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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་འག་བཅུངས།

4 July 1995

Reinforce your motivation by thinking that your reason for studying and practising the lam rim is to attain complete state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and with this strong thought, to make this life most meaningful and not without purpose.

Making life meaningful:

It is very important to constantly remind ourselves to make the best use of our life: to generate the thought that until now we have used this life for the good purpose of practising dharma, which will be of benefit now and forever. In addition to this positive thought, you should also strongly affirm the intention to continue to practise dharma so as to make the remainder of this life meaningful.

We should always try to feel regret for all the negative deeds and thoughts done in the past, and make a strong affirmation not to repeat them in the future. If you put your best effort into spiritual practice, then every day is worth living, and the longer you live the more benefit you get out of your life.

On the other hand, if you forget dharma and always engage in negative actions, then instead of gaining something from life, every day you will lose something. Then, living a long life is not worthwhile, since you only accumulate more negativities.

So it is important to always try our best to practise dharma. For the most of us, this means to safeguard all the vows we have taken, such as individual liberation vows, and bodhisattva or tantric vows (for those of us who have taken initiations). These vows are like our inner jewel or treasure, so we must maintain them as purely as possible. Then they will be a source of future happiness, and even material wealth.

For many of us practice means taking self-initiation. If you have completed a retreat in association with any tantric practice, do not completely forget the practice as if you have finished the path. Continue to practise with self-initiation, the benefit of which is to purify even root downfalls.

There are benefits from dharma practice, so day by day make an effort to progress along this path.

A balanced approach:

It is best to combine our normal day-to-day worldly activities and spiritual practice. Just devoting all our time and energy on working to obtain food and clothing is not enough, either now or for the future.

While we continue our daily life and work activities we should also try to practise dharma. Put aside some time to contemplate dharma: any topic of dharma such as "What does precious human rebirth mean?" or "What are the eight freedoms and ten endowments of a perfect human rebirth?" Regardless of the duration, set aside some time to do dharma practice as purely and completely as possible.

Of course, in the texts we learn that when you begin your spiritual journey or path you must renounce the world. But in practice you can only physically give up all worldly activities - job, friends etc. - if that decision comes out of a true sense of renunciation. With a true sense of renunciation there will be no retreat from your pursuit of that path when facing difficulties, nor will there be any regret at a later stage.

But to experience true renunciation is very difficult. Therefore it is better to have a more balanced approach without giving up everything at the beginning. Otherwise, without true renunciation, as soon as there are difficulties in the practice, there will be an inability to cope with them, or there will be frustration with slow progress. Then later there will be regret about the decision to follow dharma practice, or even the thought that dharma practice is of no value or benefit, or that it is too hard.

So there is more value if your approach is not one sided in the sense of being only dharma. It is not that this is not right, but because if you are not ready you could end up generating a wrong view, and losing faith in dharma.

Of course at the beginning of dharma practice it seems very appealing to take vows or to change one's life-style to follow the model of an ideal practitioner, since such a model seems to offer a more peaceful happy life. It is like someone with no experience of sitting in positions of authority, who believes such people have many privileges of which they can take advantage. In reality it is different when you are the one actually sitting in that chair.

It is good to do what suits us in practical life. Therefore

it is best to have a balanced life, and practise without changing your outer life too much, so that you do not become an inconvenience, or shock your family and friends. What they should see is that you are like any one else. Not only can you work and fulfil your responsibilities, but you can also achieve something extra.

The right way to practise dharma:

We are focusing upon knowing the right way to practise dharma. Without really knowing the meaning of practising dharma, some people have the notion that the practice of dharma means not engaging in normal relationships. As a result the man abandons his girlfriend and becomes a monk, or the woman abandons her boyfriend and becomes a nun. Then later they face problems as a result of not finding a girlfriend or boyfriend.

How should we make progress? Our focus should be on our mind. Our mind is so thick with desire for sex or wealth, and if we practise without remedying these things, then, although on the surface there may be a change, in fact our actions cause damage to ourselves.

Therefore the practice of dharma depends on our own state of mind. The opportunity to practise dharma is there for all – those people with a very busy working life, those in other worldly affairs, the famous and the very rich. People can practise dharma to suit their lifestyle.

Buddha said to an early king "There is liberation in a householder's life". This indicates that the real dharma is something which takes place in our mind – within ourselves. It is not something which takes place outwardly.

No matter what you do, if you perform that action out of a view to benefit others then there is always some benefit as a result. Even when, due to a lack of knowledge, that action turns out to be non-beneficial, or not positive, then there is still some positive result, since the action was derived from your beneficial attitude to others.

Practical ways to practice dharma in everyday life:

As a business person, you can think that the things you sell will be very useful and beneficial to others. By generating such a thought, then whenever business is conducted you are integrating spiritual practice, which is a cause to generate compassion or a beneficial attitude to others. If the goods you sell are over-priced, then there is nothing wrong if there is also regret about that, since this is a spiritual practice which purifies some portion of the negativity you create by cheating others.

If we know how to practise dharma and are very conscious of it, then every single footstep you take, or round of breathing, or every word uttered can be integrated as part of our spiritual practice – as part of our spiritual development.

If we develop love and compassion to others, and then develop this to the point that it absorbs into our daily

thought process, then naturally everything we do (because of our love and compassion) can be transformed into our spiritual practice – for example the common act of offering tea to a friend.

422.212.23 Suffering Of The Godly Beings (Continued)¹

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We are up to the topic of the suffering of godly beings, particularly those in the desire realms.

Without recognising the suffering of the godly beings in the desire realms, we might wish to be reborn there, since they are comparatively endowed with enormous material wealth, pleasure and mental peace. We may even mistakenly believe that the pleasures of a god are the everlasting peace and bliss of liberation. When we recognise the various sufferings that the gods of the desire realm experience, then we won't have any wish to be reborn there.

The desire realm gods are also called Knowers of the Three Times because they are capable of knowing their past, present and future life.

While still in the godly realms, and enjoying a good body and resources, with good companions, seeing what they will next experience in any of the three lower rebirths, causes them great pain and fear which they cannot tolerate.

According to the text, which you can study for yourselves, when the godly beings approach death, they undergo suffering in the one week prior to death, as they experience the five distant signs and five close signs of death.

In addition there are fights between the gods and demigods, and stronger gods abuse lower gods, even banishing them. In the presence of stronger gods the weaker lower gods thus undergo misery and suffering, which makes them lose their self esteem and dignity.

Therefore taking rebirth in the godly realms will not free us from suffering. Indeed being born there consumes all the virtuous merit or karma accumulated in the past. Furthermore no new positive karma is created, because of the environment and indulgent life. The lifespan of the gods is so long that they exhaust a huge amount of positive merit, and so after death most of them go to a lower realm.

Reducing Attachment In Our Life

In some ways the experience and suffering of the godly beings can be related to our own experience in this human level of rebirth. Our living conditions – the place where we live, the environment, the resources we enjoy – are comparatively very fortunate. We should see them as the result of our own positive karma, from our

¹ Page 499 Liberation in the palm of your hand. The title used in the text is: "Thinking about the suffering of the gods".

meritorious actions of the past. We must therefore be aware that by utilising these good conditions, we are using up the merit we have created in the past. If we do not create more positive actions, then we shall face the same fate as godly beings at the time of death, and fall into lower realms in the next life.

We can also apply our knowledge of why the gods experience fear at the time of death. They have had a very good life, and now they still desire it, even as they are dying. So at death they suffer as a result of not wanting to be separated from the source of their pleasure. In the same way, if we are also attached to our good living conditions, wealth, friends, and so on, then at death, without any choice, we are separated from them, and we shall undergo the same suffering which the godly beings experience at their time of death. So from contemplating the suffering of the gods at their time of death, and the cause of those sufferings, we can learn that we are no different from them, and realise that we must do something so that the same thing will not happen to us.

We must practise to minimise attachment, because where there is attachment, there will be suffering when you lose the object of attachment, or fail to find it. To overcome attachment we must generate renunciation not only to this body but even to the godly forms, which are also the nature of suffering.

So try to meditate to generate renunciation. Even doing this for one minute is worthwhile. Then at best, even if the desire for things is not completely overcome while living, at the time of death your mind will not have desire and will not cling to various objects. As a human we can generate true renunciation by generating an awareness of our own suffering, and also generate compassion for others by observing their suffering.

Our effort in practising dharma should in some way influence our mind to be in a positive state of virtue. On a daily basis we must train our mind to feel love and compassion for all other beings, or just to be in a state of peace, or even to be in a state of equanimity or indifference. On a regular basis train your mind not to hold any negative attitude for an hour, or even ten minutes. If you cannot do that at least try not have any obvious negative state of mind.

It is important to train our mind consistently so that it becomes very soft and obedient. When you reach the state where you can direct or shift the mind as you please, then it is not hard to do the same thing at the time of death. Then you can cultivate a happy peaceful state of mind, which will lead to a happy rebirth.

So your future rebirth is totally in your own hands. With a trained mind and a very positive attitude even at the time of death, then it is certain that your future life will be very fortunate. Then the transition from this life to the next is a matter of replacing this old, weak body with a new one.

In the discussion next week the compulsory question for the following week's test will be on describing all the benefits of hearing dharma with reference to the verse which begins 'Hearing [the dharma] is like a lamp which clears away the darkness of ignorance. Not only is it a supreme lamp but it is supreme wealth which cannot be stolen by others'. Based on that verse then, explain the benefits of hearing or listening to dharma.

One of the important factors for good discussion is to be very friendly, and share your knowledge and experience with each other. So the discussion should be mutual, where all benefit and support each other, and contribute happiness and joy of life to each other

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

The original typescript is prepared from Alan Molloy's original transcript, which has been checked against Damien Busby's notes. Adair Bunnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.

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25 July 1995

We should try to generate the right motivation by wishing to attain the state of Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings; and for this purpose to motivate ourselves to listen to dharma and to engage in the process of transforming our own mind and that of all other sentient beings.

The Importance Of The Mind

We should try to see the spiritual teachings as the means of transforming into virtue our actions of the three doors of body, speech and mind. Your own body, mind and speech are the three things which always accompany you; you are never separated from them, and you should see them as a friend. Then, just as an outer friend has an influence on you, and just as it is an advantage to have such a friend, so too will these three doors be of advantage if they are virtuous.

We are discussing the relationship between yourself and the three doors. The mind predominates over the other two doors, and in fact it predominates over you. It is said that if the mind which predominates over you and your actions is a good friend, then naturally you will also enjoy a good state of being.

In our daily life the reason we experience unhappiness is because of negativity in the mind. Because the mind always accompanies you it is more important to establish a good relationship and harmony with your own mind, than to establish a good relationship with outer things.

Finding The True Source Of Happiness And Suffering

The spiritual teachings talk of the true source of happiness and suffering. In order to recognise that true source, we must rely upon these teachings, and cultivate a true wisdom.

The normal view of the cause or source of happiness and suffering is usually seen to be some outer or external object. Any pain, pleasure, happiness or suffering which we experience is believed to depend on those external factors. When we view things in this way we find ourselves in a very unhelpful situation, because our happiness, or suffering, is determined by some external force over which we have no control.

Indeed under circumstances where there is suffering because of some external cause, you may feel that there

is no relief from this misery until that external situation is changed. In fact some people spend their entire life experiencing this kind of misery. From these spiritual teachings we learn that apart from the normal ideal of finding happiness, and eliminating suffering, by reference to the outside world, our mind can also be the cause of suffering and happiness. We see that within us there is some factor in our own mind, which can create happiness or eliminate suffering.

Therefore we understand that the true cause of happiness and suffering is within and not without. This knowledge provides us with a different path to happiness. Finding happiness and solving problems occurs within the context of our own mind.

When we realise that happiness and suffering are not always determined by external factors but by our own mind, we have the knowledge to do something about it, independently of any outer factors.

So our normal view with its emphasis on outer things being the source of our pain and pleasure needs to be changed. We can do that by realising that what one experiences is the effect of one's own mind. In this way we see within our own mind these qualities or factors which will bring happiness. Therefore practising the teaching means to sustain, and develop, those qualities by the practice of mindfulness and alertness towards our own mindstream.

Develop Courage, Overcome Self Doubt!

To achieve any goal it is better to develop inner determination and courage than to rely upon favourable outer factors. For example if you enjoy very good health you can accomplish more things. Similarly if we cultivate a positive state of mind, and if we ensure that it is clear, then this is a tremendous force to encourage us to accomplish our aims and objectives. Because of this driving force generated within you can feel very positive about yourself, and so accomplish more.

If, on the other hand, we let our mind become discouraged, and put ourselves down for whatever reason the mind dictates, we turn ourselves into a very incapable person. We reduce ourselves to incompetence, even to the point of being separated from the rest of society. It is as a result of our own mind, that we experience these very negative feelings about ourselves.

When Separation Occurs In Relationships

We should remind ourselves of this instruction from Shantideva¹ Since we are born alone, and must die alone and no one else can take the share of our misery, what is the use of having friends?

When we are separated from a close friend we experience a great deal of misery. But if we understand our life from the point of view of the this teaching from Shantideva we shall feel encouraged to think "Why should I have to suffer? My misery is not going to encourage my departed friend to show mercy on me. Why should I undergo suffering when my departed friend is not suffering, and is indeed happy?" These are practical ways to integrate Shantideva's teachings whenever we find ourselves in such situations.

Apart from the above points if we think of ourselves in the situation of being separated from, or being deserted by a friend, there is still no certainty about your relationship, and none about the one your friend has now established with another. There is no certainty about who will suffer (or lose) more from the separation in the long run.

It is possible that as a result of this separation your life will be better in the future, and your friend may face more difficulties. With this perspective, even if you see your friend living with someone else, you will not be too upset, or unhappy with that.

The most important thing is to practise virtue under all circumstances. You cannot create non-virtues to salvage your relationship, because the result of such non-virtuous action will fall upon you. Even if the friend leaves they do not take away the result of your non-virtuous action, which you must experience.

Our main practice, therefore is to always control the uncontrolled mind; to know whether the object in the mind is something positive or negative, and depending upon this, making an effort.

As a spiritual practitioner one should wish for something more than just material necessities - food, clothing, etc. With such a wish luxurious living conditions are not important, because that is not the main goal of one's life. Rather, when the main goal of life is something higher, and there is some progress in attaining that, there is naturally less craving for material comfort and more tolerance to any immediate discomfort. For example if we look at some workers who have unclean working conditions. For them it is not the uniform they wear which is very dirty, or the dirt on their body. That does not matter much to them because their aim is not to

maintain a very clean body and wear clean clothes. Rather their aim is to make money and that goal is being satisfied. Similarly if we follow the dharma, or spiritual teachings, our goal in life has to be to transcend material goals.

The completion prayers we recited from the Four Mandalas to Cittamani Tara sadhana were composed by HH Dalai Lama's late Junior tutor, Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang, who was a manifestation of Heruka.

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¹ *Bodhisattva Charyavatara* chapter 7, verse 32. Another translation of this is:

At birth I was born alone and at death too I shall die alone;
as this pain cannot be shared by others, what use are
obstacle making friends?

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1 August 1995

Subduing The Mind And Attaining Wisdom

As is always the case, whenever we engage in spiritual practice we should focus on the aim of the practice, which is to subdue the mind and enhance its wisdom. Therefore it is very important to always relate any practice to one's mind, and begin with the right motivation. If the practice is related to our mind, then we shall find that the more we practise, the more benefit we shall obtain. So we can always feel very positive about our practice because we can benefit from it.

We may not fully accomplish all our spiritual goals in this lifetime. However if we maintain the continuity of our spiritual practice until the end of this life, by calming and purifying the mind, and increasing our wisdom, then our life will be meaningful and not wasted.

We should always take responsibility for ourself. When we face some obstacle in our life or spiritual practice, we should acknowledge that, and be courageous enough to face it. Rather than relying upon support from outside, we must always be self-guided. Otherwise if we do not encourage ourselves, then it is easy to lose our spirit or self determination, and so not achieve success in either spiritual or mundane goals.

In our spiritual practices, the main goal is to develop a positive state of mind. With a positive state of mind, we can recognise those difficulties or obstacles which may weaken our practice, and make a maximum effort to overcome them.

Wholesome And Unwholesome Actions

The benefits of spiritual practice are very precious and valuable. This spiritual practice is like a great treasure which once found cannot be stolen or removed by others.

Spiritual teachings means a true understanding of the difference between wholesome and unwholesome. Practising those teachings is acting on the basis of our knowledge of the advantages of practising wholesome thoughts or actions, and the disadvantages of any unwholesome thoughts or actions.

Those of you who have taken spiritual vows or commitments should not regard them as a burden to be carried, or a restriction or restraint. Rather, you should try to see the benefits of safeguarding those vows, as

well as the benefits of adopting wholesome practice, and the disadvantages of following unwholesome ways of doing things. On that basis you make an effort to avoid the unwholesome. In this way you will not feel that following the spiritual path is an extra burden to your life. Rather, as you follow that path, you will see from your daily experiences that there is more peace, and satisfaction in your life.

Initially, taking a vow is making a commitment or promise to the Buddha that you will follow his path. So it is very important to try to develop, as much as possible, some knowledge of the benefits of choosing that path. Then, following that path, and safeguarding that vow, is a source of rejoicing. Not only will there be joy and happiness in this life as a result of following that path, but you also create the causes for future happiness as well.

Assessing Your Spiritual Progress

We have to ask ourselves "What extra benefit have I obtained by following spiritual practice?" In general someone who follows spiritual practice must have some extra quality over those who have no faith in that practice. Of course, this extra quality is not wealth, or physical looks, but it is some extraordinary qualities, resulting from a particular state of mind.

You must examine for yourself whether or not you have these qualities. Compare yourself now to before you met and began to practise the spiritual teachings. See if there is any change. What positive qualities have developed in your mind? If you have chosen a celibate life, finding out whether you have found extra benefit or not, depends on whether you have found extra inner peace, happiness and joy in the mind. Once you have seen where you stand in your life, or in your spiritual practice, you will not feel particularly happy if someone outside calls you a god, nor will you be upset if they put you down by saying "You are evil".

The Lord Buddha taught that the main purpose of the teaching is cultivating a positive state of mind, and subduing the negative states of mind. Not only this, but when put into practice, Buddha's teaching has the full potential to actively transform our mind into a positive state, and remove all negative states of mind. So if we practise with the understanding that Buddha's teaching

is to remove faults and gather good qualities in the mind, and then make an effort, we shall make progress accordingly.

Purifying Negativities Through Spiritual Practice

One obvious benefit of practising the spiritual teachings is our knowledge of how to purify the negativities which we accumulate. It is hard to prevent negativities completely, but how one deals with those negativities illustrates the difference between one who follows spiritual teachings and one who does not. If two people each create the same negative action at the same time, then the one who follows the spiritual teachings may later feel regret about those negative actions because of their belief in the law of cause and effect. That regret may later bring a change in their attitude, and may even lead them to purify that negativity by means of the four purifying remedies¹. Therefore the spiritual practitioner having created the negativity, and later purified it, will not have to experience the result of that negativity in the future. Indeed they may obtain a happy rebirth in future. Whereas the person without faith in the law of karma will have to pay for their negative acts in the future, for instance, by taking a lower rebirth.

Although it is hard to always feel positive about our daily spiritual practice, it is not without purpose. It has a great purpose, and for that you should feel positive.

422.212.23 Suffering Of Gods In Form And Formless Realms (Cont)

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In regard to the Lam Rim topics, we have finished the types of sufferings experienced by the gods of the desire realms. Next is the sufferings of the gods of form and formless realms.

The gods of form and formless realms spend their entire lifetime in a state of meditative concentration. Their life is not dependent upon outer foods, as they are sustained by the deep state of concentration. For aeons and aeons they remain in that single session of meditation.

It is said that these gods undergo no obvious suffering such as we in the desire realms experience. There is no suffering of suffering, nor is there suffering of change. However they are subject to the third suffering, the pervasive suffering of conditions. Because they are subject to pervasive suffering at the end of their lifespan, they can fall to lower rebirths.

Even though they remain in that concentration for a long time, they are not liberated from samsara. They still have mental delusions and obscurations and no control over life and death.

It is said that the gods of form realms mistakenly believe

that their state of concentration is the state of everlasting peace or liberation. So, initially upon taking birth in that realm they may think that they have attained the permanent state of liberation. Then, when they emerge from that state of meditation, they discover that what they thought was their liberation was not so, with the result that some gods generate the wrong view that the state of liberation is not possible. Because of such wrong views, they are then reborn in the lower realms.

The only time the gods of formless realms have a thought is when they were first born there. They have the thought "I am born". Then they enter that state of concentration until the end, consuming the positive karma which they have accumulated in the past. As in the case of the desire realm gods, since they do not accumulate new karma in that realm, most of them go to a lower rebirth after death.

The experience of formless gods is like us going into a deep sleep, and just before sleep having the thought "I am sleeping." Then we sleep, and on waking finding ourselves on the edge of a deep cliff. How frightening it would be to wake up like this. Similarly, formless gods from the moment of birth to their death, remain in that state of concentration, then they fall to lower rebirths.

Further in the text the contaminated aggregates are mentioned as an example of pervasive suffering, and as an explanation of the cause of our bondage to suffering. The highest of formless realms is the peak of cyclic existence. The lowest is the boundless level of the hell realms. From the peak of cyclic existence to boundless hell realms, all beings carry contaminated aggregates and so undergo limitless suffering, and are trapped in endless rounds of birth, death and suffering.

Seminar Topics

First recite the Heart Sutra and then have tea. Then discuss the coming seminar the main topic of which is the view of selflessness.

There are two types of selflessness:

selflessness of persons

selflessness of phenomena

From the point of view of Prasangika school (the highest school of tenets), there is no difference between these two types of selflessness, in terms of one being more subtle than the other. And yet it is said there is a difference in realising these two types of selflessness.

If there is no difference in terms of subtlety or grossness, then why are there two opposing conceptions of selflessness? There are two conceptions of self, and how do these two conceptions of self oppose these two conceptions of selflessness?

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¹ The four forces: regret, basis, remedy, and resolve.

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8 August 1995

Try to generate a good motivation

We have talked a lot about the various types of suffering, and the faults, or pitfalls of cyclic existence. The purpose of contemplating those faults is to overcome our attachment to cyclic existence. When we contemplate clearly on cyclic existence we realise that wherever we take rebirth in cyclic existence, whether it be a higher or lower realm of existence, the nature of existence is the three types of suffering.

Pervasive Suffering - Our Own Contaminated Aggregates:

Pervasive suffering is the main, or root source of the other two types of suffering which are the suffering of misery, and the suffering of change. So when we talk of generating renunciation towards cyclic existence, we have to know, and recognise, the nature of pervasive suffering very clearly. Because all the sufferings which we experience in cyclic existence are due to being subject to that pervasive suffering. What is pervasive suffering? It is nothing but the afflicted, or contaminated aggregates which we possess, no matter where we are born in cyclic existence.

There are five contaminated aggregates - form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness - and these are the actual cyclic existence, or samsara. As we have heard, over and over, samsara is the source of all our troubles and sufferings. When we talk of the bondage to samsara, we are talking of the bondage of our own contaminated aggregates. So seeking liberation from samsara means we must relate that samsara to something within ourselves.

From our own experience we can come to understand that of the five contaminated aggregates, we are particularly attached to the aggregate of form, and this attachment leads us to create so many karmic actions. Because of the existence of the contaminated aggregate of form there is feeling. There is attachment to feelings of pleasure, but hatred or dislike of the feeling of pain. In this way we generate the very prejudiced attitudes of viewing some as friends, and others as enemies.

Therefore the aggregate of form is the basis on which various types of feelings are generated. It would not be too detrimental if, having obtained the contaminated

aggregates, there were no fluctuating feelings of pain and pleasure, etc. But with this contaminated aggregate of form, these fluctuating feelings of pleasure and pain are almost inevitable. In order to generate a sense of renunciation to cyclic existence, one needs to contemplate the faults of one's own constituent aggregates, and the way they are so susceptible to change, because as soon as one acquires these aggregates, there is no escape from cyclic existence.

Pervasive Suffering Of Conditioning Defined:

The literal meaning of pervasive suffering is the pervasive suffering of conditioning.

'Pervasive' means present in all types of suffering. If we go into detail, 'pervasive' indicates the pervasiveness of the seed of karma and delusion, which means that as long as one is subject to pervasive suffering, one possesses the seed of karma and delusions.

Think of how, when we are in a very calm state and then, on meeting some unexpected conditions, we immediately lose that calmness and generate anger in the mind. Even if we remain in a calm state of equanimity, if we look deeply inside there is still a seed of karma and mental delusions - the potential to generate very hostile states of mind.

In the term pervasive suffering of conditioning, the word 'conditioning' indicates that pervasive suffering is the condition to create negative karmic actions. As mentioned earlier, we have the tendency to always be attracted when we perceive a beautiful form, and feel aversion towards an ugly object. We have the same discriminating attitude with regard to the various feelings of pain and pleasure, and due to such discriminating attitudes of liking and disliking we create various negative karmas. Therefore this pervasive suffering is something which is most intolerable.

The aggregates are called 'contaminated' or 'afflicted' because they are the result of afflictive emotions, or mental delusions. Since these aggregates are dependant on afflictive emotions they are called afflicted aggregates. It is similar to describing those people under the rule of a king, as the king's people.

The Whole Of Samsaric Existence Is Suffering And Deceptive:

We realise the suffering nature of samsaric life by

contemplating our own life situation. We can think of a continuous period of time in which we are very helpless. Without any choice or desire we have to confront unwanted things, where there is almost no solution. Not only do you have no choice other than to suffer, but no-one else can help you. For example, there are some people with chronic disease. It is a situation they must experience alone. Doctors cannot help, neither can medicines, nurses or friends.

Therefore when we contemplate the nature of this suffering of samsaric life we must remind ourselves of our own real life situation. We are so trapped in it, and no-one comes to help. Even if someone does come to assist, they cannot do much to help that situation. It is not right to blame this situation on a friend, or on an outside condition, because the cause of all these events is having to take this type of life - this samsaric body.

Even when we think of our own body, and go deeper, we find there are no [good]¹ qualities. Similarly if we look into any other object within cyclic existence - material possessions, friends, relatives - nothing in cyclic existence has even a single [good]² quality. What they are is unreliable, and very deceptive objects. In this way we try to realise how in cyclic existence there is not even a single virtue to be found in any object. Therefore to develop an understanding of the faults of cyclic existence, one generates renunciation, and reduces attachment to the appearance of various objects of cyclic existence.

Developing A True Thought Of Renunciation:

True renunciation is the thought of seeking liberation from cyclic existence. As Lama Tsong Khapa said:³

True renunciation is generated when, day and night, this thought of seeking liberation arises as a result of a long familiarity with the understanding of how all the appearing marvels of cyclic existence are unreliable, and are untrustworthy.

True renunciation is generating this very spontaneous thought of seeking liberation. It is a very spontaneous thought, just as someone who is starving to death would dream of, and have endless thoughts of eating. Therefore there is a great deal of emphasis on producing a true sense of renunciation, because the effectiveness of our spiritual practice depends upon that. If we can generate some degree of renunciation it can bring a more stable peace and happiness to our mind. Thinking of the preciousness of our present life, we should not let this life pass without achieving something lasting - a concrete goal in life.

Although we have achieved countless past lives, most were wasted. It is just by some rare conditions, by chance,

that we are able to find this excellent form of life now. So utilise this life to achieve some lasting purpose in life such as making some effort to cultivate renunciation, thoughts of seeking liberation, and also to contemplate the law of karma.

It is important to always inspire yourself, and to get into spiritual practice out of your own motivation. This is the only way. How much would we listen to others if they advise us to practise? We won't listen. We must produce the motivation to practise from our own side, without any excuse. If we use the excuse "There is no time", that is not right. When death comes there are no exceptions, and death does not wait. So engage in practice on a regular basis, regardless of the length of time.

Even if we do not accomplish all spiritual qualities in this current life, your efforts will bear fruit in future lives. Even if we are born in cyclic existence, we shall not be the same as other miserable and confused beings. Because of our knowledge of renunciation and the law of karma, we shall have more potential, and the benefits of what we have practised in this life.

Always feel positive about spiritual practice, without discriminating between whether the practice is complete or incomplete. We also have to appreciate for ourselves, every single quality of dharma which we cultivate in ourselves. We must cherish even the thought of wishing to follow dharma, the thought of following the footsteps of the Lord Buddha.

The causes to produce such a thought take a great deal of effort and time. Having the thought or wish to practise dharma is like finding something that cannot be found in three thousand world systems. It is very precious and is very positive for the reason if you think of the place where you live, and the social culture and background of that place. If the culture of a country is influenced by Buddhadharma, it is quite easy for people to follow that way of thinking.

For that reason, one sees how one cultivates the thought of Buddhadharma, because that thought is the source of all joy and benefit to all beings. Always try to feel positive, because development on the spiritual path depends upon the individual and their conditions. Therefore, cherish whatever spiritual qualities you have gained so far. They are very precious, so think of safeguarding them.

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

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¹ Editor: The usual word used in Tibetan is *Yon-tan* which means good quality or excellence or excellent quality.

² *ibid*

³ *Three Principal Aspects Of The Path* by Lama Tsong Khapa.