

Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



14 November 2000

Cultivate the bodhicitta mind of wishing to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all beings. With this motivation generate the thought of wanting to listen to these profound Mahayana teachings and put them into practice.

In order to make sure that whatever spiritual practice we do is influenced by this bodhicitta mind, we have to generate as strong a bodhicitta motivation as possible before engaging in any practice. In other words the stronger the bodhicitta motivation, the greater the influence of this mind on whatever actions follow it.

7. We are up to the seventh root downfall of the bodhisattva vows, which is taking away the saffron-coloured robes of ordained monks or nuns.

The object of committing this root downfall is either a Sangha who is endowed with complete, unsullied Sangha vows, or a Sangha who has an incomplete or broken vow. However, the number of Sangha should not exceed four ordained Sangha, because if the same action were committed against more than four fully ordained Sangha then it would be classified as the fifth root downfall, which is stealing the property of the Supreme Jewel

The kind of thought that motivates one to commit these actions is a harmful malicious thought towards the Sangha.

The action is something that results in the removal of the Sangha's saffron-coloured robes. It also means disrobing them, in the sense of reducing their status to that of a lay person.

8. The eighth root downfall is committing any of five immediate negative actions. These are the five extremely negative karmic actions of killing one's own father, killing one's own mother, killing an Arhat (i.e. one who has achieved the state of liberation), causing the shedding of blood of a buddha, and causing a schism or division within the Sangha community.

The reason why these five actions are called immediate negative actions is because their severity is such that, if they are not purified, they will bear their result of taking a bad rebirth in the immediate next lifetime. There is no gap of another rebirth between the time of committing the action and the ripening of the result.

9. The ninth root downfall is generating wrong view. This wrong view refers to the loss of faith in the law of white and black karma, and the wrong view that there is no life before or after this one.

This wrong view of the karmic law of cause and effect is more than just saying that such a law does not exist. Rather it refers to falsely believing that if you create white or positive karma then the result is not happiness. Likewise, if you falsely believe that the result of negative or black karma is not suffering, this also is a wrong view.

In our day-to-day life this topic of the law of karma is one of

the most essential parts of our practice. This is because if in our daily life we create more positive actions and less negative ones, we are progressing in our spiritual practice. If our understanding of this topic of the law of karma is accompanied by a deep faith in it, it will become deeply entrenched in our mind. Then it can be a continuous source of motivation for our spiritual practice.

Generally speaking, practising the law of karma means being a good, honest person with both yourself and other people. Therefore we can see how, when we talk of spiritual practice, and make progress in that practice, it is not just simply knowledge which is important. Rather, that knowledge has to be thoroughly and deeply integrated within us, with a strong faith in the value of that knowledge.

There are some people who have probably never heard this word 'karma'. Yet as a matter of principle they live their life very much according to the point of view of the spiritual teachings, and particularly this teaching on the law of karma. In effect they are practising true Dharma in their life. Of course their actions are also very beneficial to their life, as well as being very satisfying to them. They see that the principles on which they live their life are very constructive and beneficial both personally and to others.

Because the results of positive actions are very desirable they are wholesome white actions. Whereas the results of negative actions are undesirable, so therefore the actions are called black unwholesome karma.

We have to realise that the law of karma is not something to be practised solely to gain some benefit in our future life. Rather we also have to see that it is crucial for living a very good life in this lifetime. Indeed the law of karma is almost indispensable for finding more happiness within this lifetime. If you do not practise it, then there is no hope of finding happiness, let alone minimising suffering within this lifetime.

Basically this law of karma says to us that positive actions result in happiness, whereas negative actions result in suffering. When we say we have faith in the law of karma we believe in this causal link between positive actions and happiness, and between negative actions and suffering.

If we have gained faith in this deep down in our heart, then it becomes so natural for us to practise it very seriously in day-to-day life. This is because there are no questions in our mind that what we seek in our life is happiness, which is a very pleasant and desirable state in which to be. The cause for that is creating positive karma or positive actions. We can understand this link between positive actions and their desirable result just by observing all our actions and their results in our everyday life. Likewise if you observe the causes and results of the actions of other people you can understand this law.

If you have faith in this law of karma, it also becomes natural that if you happen to create some negative actions, then you immediately feel bad about them. You know that unless you do something to purify those actions you will have to pay for them in the form of suffering. You know that your negative action is going to bring something that you do not want, and which you always try to avoid. So therefore faith in the law of karma inspires us to prevent negative actions, and to purify any negative actions that we have already created.

There are, of course, many levels of understanding the truth of this law of karmic cause and effect in our life. At one level we can see that the happiness we seek is not just a matter of enjoying good material conditions. Likewise unhappy events are not always related to poor material conditions. In other words it is hard for us to know the complete causes of our experiences unless we consider the topic of the law of karma.

With the law of karma, even though the actions that we create cease to exist with the completion of that particular action, we say that they leave some imprint in our mindstream. This imprint, which will be retained in our mind stream, has the capacity to produce the result of that action in the future. Therefore many things happen in this lifetime, which are not necessarily the result of karma that we have created in this life. Rather they could be the result of karma that we have created in past lifetimes.

What this means is that even if in this life we find a great deal of happiness, we may possess within our mind stream a vast number of karmic imprints of negative actions created in the past. Therefore we have to realise that it is important to engage as much as possible in the practice of purifying those.

Of course this has been just a general introduction to the importance of this topic of karma in our day-to-day practice.

The best way to approach the Buddhadharma is to first try to apply all those teachings and practices which are most personally relevant. These are the ones that can be understood and practised in the immediate time frame. One tests, as much as possible, the Buddha's teachings in the context of one's own immediate life. If, as it says in the teachings, through this testing the Buddhadharma proves unflinching, particularly with respect to the law of karma you will find that positive karma brings happiness and negative karma sufferings.

The teaching of the Buddha mainly relates to our thoughts and our actions. It shows the path to achieve happiness and to eliminate suffering. By applying these teachings to our own mind and actions, we learn that the source of our happiness, from the immediate present to lasting peace and happiness, is in our own mind. Likewise the source of suffering, restlessness, difficulties and confusion also lies within our own mind.

If the source of happiness lies within our mind, then what is that source? It is generating loving-kindness, compassion and a good heart towards others. Whereas generating any harmful ill thoughts is the inner source of suffering, and hence the source of our problems. Through our everyday actions we have to try to test whether the peace and happiness that we seek really does come from this positive state of mind of showing love and compassion to other beings?

If we relate the teachings to our own daily actions we can understand the meaning of the teachings. We know how we feel very inwardly disturbed if our mind is under the

control and influence of some harmful thought like hatred. Not only that, but if we check our outer actions, there is no peace in creating any negative, destructive actions like physically showing aggression to another. We can also see the effect in our life and also in the life of others of sincerely putting into practise all these teachings of showing love and respect to others.

Sincere, genuine faith in the Buddha's teachings on the law of karma or other whole aspects of the teachings has to be based on our own immediate experience. With some knowledge and faith we can develop an even deeper faith in the Buddha's teachings. Without relating the Buddha's teaching to our own experience, our knowledge becomes very abstract rather than something that we can immediately apply to our life.

This is even more the case for the higher, more profound teachings such as the existence of life before or after this one, and its relationship to the law of karma. Then the teachings become even more abstract, and appear to be very subtle to grasp. Therefore it is said in the teaching that in order to logically prove these facts, then we also need to use very abstract, subtle logic, because basically there is no other way of understanding these facts.

First of all we need to make sense of the Buddha's teachings in terms of our experiences in this life, and so gain some faith in the validity of the teachings. Then we are in the position to say that, having tested the teachings and not having found any fault with respect to this life, we can infer that the teachings on the law of karma with respect to previous and future lifetimes are true.

By testing and examining the Buddha's words we confirm and authenticate them as fact. On the basis of this we gain a deep faith in the law of karmic cause and effect, and then it becomes so natural to always feel motivated to create virtuous, positive actions. Creating negative actions on the other hand becomes so frightening that, unless you take some action to purify that negative action, you can find it difficult to sleep. Faith in the law of karma can be a great source of continual inspiration to practise Dharma and purify negative actions.

Faith in our practice of Dharma is strongest when it is derived from our own knowledge and experience. Faith can be so strong that we shall be prepared to forsake our own life for the cause of Dharma. Whereas a faith that is just based on saying that whatever you learn in Dharma is true because it is the word of the Buddha, can be very fleeting faith, in the sense that you can lose it very easily.

The Lord Buddha himself said to his followers, "Do not honour my teachings just out of your faith in me. Rather you should honour the Dharma by examining the teachings for yourself, just as you would assay the quality of gold."

As the Buddha said, it is very important for the stability of our own practice to test the ways in which teachings relate to our own mind and actions.

© *Tara Institute*

Note on authentication

Transcribed from the tape by Kathi Melnic

Edited by Adair Bunnnett and Alan Molloy

Checked by Sandup Tsering and Alan Molloy

Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

༄༅ ལམ་རིམ་རྣམ་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



21 November 2000

Cultivate your motivation by generating the thought, "I shall attain the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings, and in order to fulfil that goal I shall undertake these profound lam rim teachings, and follow them up with practice."

Root Downfalls of the Bodhisattva Vows (cont)

10. We begin tonight's teaching with the tenth root downfall of the Bodhisattva vows, which is **destroying towns and so forth**.

There are four main categories of the type of place to which this vow refers.

The first is a village, which is a place where a small number of men and women who are not ordained live together in families.

Second is a *tong kye* in Tibetan. It is a town where, according to the scriptures you can study all the 18 classes of the arts, such as sculpture, and statue making. In these days it is a place where universities are situated.

The third type of area is called in Tibetan *gang*, which literally means far away. It refers to an area where there are more than four races of people.

The fourth category, called *tong ta* in Tibetan, is a place which is smaller than a town, but where merchants and business people come together for commercial activities.

The motivation behind destroying these places is some mental delusion.

The action takes place when you destroy such a place through whatever means.

Of the eighteen root downfalls the fifth to the ninth root downfalls¹ are sometimes called the root downfalls for kings, whereas the tenth is called the downfall for ministers. The reason for this is that downfalls 5-9 are more likely to be committed by kings, whilst the tenth one is more likely to be committed by ministers.

11. The eleventh downfall is **teaching emptiness to those who are spiritually unripe**. There are some defining criteria in relation to the person who is the object of this root downfall.

Firstly, the unsuitable or spiritually unripe person to whom you are teaching emptiness must be one whose mind is not fully trained, in readiness to receive all these teachings on emptiness.

Secondly, teaching emptiness to that person must frighten them.

Thirdly, the person must actually possess the bodhicitta

mind.

The teaching on emptiness that you give to that person refers to the concept of emptiness, which is free of all forms of mental fabrications, mental superimpositions and constructs.

The actual root downfall will occur when as a result of teaching emptiness to a spiritually unripe person as just defined, that person becomes frightened with the result of the loss, or lessening of their bodhicitta mind. It might even cause them to fall into the path of the lower vehicles.

12. The twelfth root downfall is causing others to turn back from supreme enlightenment or the state of buddhahood.

The person on whom you commit this downfall has actually entered into the Mahayana or the path of Great Vehicle by having already generated the bodhicitta mind. You can discourage them by saying that they have no hope of achieving complete enlightenment because to do so they have to engage in the six perfections. You say that engaging in these deeds of the Bodhisattvas is extremely difficult and almost impossible. You change their mind by saying, "Wouldn't it be better if you followed more realistic goals like the goal of the Hearer Vehicle which is just, achieving the state of liberation from cyclic existence for yourself".

If you are able to persuade another being who has already entered the Mahayana path to give up that path, and to enter into the path of Lesser Vehicle, (such as the Hearer vehicle), you complete the action of this twelfth root downfall.

13. The thirteenth root downfall is causing another to give up their Pratimoksha vows. The Pratimoksha vows which are individual or self-liberation vows². They are called self-liberation vows because they are vows that are primarily to achieve the state of liberation for the person keeping that vow.

This root downfall is committed by causing one who possesses any of these Pratimoksha vows to give up their vow. It is telling them that if instead of following the Pratimoksha vow you generate the bodhicitta mind, and follow the Mahayana or the path of Greater Vehicle, then you can remove all delusions and all the faults of your three doors of body, speech and mind.

If, influenced by your words, the person gives up this Pratimoksha vow you then acquire this root downfall.

¹ 5:stealing the property of the Supreme Jewel, 6:giving up Dharma, 7:taking away the saffron-coloured robes, 8:committing any of five immediate deeds, 9:generating wrong view

² The Pratimoksha vows is a set of eight vows some of which are for lay people and are for the ordained.

14. The fourteenth root downfall is **discrediting the Hearer Vehicle**.

This means making comments about the Hearer Vehicle such as, "That vehicle does not show the means of overcoming all mental delusions such as desire and so forth". This causes others to believe that the lesser vehicle of the Hearer or Solitary Realiser has no capacity to remove all mental delusions, or to lead one to achieve liberation from cyclic existence.

In the fourth root downfall, which is giving up Dharma, we mentioned that the Dharma includes the Dharma of the three vehicles including the Hearer, the Solitary Realiser and the Mahayana. The main difference between the fourth root downfall, giving up Dharma, and the fourteenth, discrediting the Hearer Vehicle, is that the fourth root downfall mainly refers to the scriptural sources of those lesser vehicles, saying that those sources are not actual word of the Lord Buddha. Whereas here in the fourteenth root downfall, discrediting the Hearer Vehicle refers mainly to the actual path, such as the internalised path of these lesser vehicles, or the possible realisations to be gained in this lesser vehicle. This fourteenth downfall is saying that those realisations have no potential capacity to eliminate all delusions and to liberate oneself from this cyclic existence.

15. We now turn to the fifteenth root downfall, which is lying to others about having realisations of the profound truth.

This refers to lying about having gained realisations of the profound truth of emptiness, when you have not actually done so.

In order to actually commit this downfall, the person to whom you are lying must be someone who has a sound faculty of hearing, and also an understanding of what you are saying.

From your part you lie about this realisation of emptiness. You say things like "I have gained these profound realisations which are the direct path to achieve liberation, and out of compassion and care for others, I am telling you so. If you also gain the same realisations, then you too will reach the same state."

When, having heard all your lies, your listeners actually come to believe your statements with a clear knowledge and understanding of what you have said, then we say that you have committed this root downfall. In fact it is said that for a fully ordained monk or nun this is a root downfall of not just their Bodhisattva vows, but also their Pratimoksha vows.

16. The sixteenth root downfall is seizing the property of the Three Jewels.

This downfall occurs when those who possess the Bodhisattva vows receive property belonging to the Three Jewels from those such as kings or ministers. A king or his ministers can impose a fine on the population, including the Sangha. In order to pay those fines the Sangha have to give up all their belongings. As a Sangha community they may even have to give up property which is basically the property of the Three Jewels - the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. This property of the Three Jewels then becomes the property of the state, or the king, or his ministers.

The minister may later decide to distribute this property

to others, and if among the recipients there is someone who possesses the Bodhisattva vows, then like the king they are also creating this root downfall.

17. The seventeenth root downfall is establishing harmful rules.

This root downfall refers to giving away the belongings of meditators to those who are practitioners of daily recitations or daily prayers. This root downfall is committed on one who is engaged in meditation to achieve the calm abiding, the single-pointed state of concentration.

Out of ill thought towards the meditator, you steal their belongings or even the necessary basic living conditions for their meditation, and give it to other practitioners who are just engaged in recitations or prayers.

As a result of your actions you interrupt the meditator's search for calm abiding.

18. The eighteenth root downfall is giving up bodhicitta, which refers to losing the aspiring bodhicitta mind.

Following this, the next topic is the four types of binding mental delusions, which we shall discuss in the coming teaching.

It would be good if you could read about the four binding mental delusions in the meantime. The tradition of monastic study is that the students are always required to memorise the source texts before the teachers give the commentary on those texts. When they begin the class the teacher always asks the students whether they have memorised the source of the teachings. In line with that tradition it is also good to try to do some preliminary study about the coming teachings.

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

© *Tara Institute*

Note on authentication

Transcribed from the tape by Kathi Melnic
Edited by Adair Bunnnett and Alan Molloy
Checked by Sandup Tsering and Alan Molloy

Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

༄༅ ལམ་རིམ་རྣམ་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



28 November 2000

Make sure that you cultivate the bodhicitta motivation by generating a genuine aspiration to achieve the state of buddhahood for the sake of all beings. Then think that it is in order to fulfil this bodhicitta aspiration that you are listening to these teachings, and will put them into practice.

We have now finished describing the eighteen root downfalls of the Bodhisattva vows.

The Four Binding Afflictions

It is said that to complete sixteen of these eighteen root downfalls, four binding afflictions or delusions have to be present. The two exceptions are the root downfalls of generating wrong view, and losing one's bodhicitta mind, and in these two cases the binding afflictions do not need to be present for the downfall to be completed. If you commit either of these two then automatically, regardless of the four binding afflictions, you lose your Bodhisattva vows.

By generating wrong view, for example the wrong view of lacking faith, or rejecting the law of karma or cause and effect, you specifically lose your Bodhisattva vows the moment after you have generated the wrong view. You do not lose it concurrently with generating the wrong view, but the moment after.

The four types of binding afflictions are:

1. Not giving up thoughts of committing negative downfalls, and still desiring to commit them.
2. Not having any sense of shame and consideration in committing the downfalls.
3. Committing these downfalls happily and with satisfaction.
4. Not recognising the negative actions of the downfalls as wrong actions.

Apart from the two root downfalls that automatically cause the loss of one's Bodhisattva vows, all four binding afflictions must also be present, along with one or more of the other sixteen downfall actions in order to lose one's Bodhisattva vows. It is said if one commits a root downfall action without these four afflictions being present, one's vow is not actually lost. However, this does not mean that the misdeed one has committed becomes a secondary Bodhisattva offence. It is still considered to be what is called a *pham-pa* in Tibetan, that is a part of the downfall of the root vows.

1. The first binding affliction is not giving up thoughts of committing the downfall.

With this binding affliction you always have a desire or motivation to commit any of the eighteen root downfalls. Therefore you cannot stop yourself from creating the actions of the downfall. In other words, in order to maintain the Bodhisattva vows it is very important to overcome this binding affliction which is really a thought or desire to commit wrong actions.

2. The second binding affliction is not having any sense of shame or consideration.

This is also important to overcome, because it is said that without this sense of shame and consideration you would still be likely to commit these downfalls, even though you have prevented the thought of committing the actions.

We have discussed the difference between shame and consideration in the past. Briefly, the Tibetan term for shameful is *ngo-tsa*, is thinking, "I should not do this action because it is wrong". With *ngo-tsa* shameful you avoid wrong actions because you clearly recognise them as wrong, and not necessarily because of your concern for and consideration of the view of other people. Without a sense of shame you have no self-respect, or sense of decency about your behaviour, nor do you care about your self image.

In Tibetan consideration is *trel-yö*, which is considering the views of people other than yourself. *Trel-yö* is also a powerful factor which causes us to refrain from negative actions. With it you respect and consider other people and their views. That is to say you understand that committing certain misdeeds may be fine with yourself but not fine with other people and your relationship with them. The fact that you usually take spiritual vows and commitments from your Gurus and Refuge Objects means that it is easy for *trel-yo* to arise. This sense of consideration serves as a basis to maintain your ethical practice.

Regarding this, Shantideva said in his *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* that we should always try to think that all the buddhas and bodhisattvas are always present throughout space and time. Therefore, there is no place to do negative actions discreetly. Sometimes you commit misdeeds thinking that nobody is watching and that it is all right to do so as long as you are not seen performing them. So you can see here how effective is to have *trel-yo* in order to refrain from breaking vows and committing any misdeed.

Although both are a sense of moral restraint, the main difference between *ngo-tsa* shame and *trel-yo* consideration is the reason for restraint. In the case of *ngo-tsa* it is mainly related to oneself and *trel-yo* relates to other people. Both are equally essential in sustaining a pure morality. It is said that if after you have committed a misdeed you feel even a small degree of shame or consideration, then the misdeeds that you create will not be a *pham-pa*, or root downfall.

3. The third binding affliction is committing the misdeed happily and with satisfaction.

The 'happily' refers to feeling happy about the actual actions which are the misdeed. The 'with satisfaction' implies that from the depth of your heart you like, enjoy, desire and take pleasure in doing the action.

4. The fourth binding affliction is not recognizing the misdeed as a wrong action

This is just a brief discussion of the four binding delusions.

In the commentaries it is said that there are three categories

of the four binding afflictions in terms of their intensity or degree.

1. The heaviest degree of affliction.

This is when all of the four binding delusions are present, causing the root downfall to occur.

2. The medium level of affliction

This refers to the fourth delusion of not recognizing the misdeed as wrong, which in fact is regarded as the worst one. If you are afflicted with this delusion, then regardless of whether or not any one or two of the other three afflictions are present, your affliction is of the medium level.

3. Small level of affliction

This refers to possessing any of the first three binding delusions, but not the fourth one.

The whole discussion about the Bodhisattva vows is part of the topic of the instructions on Taking Bodhisattva Vows, relating to the Engaging Mind of Bodhichitta.

Liberation is in the Palm of your Hand

In the lam-rim commentary, after completing the Instructions Relating to the Engaging Mind of Bodhichitta the text says, "I have shown you the path to liberation. Achieving that liberation depends upon you".

This quotation carries a strong message. Having heard the entire lam-rim teachings showing the stages of the path to enlightenment, the only way to benefit from these teachings, whether it be enlightenment or just some benefit in this lifetime, depends on our own practise.

We have to understand that the amount of practice we do is far more important than the amount of knowledge we have gained from listening to the teachings. We have to make sure that what we have learnt in the lam-rim teachings we have received is not just an intellectual exercise, or some outer knowledge. Rather we have to make sure it becomes the basis of our daily spiritual practice.

If you study the works of Lama Tsong Khapa and the great Atisha, you will find that their whole emphasis is on practice. It is in order to make progress in our practice that we must meditate on the topics of the teachings and their meaning. We should try to understand the point that Lama Tsong Khapa made when he said that we should combine learning, contemplation and meditation in such a way that the more our learning increases, the more our contemplation also increases, which in turn increases our meditation.

If we follow Lama Tsong Khapa's instructions, knowledge of meditation must come from the knowledge of contemplation, which comes from the knowledge gained by studying or listening to the teachings. So, when we think of what to practise, or what to meditate on, think just of what you know about Dharma. Because your practice must come from the knowledge you have gained through studying Dharma.

There is really not much point in listening to the lam-rim and other spiritual teachings if we do not relate them to our practice. If you just listen to the teachings and do not practise there may be some sort of future benefit, but there is obviously no benefit to one's immediate life. Such a limited involvement cannot be a substantial cause to achieve a better future life, let alone the state of liberation in the future.

If we do not practise it, the Dharma we have learnt is like a beautiful looking unripe fruit, and there is no use in that! Try to encourage and motivate ourselves to practice Dharma by thinking of the benefits of practising it.

If we are familiar with the topic of this excellent human rebirth and the rare opportunity of meeting with these perfect teachings, we must also understand that the only way to achieve any meaning or purpose of this life is through practice. Without practice then no matter how much knowledge you gain from the teachings, you will not have achieved any purpose of your human life.

There are three purposes of this human life. Achieving the small purpose of human life means to be able to create the causes to find a higher rebirth, and to prevent lower rebirth. Achieving the medium purpose of human life is to achieve liberation from cyclic existence. Achieving the great meaning of this human life is to use this life to create the causes to achieve complete enlightenment.

We should understand the importance of practising Dharma over all other things, and understand what we mean by practice. It means understanding that practice concerns our own mind and its mental attitudes. In a sense even meditation practice concerns our mental attitude. What does mental attitude mean? In what way does practice have an effect on one's mind? It counteracts the negative states of mind such as desire, hatred and so on. Mental practice means removing all these mental delusions which overpower the mind.

In fact, in Tibetan we say that the Buddhist scriptures are the scriptures of inner knowledge. This implies that the content of the scriptures concerns the personal development of inner knowledge and wisdom. More specifically, it means developing the knowledge and wisdom which can cut the ignorance of self-grasping at its roots.

We have been studying the lam-rim text for a long period of time. If we understand the meaning of it, this text will enable us to understand and develop this inner knowledge. Conversely the text will help us to overcome our mental delusions. We have to ensure that the knowledge that we gain from the scriptures and the time we have spent in gaining that knowledge actually does help us to eliminate the delusions within our mind.

How very sad if your learning of the scriptures does just the opposite, and the time you spend in spiritual practice becomes yet another source of increasing various mental delusions such as jealousy, competitiveness, and so on! If that happens whatever knowledge one has gained from the scriptures, even though they are Buddhist scriptures, is not really inner knowledge, but it has become a poison for you.

Only by putting into practice whatever we learn from the teachings can we receive the true benefit and appreciation of the Dharma. At the same time we can achieve more happiness and minimise suffering in our life. So it is obvious why practising the Dharma by counteracting delusions in our mind can bring true happiness, and make a positive change to our life.

If we examine the cause of most of our unhappiness, and the internal conflict, stress and anxiety in our mind, most of the time the cause is not external objects or factors. Most of the time the cause is created within ourselves. If we check on what it is that brings this unhappiness, dissatisfaction and so on that we presently experience, we can see that it can be any one of those mental delusions that we have learnt about in the lam rim. Just like other beings, we all want to find happiness and avoid suffering, therefore it is so sensible and worthwhile to follow the Dharma by studying and practising it in our daily life.

© Tara Institute

Note on authentication

Transcribed from the tape by Kathi Melnic

Edited by Adair Bunnett and Alan Molloy
Checked by Sandup Tsering and Alan Molloy

Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

༄༅ ལམ་རིམ་རྣམ་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



5 December 2000

Try to reinforce the bodhichitta motivation which you have just generated. Cultivate the thought of wanting to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and think, "for this purpose I am undertaking this study and practice of the profound lam-rim teachings."

In the previous teaching we discussed the statement by the Lord Buddha, "I have shown you the path to liberation. Achieving that state of liberation is up to you."

We have heard numerous times that the Dharma we learn should be integrated into our practice, by relating it to our mind and actions. Hearing the Dharma should not be like hearing the other things that we put in our mind and leave there, doing nothing with them. The Lord Buddha said that after you study the Dharma you should relate it to your mind, and through that you can achieve a better future. You should try to practise Dharma according to your own mental capabilities: small, medium or great.

The bodhichitta mind is our root Dharma practice. It should influence whatever other practices we do - meditation and so on. To enhance the bodhisattva mind, we should engage in the lam-rim meditation. We have to become very familiar with this stage-by-stage lam-rim meditation, which guides us in stages from the beginning of the spiritual path, which is to rely upon a spiritual guru, up to the attainment of complete enlightenment.

The first stage is to understand how a proper reliance upon a spiritual guru can lead us through all of the stages of the lam-rim. With such devotion, we shall sincerely follow the guru's instructions. This would naturally generate a genuine desire to take the essence or meaning of this precious human life of leisure and endowment.

Not only that, but we would see how we have to begin to take the essence of this life of leisure and endowment immediately, because we shall clearly see that this life is not going to last forever. In fact death can come at any moment - we have no control over it.

If we do nothing, we may take rebirth in the lower realms, and there is no guarantee that we can avoid such a lower rebirth. The next step is to try to think of the suffering that would be experienced if one was to be born in the lower realms. This, plus the knowledge that death could occur in the next moment shows us the urgency of practising from this moment to prevent a lower rebirth. That means seeking refuge in the Three

Jewels, and following the practice of karma, the law of cause and effect.

The practice of karma may prevent a lower rebirth, however we should also understand that we need to ask if it is sufficient to merely take a higher rebirth. From our understanding of the lam-rim, we know a higher rebirth is clearly not sufficient, because there is also suffering there. In fact being born anywhere in cyclic existence entails suffering. Therefore it is necessary to seek liberation from cyclic existence.

Furthermore, we must also seek liberation for all sentient beings. We do this because there are no other sentient beings who have not been one of our parents at some stage. Thus, as our parents all sentient beings have been kind to us. So seeking only personal liberation is very selfish. It is not an appropriate wish because how can we leave all the other motherly and fatherly sentient beings behind in cyclic existence. Therefore, right from this moment, we have engage in the practice of the path of the greater vehicle, or Mahayana.

Furthermore, the type of bodhichitta which we should generate must be much stronger and more forceful than the one generated in the sutra or the common vehicle. Right from this moment the main practice that we should be doing is to begin to engage in the Mahayana path, by generating and developing the bodhichitta mind, to the point that it becomes spontaneous, arising without depending on any effort on our part. When we have this bodhichitta mind, we shall have very great determination and willpower to benefit all other sentient beings. It is said that with bodhichitta mind your thought to benefit other beings is so strong that you are determined to endure any hardship to save all other beings, even if it takes aeons to do so.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that the bodhisattva mind in Sutrayana shows a greater force of determination to benefit other beings, because you are prepared to benefit all other beings for as long as it takes, even if that means aeons of years.

Out of consideration for other sentient beings, your high degree of determination and thought of benefiting others gives you the urge to achieve complete enlightenment as quickly as possible. The more quickly you do so, the better for other sentient beings. So you realise the importance of engaging in the secret mantra path to quickly achieve the state of enlightenment within a single lifetime in this age of degeneration.

The beginning of the secret mantra path is taking the four initiations to establish the seeds of the four types of

bodies. These initiations also to create a ripening cause to cultivate the path of union of the clear light and illusory bodies, which lead one to achieve the ultimate state of union of a buddha.

The lam-rim text says that by meditating on the various stage-by-stage developments of the tantric path, one can see the state of union of a buddha, and how to achieve it. The immediate causes of it are the clear light and the illusory bodies. What are the causes to achieve that? The ripening cause is following the generation stage.

When we study the generation stage we see that it has various levels. We have to start from the gross generation stage. To engage in that, we have to take the necessary initiations as a ripening cause. This means that we have to meet a fully qualified Vajra Master.

The most important precondition of the tantric path is the common path, which is gaining some realisations from the Sutrayana. We can appreciate the importance of engaging in the common path of Sutrayana by understanding that within the various stages of the common path, the most important practice is the bodhichitta mind.

If bodhichitta is so essential to the common path, we must know the causes of the bodhichitta mind, and how it can be generated. The main cause is developing compassion and loving kindness towards all other sentient beings. The cause to generate this compassion and loving kindness is renunciation, the genuine thought or aspiration to achieve liberation from cyclic existence. Giving rise to such liberation depends on recognizing the suffering nature of cyclic existence.

It is important to realise that before one can gain the realisation of the suffering nature of all cyclic existence, one has to first realise the suffering of lower rebirth. To become aware of, and generate some thought of how to prevent the suffering of lower rebirth, one has to see the essence or meaning of this human rebirth. Such thoughts will only arise if we see the preciousness, rarity and impermanence of this human life.

When beginning spiritual practice the most important thing is to rely upon a spiritual guru. We engage in the lam-rim practice by undertaking a reflective meditation on the various stages of the lam-rim path, from beginning to end, from guru devotion to buddhahood. Or you can do the meditation backwards from buddhahood to guru devotion. We can also apply this to cover the stages of the tantric path as well.

To make substantial progress in our practice, we must try to focus on the level of practice which suits our capacities, and to practise that which we are capable of doing and understanding. We should try not to have the attitude of focussing on higher and profound practices, instead of the practices that we can actually do. Progress is achieved by working upwards from the base levels. Having made progress and achieved the lowest step, we can direct our focus onto the next step. The focus should remain there until we gain the realisations of that stage. Only then do we go to the next step. Although our main focus is developing our spiritual practice at whatever the level we are at, we can also do reflective meditations on the entire path of Sutrayana and Tantrayana. By doing a reflective meditation on the whole path we gain an

overall view, and at least implant the seeds of the entire stages of the path within our mind.

Now that we have met the stainless teachings of both sutra and tantra, we are also encouraged to take the opportunity of engaging in the highest yoga tantric practice, by receiving any of the initiations of the three main deities of Guhyusamaya, Heruka, and Yamantaka. Not only in sutra but also in tantra, one should at least plant the seeds by entering into the highest tantric initiations.

Through entering those initiations you engage in the generation and completion stages, traversing the entire stages of the path, and at least doing some reflective meditation on these stages. If, in addition to reflective meditation, we become very familiar with the tantric generation and completion stages, then based on the development of our bodhicitta mind, we can gain very high and profound realisations in this very lifetime. It is possible that even in this life, in a single meditation sitting, like the gyawa wen-sa-wa, the father and son, one can achieve the ultimate state of union of a Buddha.

This basically completes the teachings of the lam-rim. At this point it is customary to recite the dedication chapter from *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, which we shall do next week after our usual prayers and meditation.

© Tara Institute

Note on authentication

Transcribed from the tape by Majola Oosthuizen

Edited by Adair Bunnnett and Alan Molloy

Checked by Sandup Tsering and Alan Molloy

Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



12 December 2000

We begin tonight by engaging in a meditation on bodhichitta together. Assuming that you are all very familiar with the meditation to generate bodhichitta mind, try to make sure that you have the right physical posture and frame of mind. Make sure that you are physically very relaxed with your mind drawn inwards, and then just let this bodhichitta mind arise from your meditation.

We meditated together for a while

Please come out of your meditation now. Only the Buddha can teach or hear Dharma while in a state of meditative equipoise. For us ordinary beings it is not feasible to do so. We cannot do a sitting meditation, and at the same time study or listen to the Dharma, or indeed any other activities.

You can guess Lama Tsong Khapa's status from his statue. His right hand is at his heart in the gesture of teaching Dharma, and his left is in the gesture of meditative equipoise, resting below the navel. This symbolises his attainment of complete enlightenment.

We are not going to spend much time on teachings tonight. Remember that the great Kadampa masters said that there are two important elements to remember in whatever activities you undertake: those at the beginning and those at the end. At the beginning it is important to set the right motivation, and at the end it is important to dedicate the merit from the activity.

In terms of life form we have obtained this excellent and very rare opportunity of a human life of leisure and endowment, with a sound mind having the capacity to discriminate right from wrong and so on. In terms of the spiritual teaching or Dharma, we have the opportunity to study the complete teachings of the Sutrayana and Mantrayana, and we have met the perfect spiritual guide. So we are in a very fortunate situation indeed.

The most beneficial thing we should do in order to make these opportunities meaningful, and to extract some purpose from this life, is to engage in any actions which help us to calm our mind, whether they be called meditation, Dharma practice or some other activity. We should think that in essence calming our mind is the best action we can do to make these opportunities meaningful.

As a means of calming the mind, we are extremely fortunate that we have studied the whole teaching of the lam rim extensively. If you think of it, the lam rim teachings are the essence of all the teachings of the

Buddha. It is presented to us like a prepared meal, easily applied and easily understood.

I am happy and delighted to have had the opportunity to give the complete lam rim teachings to you. It is the culmination of all the effort I have put into in the study of the lam rim. I was 19 years old when I received extensive teachings on this lam rim commentary from the late Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, Junior Tutor to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The teachings went for over a month, and each day I had to travel to and from Sera to Lhasa where the teachings were given, a journey of about 8 kilometres each way.

We all have to consider how fortunate we are to have this opportunity to study the lam rim. What is important now is to apply these teachings, as much as possible, to calm our mind and particularly to generate bodhichitta mind.

Then we read Chapter 10 of Shantideva's "A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life" together.

While I read the following prayers, try to cultivate the bodhichitta motivation. Our purpose for engaging in this spiritual practice is to achieve the unsurpassed state of complete enlightenment, and through achieving that to free all other beings from their state of suffering and lead them to the state of complete enlightenment.

Then Geshe-la read some prayers, saying at the end,

Pabongka's *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand* was first taught at Choezang hermitage, which was some distance from Sera Monastery. When I saw the words Choezang hermitage in this prayer I remembered studying Lama Tsong Khapa's *Essence of Eloquent Speech* there with my friend Geshe Sonam Rigzin.

I want to thank you all for making this great commitment to studying the lam rim teachings, which I feel greatly honoured and happy to have given. Many of you had the great opportunity to study the complete lam rim. This has not only benefited you in your individual practice, but also when you have presented the lam rim or Buddhism to other people. So many of you have gained a lot of benefits. Having made so much effort in studying the lam rim teachings, it is important to retain the knowledge you have gained during the course of your study, and to put it into practice as much as possible.

I am also very delighted because I have heard words of praise from others about Tara Institute, its members and its students. This admiration from others shows that the Institute has a good name, and reflects well upon the people involved in the Centre who are trying to put the

teaching into practice. Putting the teaching into practice, shows others what a good human nature and personality is like. I believe that this is why the Centre has such a good name, and receives so much admiration from others. I would like to thank you, and encourage you to continue your study and practice of Dharma.

Overall the other spiritual activities of the Centre have all gone really very well. This includes Monday night Introduction to Meditation classes, children's Sunday School, and school visits to introduce the Dharma. I want to personally thank those who have given their time to make all those activities possible, and so very successful. I understand that many of you have little spare time, yet you find the time to give to the Centre to run its activities. That is greatly appreciated.

We must also remember that through the Centre we can reach a great number of people, and there is even more potential to reach an even greater number of people in the community. On Monday night the Centre only charges \$5. Really, in these days that is almost nothing. For a cup of tea I pay \$2.50 or \$2.75, and that does not include a biscuit. Here, after Monday Night meditation we provide tea and a biscuit. The other teachings are all freely accessible to people.

This shows that we have created the facilities and conditions to provide teachings, and the opportunity for people to learn meditation. So we must really appreciate the people who give time and effort to make that happen. The effort that they make can reach a great number of people and be of great benefit to them.

Dennis Moore then expressed the gratitude of all students for the teachings and asked that Geshe-la teach us the lam rim again and again until we understand it. He thanked Sandup for the translations and for being a spiritual friend. Both Geshe-la and Sandup each received a bunch of flowers as a small gesture of appreciation.

© *Tara Institute*

Note on authentication

Transcribed from the tape by Majola Oosthuizen

Edited by Adair Bunnett and Alan Molloy

Checked by Sandup Tsering and Alan Molloy
