consciousness which stores the latency or the impression of karma.

When the action of killing is completed, it does not cease or become non-existent. Rather it leaves a latency or

impression which is carried by the third dependent arising called consciousness.

If consciousness is the ground or field, then karmic formation is a seed, and ignorance is the one who sows that seed. Another analogy begins with the person being the one who sows the seed. Then karmic formation is the action of sowing the seed, consciousness is the field and ignorance is the seed that is sown.

The results the seed produces depends upon the conditions it meets. When the right conditions - water, manure, heat - come together then the seed will germinate to become a sprout. Similarly when the latency of karmic action meets its conditions of craving and grasping, it will produce its result which is a future rebirth.

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<sup>2</sup> From the text “Madhyamika-Avatara’ Chapter one



which then results in feeling, and this feeling results in craving. From this point of view, feeling serves as a source of further karma and the development of delusions.

However this chain of events is not inevitable. There is a way to free ourselves from this chain of rebirths, and it is by generating renunciation, and focusing on purifying all negativities or non-virtuous karma. This is the only way. So generally speaking it is possible to end cyclic existence, but without applying such spiritual practice we cannot perceive such an end.

The life in which we are now born is the effect of one single karma, and the stage where we are at now is but one part of one set of twelve dependent arisings. Before we can complete this rebirth, or set of twelve links, we shall accumulate countless karmas, which means countless more sets (or lifetimes) of twelve links. Unless we achieve a great purification of our past karma, and minimise the accumulation of karma by generating renunciation, then cyclic existence seems to have no beginning and no end. Of course we are not asserting that there is no end to cyclic existence, but what we are saying is that given all the causes for rebirth in cyclic existence, it would appear to our minds that there is no end.

#### 422.221.339 Ninth Dependent Arising: Grasping

ལེན་པ།

The ninth dependent arising of grasping is where the dependent arising of craving becomes so intense, that there is not only desire for an object, but also the strong wish to possess it.

There are four types of grasping:

1. grasping at sensual objects
2. grasping at wrong view, but not including the wrong view of transitory collections
3. grasping at false moral ethics or conduct such as extreme ascetic practices, because of wrong view
4. grasping at the view of self

#### 422.221.3310 Tenth Dependent Arising: Existence

ལྡན་པ།

The tenth dependent arising is called existence. In this stage the karmic latency, which is stored in the consciousness, is fully nourished and activated by the dependent arisings of craving and grasping to the stage where the karmic latency is about to produce its result - the next rebirth.

At this stage of existence all the causes to take another rebirth are fully present and ripened, so that the next rebirth is unavoidable.

#### 422.221.3311 Eleventh Dependent Arising: Birth

ལྗེས་པ།

The eleventh link of dependent arising, birth, occurs because the link of existence has been created. There are four types of birth: from an egg, from a womb, from heat and moisture, and miraculously, and here the term "birth" means the first moment of consciousness. [In the context of birth from the womb, we usually call this process conception]. The eleventh dependent arising of

birth exists only in that first moment of conception.

#### 422.221.3312 Twelfth Dependent Arising: Ageing or Death

རྒྱུ་ལྡན་པ།

This twelfth link of ageing or death begins in the moment immediately after conception. In general "Ageing" means the momentary changes of this karmically acquired body, whereas the common view of ageing refers to the outer indications of physical deterioration: changes in the colour of hair, wrinkles in the skin, loss of strength and so on. From this common perspective death can come before ageing, so in order to accommodate this common view the twelfth link is called ageing or death.

Death is the separation of our consciousness from this body, and is the ripened result of our past karma.

Next week is discussion night. The following week will be the test.

The compulsory test question is to explain in detail a quotation from Lama Tsong Khapa's *Three Principles of the Path*, which indicates the three principle aspects of renunciation, bodhicitta and the correct view of emptiness.

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27 August 1996

Generate the bodhicitta motivation, which is one of wishing to achieve the state of buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. Then, knowing that the purpose of studying and practising these stages of the path is to fulfil this spiritual goal, generate the strong intention to achieve that goal by means of study and practise.

In spiritual discussion we talk a lot about cultivating the right motivation, and through this focus we are directing our attention to our own mind. The quality of whatever actions we undertake is mainly predetermined by the thought which preceded them, so it is the mind that presides over our actions.

What we all truly want is a very positive and good frame of mind, and to live in an environment of good deeds. Whether or not we have abundant wealth, we can be fully satisfied as long as we have peace, contentment and joy in our mind, and our daily deeds are very meaningful to both ourselves and others.

It is very important therefore, for us to correct our mind and the daily thoughts that we generate. As much as possible we should try to remove all the negative and destructive habits of our daily way of thinking. For example whenever we engage in spiritual practice, whether it is meditating or studying, we must remind ourselves that the purpose is to tame our own mind.

In the beginning, because of the lack of training, we find it very easy for the mind to go out of control. When that happens, we know from experience the damage it does to our own life, to our circle of close friends, and to our relationships with others. If we could become accustomed to the daily practice of training our mind to be more generous, kinder and more supportive to our friends and others, we shall see some result. Then unlike its present untamed state, we shall find it easier to maintain that more positive state of mind. With such a positive frame of mind, there will be more peace and happiness in our own life, and those with whom we come in contact will see good qualities in our personality. In this way we automatically develop good relationships with others.

We may blame the cause of our problems on some outer factors, or some other person. However it is the mind which is the source of all our troubles, as well as happiness, joy and contentment in life. For instance at the beginning of a relationship there is a sense of friendship and care for each other. But as time passes, and the real nature appears, there is no consideration for the other. Then the other may even be blamed for one's

own mistakes and faults. If we examine this we see that right from the beginning all the causes are in the mind, and this shows us the importance of utilising our own sense of discrimination.

## Divisions of The Twelve Links

To return to the subject of our teachings. What follows the description of the twelve links is the way they can be subsumed into four branches.

### 1 Propelling branch:

འཕྲོད་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཡན་ལག་ལ།

This includes the links of:

- ignorance
- compositional karma
- causal consciousness (which is the first of two parts of the link of consciousness)

As said in the previous teachings, *ignorance* is like the one who sows the seed, *karma* is the actual seed, and *causal consciousness* is like the seed being sown in the ground.

### 2 Propelled result:

འཕྲུལ་པའི་འབྲས་བུའི་ཡན་ལག་ལ།

This branch includes:

- resultant consciousness (the second part of the link of consciousness)
- name or form
- source
- contact
- feeling

### 3 Establishing (or forming) branch:

འགྲུབ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཡན་ལག་ལ།

This includes:

- craving
- grasping
- existence (or becoming)

### 4 Established (or formed) result:

མཐོན་པར་གྲུབ་པའི་འབྲས་བུའི་ཡན་ལག་ལ།

These are:

- birth
- old age and death

So we see how the twelve links can be grouped into four branches.

Ignorance, karma and causal consciousness are called propelling branch because they are the main causes

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which bring about the propelled result. The term “propelled result” has the indication that the result is subject to conditions, i.e. is subject to the establishing branch of craving, grasping and existence.

In other words, after the karmic seed is implanted in consciousness by ignorance, whether or not it yields its result depends upon the conditions of craving, grasping and existence. Once nourished by craving and then grasping, by the time it becomes the link of existence the result is inevitable. So then the resultant links of birth, old age and death are the established branches.

### **How Many Lifetimes are Required to Complete a Set Of Twelve Links?**

We can see how twelve links are completed in two lifetimes by considering the example of creating the karma to be born as a god in a god realm. The initial cause which motivates us to create that karma is the first link of ignorance concerning the nature of ultimate reality. Then, soon after its creation and in that same lifetime, the karma is implanted in the consciousness. With this karma planted in the consciousness, it can later on be nourished by the eighth link of craving. Just before we finish this life we may generate the wish “How good if in the next life I were born in the god realms!” This is the eighth link of craving. As this craving becomes stronger, one might want to make some effort to achieve this wish, and this is the indication of grasping, (which is a further increase of craving). This craving and grasping, it is said, will fully nourish the karma to be reborn in god realms. The link of existence is when this karma will definitely produce its result.

Six of the twelve links including the three of the propelling branch and the three of the establishing branch are all completed in the same lifetime. Then, on being born in the god realms in the immediate next life, the rest of the twelve links are completed. They are the branches of propelled result (name and form, source, contact and feeling) and of established result (birth, ageing and death), which are the six resultant links.

So in terms of two lives: the six causal links finish in the one life and the six resultant links finish in the next life.

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