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# 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་ལག་བཅུངས།

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12 July 1994

Try to generate the motivation of bodhicitta by thinking that I sincerely wish to attain the state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and for this reason I study the Lam Rim and will do my best to put it into practice.

In other words as part of generating the right frame of mind, you develop the motivation to pursue, study and practise in order to turn your mind away from cyclic existence, and achieve that ultimate state of liberation, which is one of buddhahood that possesses all excellent qualities. The reason for wishing to attain this state, and to be rid of negative states of mind, is all for the benefit of all beings.

## The Purpose And Meaning Of Dharma Practice

The purpose of following the Dharma is to transform our ways of thinking and acting into positive habits. Of course the ultimate purpose is to benefit others. The main thing that effects the attainment of both these goals is our state of mind. If the motivation is positive, then naturally you benefit others through your actions. Without such a motivation, there is no real thought of helping others, and so there will be no real benefit to others as a result of our actions.

We must constantly remind ourselves that the instructions in the Lam Rim are an effective method of bringing about a positive transformation of our actions of body, speech and mind. If the Lam Rim teachings cannot change our thoughts and actions then nothing else will do so either. A true spiritual practitioner is someone who lives their life in such a manner that all other things are secondary importance compared to Dharma. Even if we do not always fully practise the Dharma in daily life, but try to do as much as we can, it will still be very beneficial both in this life and future lives. It may be difficult to be a true spiritual practitioner, but at the very least we must not forget the benefit of Dharma both now and in the future.

## The True Source Of Happiness And Suffering

Through Dharma we are basically trying to find within ourselves the cause of happiness, and solutions to various problems and difficulties we face. So the emphasis is on cleansing one's mental continuum, or in other words, ridding ourselves of negative states of

mind. It is important to know whether the continuing source of problems lies within ourselves or in the outer world. On the positive side, we need to know where the true cause of happiness lies. Do we find it within ourselves or is it to be found somewhere in the external world?

From our experience we know that there are some external conditions that can bring happiness and pleasure, but they are very impermanent and quick to change. We have hardly any control over these external conditions. So if our view of the causes of suffering and happiness is based on these external conditions, we can see that it is impossible to achieve liberation and feel independent, because we have no control over them. The Dharma shows us that the causes of happiness and suffering are within us. Through following the Lam Rim instructions and integrating them into daily practice, the inner cause of happiness becomes apparent. Then we see how we can control our life and be totally independent of external factors. Without this inner knowledge and strength our sense of happiness or unhappiness is always dependant on external circumstances. Through following the Lam Rim teachings, we can take full advantage of the enormous potential of the human mind and body. We can see there is some positive force within us that can ensure continuous happiness in this life, and which can also save us from suffering which would otherwise be caused by external factors.

With a broad and open way of thinking, we can see everybody has some complaint about their life. This is the same whether people are rich, poor, middle class or even those of us here. Socially and financially we are from different backgrounds but all of us have some complaint or problem to resolve. The difference is in how seriously that problem is perceived. Two people may have exactly the same problem. For one the problem bothers them greatly, and may even harm their mind because they think of nothing else. When confronted with a difficulty all their mind sees is that difficulty. Day after day their mind is caught in that problem. Even though the problem faced is no different from that faced by others they take it more seriously. The other person sees exactly the same problem in a different way, and so does not dwell on it. They acknowledge the problem, but also know that there are other positive factors in their

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lives. The real problem is obviously not so much to do with the actual situation, but more to do with the way we look at the problem. So when we face problems it is important to remember the positive aspects of our life.

Adopting a very broad and open way of thinking helps our mind to enjoy peace and happiness. Then in the face problems and difficulties, we are able to deal with them, find solutions, and overcome those problems. Without a calm and relaxed mind it is generally hard to think clearly.

We must try to realise that a lot of problems are unnecessarily created by our own minds. Someone once told Geshela that she felt very lonely. Geshela did not know her background well, so he asked if she had a partner. She replied that she did, and that their relationship was good and harmonious. When Geshela asked how she could have a good relationship and still feel lonely, she thought for a while and then Geshela saw her face light up. Spending just a few moments analysing your situation can help a lot. Through this you can see the reason for unhappiness is lack of contentment, rather than a lack of living conditions or friends. Through focussing on the positive living conditions, you place your problem in perspective and so overcome unnecessary mental problems.

### **The Causes Of Great Wealth**

In the Lam Rim teachings we are engaged in studying the causes of the eight ripened qualities. We have finished the causes of being born in a high family, race or caste. Next is the cause of acquiring great wealth. The main cause of this quality is to be very generous towards others. In order to enjoy the excellence of wealth in the future one has to overcome miserliness such as not giving material goods or the Dharma to others.

We are learning the Dharma not just to gain some intellectual knowledge but to assess the relevance of the Dharma to our daily practice. We should investigate the benefits of putting it into practice in our own life. Here we are talking about the practice of generosity, which is the main cause for acquiring great wealth in the future. For this we need to understand the practice of generosity, and its benefits for both the long term and this immediate life.

Practising generosity means giving material things, spiritual knowledge or any skill we have to others. Two special fields are our parents are, because of their great kindness to us, and refuge objects since they are the source of generating qualities for ourselves. To those stricken with disease we must practise generosity because they deserve our sympathy, love and care. We should also practise generosity to those in poverty because they are very desperate for help. We should be generous to those such as our friends to show our gratitude and respect. Generosity can even take the form of providing some advice (either Dharma or otherwise) to overcome some confusion in their mind. Anything or

advice that is given freely is also the practice of generosity. For example giving without the feeling that if I give them this knowledge then I shall not be so special. In particular it should be given and should be practised regardless of whether we are asked for assistance.

Today we celebrate the anniversary of the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma. After attaining nirvana, Buddha sat in meditative equipoise for forty-nine days. The god Brahma descended and offered a thousand spoked Dharma-wheel requesting Lord Buddha to turn the wheel of Dharma at Varanasi. Today is the anniversary of this occasion.

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

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19 July 1994

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Try to reinforce the correct motivation which is to think that the reason why I undertake this study and practice of Lam Rim, is to achieve the fully enlightened state of Buddhahood - a state that is free of all faults and possessing all qualities - for the benefit of all beings.

### The Causes Of Pleasant Speech

We continue from last week's teachings on the causes of achieving the eight ripened qualities of a human rebirth. Having finished discussing the causes of the first four excellent qualities, the fifth is pleasant speech.

The primary cause to achieve pleasant speech is to abandon the four non-virtues of speech:- lying, divisive speech, harsh speech and idle gossip - and to adopt the practice of always speaking very pleasantly to others.

As we have previously discussed in detail the shortcomings of the four non-virtues of speech we shall not repeat them. Speaking pleasantly is in the context of spiritual values or Dharma, and refers to the skill of communicating Dharma teachings to others.

It is always very important to have the right motivation when giving teachings to others. The right motivation is not a selfish one but is to help others through our communication. At the same time it is important to have a smile on your face, because that is very pleasant to others. The language used in giving teachings should be very suitable not only in terms of the content being suitable to the listener, but also in terms of the selection of words. A polite and gentle vocabulary has more positive effect on the listener.

In order to have such qualities of speech we must create a special cause. For example two people may teach the same topic, but the listener gets a different taste and feeling from each. For the listener to get a positive feeling from your teaching you must have some special qualities and skills in your speech. If you are giving a Dharma talk such as on Monday nights, you should remember this and make sure you have the right motivation. Lama Tsong Khapa always emphasised that while giving Dharma your facial appearance should be pleasing, maintaining a smile, and your speech very gentle. Even if people ask very cynical or sceptical questions you should not get upset, but maintain a clear mind and provide the most suitable answer for that person.

The skill of pleasant speech is also important in day-to-day life, where good communication skills can improve your interactions with others, as well as influence more people.

Therefore we must always remember the importance of pleasant speech. The most important thing is to put it into practice in our daily life, both in spiritual practice and in daily affairs.

### Pleasant Speech And The Four Means Of Gathering Disciples

Last week we said pleasant speech comprises the last three of the four means of gathering disciples. The first means of gathering disciples is giving of material objects.

The second is pleasant and gentle speech which implies skill in teaching or giving Dharma to others in terms of language and effective communication.

The third is teaching according to the need of others. It is not enough to simply have all the skills of teaching, and communicating with others, because we must be able to relate what we are teaching to their needs, interests and predispositions.

The fourth is practising what you teach to others. Think for example of encouraging children not to drink alcohol. Firstly the parents must stop drinking to set an example, otherwise their advice will not have much influence on the children. Similarly, if we live and abide by the Dharma teaching which we give to others, then this will have more impact and provide encouragement for others to follow that teaching.

### The Causes Of Great Power

Sixth are the causes to have great power. The cause of this is to show great respect to your teachers, masters, parents and those who are older or more senior. Another cause is making an effort to obtain positive qualities, and generating prayers wishing to have them in the future. These are said to be the cause to accomplish great power.

### The Cause To Be Reborn As A Male

The seventh ripened quality is to be reborn as a male. This quality was discussed at length earlier. It by no means discriminates against females or despises women. In this context there are some clear explanations as to

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why there are some advantages in being born as a man. To achieve this quality the cause is to wish to be male in a future life, and to have the qualities of a male.

In Buddhism there is no sexual discrimination. This is apparent if you refer to other sources and especially to the qualities of Lord Buddha himself who fully generated an unbiased attitude of compassion, with no feeling of liking some but not liking others. He had the same attitude to all beings. Within the tantric teachings, one root tantric vow is not to despise women. You completely break that root tantric vow if you despise women. Women have an essential role in accomplishing the ultimate goal of tantra. In the Vinaya (or moral codes) of Buddha, there four main types of attendants are mentioned - novice monks and nuns, and fully ordained monks and nuns. The Heart Sutra refers to sons and daughters of family or race of Buddha. It shows that both men and women can actualise the path of seeing which is direct realisation of the ultimate truth.

There is no discrimination to be found in other sources. If you think there is some discrimination, that is misinterpretation.

### **The Cause Of Powerful Mind And Body**

The cause of having the quality of powerful mind and body are voluntarily helping others by undertaking tasks which no one else could be capable of even thinking to do let alone actually performing the deed itself. If such a help cannot be provided single handedly, it can be done with the aid of others. Another cause to have powerful mind and body is to preventing harm in any form to others e.g. hitting, harming or injury and freely giving food etc. to others.

This finishes the eight ripened qualities, knowing the benefits of each, and the causes to attain them.

### **The Seven Qualities Of Higher Status**

Beside the eight ripened qualities, there are also seven qualities of higher status or rebirth which we come across in other texts. Some are the same as in the eight ripened qualities. They are:

1. Good race
2. Attractive body
3. Long life
4. No sickness
5. Pleasant speech
6. Wealth
7. Wisdom knowledge.

Apart from wisdom knowledge, the other six are contained in the eight ripened qualities. Therefore the causes of these six are no different from those six ripened qualities.

Wisdom knowledge refers to the right sense of

discrimination. The Abhidharma says without this wisdom knowledge there is no means to overcome mental delusion.

One of these seven qualities of higher status is wealth which is literally power or freedom. This is having opportunity in terms of both Dharma and daily life. You have the good fortune to be able to practise Dharma if you wish, as well as enjoying a good worldly life. The causes to achieve this quality of power or freedom is not being jealous of those with more wealth, education, etc.; not being competitive with equals in terms of wealth and so on; and not having a sense of superiority towards those who have less wealth, power etc.

This is all for tonight. Now Geshela requests some people to get the tea while the others recite the Twenty-one Taras prayer. Then everyone will stand up and shake hands and ask people "How are you?", with a smile.

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26 July 1994

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Make sure you have the right frame of mind or motivation.

### The Four Wheels Of The Supreme Vehicle

Having completed the eight ripened qualities and the seven qualities of higher status or higher rebirth, we can now talk about the four other qualities known as the four wheels of the supreme vehicle.

The four qualities known as the four wheels of supreme vehicle are:

1. living in a place suitable for virtuous practice,
2. having the perfect teacher,
3. delightedly engaging in the practice of virtuous actions through the three doors of body, speech and mind,
4. having a great store of merit from the past.

#### 1. Living In A Place Suitable For Virtuous Practice

The first supreme wheel is living in a suitable place.

The Samadhi (or Calm Abiding) teachings say that such a place has the necessary conditions to enhance one's meditation practice.<sup>1</sup> The ideal place for meditation has few hindrances and is quiet and peaceful. Staying at a monastic area is a cause to find such a suitable place for meditation in the future.

#### 2. Having The Perfect Teacher

The second supreme wheel is having a perfect master or holy being.

The *Ornament of Sutra* by Maitreya states that the qualifications of a perfect teacher or holy being include:<sup>2</sup>

- Having a great knowledge of scriptures. Because we

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<sup>1</sup>Liberation.. p649 There are generally five characteristics of a place suitable for developing samadhi or mental quiescence. As described in *An Ornament To The Sutras*

Any place where the wise practise has excellent provisions, is a wholesome place, is a healthy location, has noble friends at hand and has facilities to satisfy the yogi.

<sup>2</sup>Liberation.. p272 There are ten qualities stated "Rely on a spiritual friend who is subdued, pacified, most pacified, who has more qualities than you, perseverance, a wealth of scripture, realisation of suchness, who is a skilled speaker, has love, and has given up disappointment (in the disciple's performance."

must rely upon the teachers to acquire knowledge, the teacher must have more knowledge than us, otherwise they cannot help us to develop..

- Having knowledge of the path to liberation, and also realisation of the Four Noble Truths and the two truths, (which refers to the penetrative wisdom realising the ultimate truth).
- Being skilled in teaching others.
- Love of others is indispensable to the perfect teacher, since this refers to the motivation of the teacher. It is important that the teacher's motivation is always one of compassion or bodhicitta.
- Another qualification is to not be easily discouraged in the face of difficulty, or fatigue.
- Finally qualities are that the perfect teacher should always display joyful effort and have tolerance in the face of difficulty.

These qualities of a perfect teacher or holy being are mentioned in Maitreya's "Ornament of Sutra". However the Abidharma gives the literal meaning of the term noble being. There a noble being is described as someone who is always engaged in virtue or wholesome behaviour.

#### 3. Delightedly Engaging In Virtue With Body Speech And Mind

The third supreme wheel can be fulfilled if we engage in the study and practice of Lam Rim which is the stages of the path to enlightenment.

#### 4. Having A Great Store Of Merit From The Past

Having a store of merit from the past is important because it provides support and assistance to our spiritual practice. We may possess the other three wheels, but without this fourth wheel of accumulated merit, we shall experience harm and obstacles to our practice. It is harder to harm someone who has assistance, than someone who has no help or assistance from others.

We should realise the importance of these four qualities and try to create their causes. We always dedicate our virtue by generating a prayer to meet with such a perfect teacher as Lama Tsong Khapa.

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## Further Explanations Of The Qualities Allowing Dharma Practice

Early in the teachings we discussed the eighteen qualities of the human life qualified with leisure and endowment. It is said that those eighteen qualities of leisure and endowment are essential to successfully complete the three stages of the path (the lower, middle and great scopes).

Whereas the seven qualities of high status or higher rebirth are essential in order to achieve the state of liberation.

The four wheels of the supreme vehicle are essential to have to achieve the state of all-knowing, which is Buddhahood.

The eight ripened qualities are important to achieve *both* the state of liberation and the state of all-knowing or Buddhahood. The text also specifically mentions that even having five of the eight ripened qualities is a very powerful factor for quickly achieving the state of liberation.

### The Causes For The Eight Ripened Qualities

To create the cause for any of the eight ripened qualities we should include three qualities in any practice in which we engage. These three are:

- pure thought or motivation,
- pure deed,
- pure field.

#### 1. Pure Thought

It is important to have pure thought to create the cause of any of the eight ripened qualities. There are two subdivisions:

- a. Pure thought in respect of oneself. Whatever virtuous practice one engages in should be completed wholeheartedly and voluntarily by oneself. Any virtue which is created as a cause for the ripened qualities should be dedicated to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment for the sake of all beings, without thought of personal reward.
- b. Pure thought in respect of others. When you see your superiors engaged in virtuous practice, you should not be jealous. Towards your equals you should not be competitive, and you should not belittle the practice of those lower than yourself. Rather you should admire and rejoice in their practice, and wish to achieve the same. If what they are doing is impossible for you to practise now, you can make a wish to be able to do those same actions in the future.

It is the same as how a father would feel if his son found a valuable treasure. Not only would the father feel positive and happy on his son's behalf, but he might also receive a share of that treasure. In the same way by

rejoicing in merit of any other being, we also receive a share of their merit as a benefit.

The reason why we use the term "pure" to describe thought, deed, and field is to indicate that these actions are free of any stain in terms of thought or motivation, and to imply a positive result from our actions.

#### 2. Pure Deed

Pure deed has two subdivisions:

- Pure deed which directly depends on self,
  - Pure deed which depends upon others.
- a. Pure deed which directly depends on self means to have a consistent practice. The practice may be small, but over a whole lifetime the small deeds will become a great practice. Pure deed also means to maintain faith in, and avoid all opponent forces to one's practice.
  - b. Pure deed which depends upon others means helping others to engage in practice. If there is a request to grant vows, then if one is qualified one gives the vow. If another asks for help with the practice they should always receive that help. Another pure deed in respect of others is praising and admiring their virtuous acts.

#### 3. Pure Field

Although the third, pure field, is mentioned as a separate category, the text does not give any further explanation of this other than that the explanations given of pure thought and deed implying pure field. We can understand from this if our practice has pure thought and pure deeds the result will be the result of a good field which can produce a great harvest in terms of quantity and quality. Through practice of pure thought and pure deed we ensure an excellent outcome in terms of quantity and quality.

End of discourse

#### How Anger Destroys Virtue<sup>3</sup>

Student 1: If one moment of negative thought towards one's guru or teacher destroys thousands of aeons of virtuous karma, can those thousands of aeons of positive karma be brought back by means of purification by the four opponent powers?

Geshe-la: Whatever damage that is done to the virtues by that moment of anger cannot be repaired. It is like the example of a broken bone in a leg. It heals, but will never be exactly the same as it was before being broken. Shantideva said:<sup>4</sup>

Whatever wholesome deeds,  
such as venerating the Buddhas, and generosity,

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<sup>3</sup>Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism by Jeffrey Hopkins pp 209 to 216. This is a translation of Lama Tsong Khapa's classic explanation of these difficult points. This was also extensively explained in Geshe-la's commentary to the *Madhyamika-Avatarata* on 26/9/89.

<sup>4</sup> *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* by Shantideva chapter 6 verse 1.

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that has been amassed over one thousand aeons will all be destroyed in one moment of anger."

Here the reference is to a bodhisattva of a lower level generating one moment of anger towards a bodhisattva of a higher level, so a large amount of virtuous merit that has been created in the past is destroyed.

For an ordinary person, one who is not a bodhisattva, generating anger to a bodhisattva, the amount of virtue or merit that is destroyed is even far more than that. A bodhisattva on the path of accumulation generating anger but who later purified the negativity fully will still have their entry into the next path, the path of preparation, delayed.

Through the four purifying means the negative effects of anger are purified and this prevents any negative result arising from that anger. On the positive side this does not mean that you completely restore the same amount of merit that was destroyed, nor is there any new quantity of positive karma created to replace that which has been lost. Of course that previous virtuous karma has been destroyed in the sense that you can no longer reap the result of that merit.

How Is Karma Destroyed?

Student: How is the karma destroyed?

Geshe-la: It is destroyed in the sense of preventing its result from ripening.

There is a debate about whether, when anger is generated, it completely destroys virtue from its roots. There is no debate however that anger prevents the ripening cause or main cause of virtue from occurring. But in terms of the second result of a virtuous act, the result similar to cause in terms of habit, anger may prevent the main result, but not prevent these secondary results arising. So it can be argued that anger does not destroy the root virtue completely.

When we create virtue, we should treasure it and not treat accumulated virtues lightly. Treating them in that way is like giving money to children who then lavishly spend it as soon as possible. Rather we should always dedicate virtue to the ultimate state of buddhahood. If we join our practice of virtue with force of bodhicitta then, as said in Shantideva's text, that virtue will remain as long as that final goal of bodhicitta is achieved. This is buddhahood. Because of the danger of virtue being destroyed by anger it is important to always dedicate it.

You cannot understand meaning of anger destroying virtue in the same way as we understand wisdom realising emptiness which destroys self grasping of true existence - the misconception of the "I". This wisdom realising emptiness completely opposes the self grasping. In this way conception of true existence can be uprooted from its root and removed from the mind. Whereas anger destroying virtue, means that anger delays the result of that virtue, or reduces its quantity,

but does not uproot it completely.

We do not say that anger is remedy to virtue. Whereas we say wisdom realising emptiness is the remedy to self grasping since it directly opposes self grasping. The meaning of wisdom realising emptiness destroying self grasping is to uproot that self grasping.

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2 August 1994

Let us first generate the correct motivation by thinking that I wish to achieve the state of Buddhahood for the sake of all living beings, and for this reason I am studying (and will wholeheartedly practise) the Lam Rim.

We have finished the first two of the three main headings relating to the law of karma. These three headings are:

### 422.122.1: The General Explanation Concerning The Law Of Karma

ལས་འབྲས་སྐྱེར་བསམ་པ།

### 422.122.2: The Specifics Of Karma

བྱི་བྲག་དུ་བསམ་པ།

### 422.122.3: Having Contemplated The Law Of Karma, What Needs To Be Adopted And What Needs To Be Abandoned<sup>1</sup>

བསམས་ནས་འབྲས་ལྡན་གྱི་ཚུལ།

The third heading concerns what is to be adopted and what to be rejected as a result of contemplation of the law of karma. Under this heading there are two subheadings:

#### 422.122.31 The General<sup>2</sup>

སྦྱིར་བསྟན་པ།

#### 422.122.32 The Specific<sup>3</sup>

ཁྱད་པར་དུ་སྟོབས་བཞིས་སྦྱོང་བའི་ཚུལ།

Under both headings we learn the value of adopting positive karma, and rejecting negative karma.

#### 422.122.31: The General

སྦྱིར་བསྟན་པ།

The main point of this section is that we must make an effort to

create positive karma and to abandon negative karma. In spite of our virtuous efforts, through the various doors of delusions such as ignorance and lack of mindfulness, we create negative karma instead of creating positive karma. What then should we do? Under the next subheading of specific the text shows the four forces of remedy, which are to be applied in order to purify those negative karmas which we have created.

### The Four Doors Of Downfall

Geshe-la gave details about the four door of delusions or downfalls, so here they are just listed. They are:

1. Door of not knowing
2. Door of lack of conscientiousness
3. Door of non-faithfulness
4. Door of a great number of mental delusions.

All the negative karmas we create are created through one or more of these four doors, so each door should be kept closed in order to prevent or minimise such negative karma. It is important to overcome the door of not knowing. Creating negative karmas out of ignorance, or unintentionally, still creates negative karma, and will bring a negative result.

To properly practise the law of karma we have to distinguish between meditation time and post-meditation time. For each time there are different things to do in order to make good progress. During meditation time we fully utilise our concentration and wisdom to familiarise ourselves with the concepts of karma, its divisions, the consequences and all the details of the subject to gain insight into the topic. But during post-meditation time, when one is not doing formal meditation, the most important thing is to practice mindfulness and alertness. One of the very best and well known practitioners who is a source of inspiration is Geshe Baen Gung-gyael who was very thorough in his spiritual practice. In order to remind himself and keep a record of how he was going in his practice he carried two kinds of pebbles, black and white. With the white pebbles he kept count of the positive white karma and with the black pebbles he counted the black negative karma. At the end of the day he counted the pebbles. If there more white pebbles he rejoiced in his deeds of the day and said to himself; "Geshe has done very well today." But if he found more black pebbles, he regretted his own negative deeds and thought of purifying them.

Spiritual practitioners are like those in business. Think of the calculations that are necessary to monitor the state of a business: the income, expenses, interest to be paid, money to be borrowed and so on. The sign of a healthy business is a profit. Similarly a spiritual practitioner needs to consider the most effective way to make quick and great progress in the path. So you can see how important it is to do as Geshe Baen did, and

<sup>1</sup>Liberation page 464 The title used in the text is "After thinking about those things, the way to modify your actions."

<sup>2</sup>Liberation page 464 The title used in the text is "The general teaching."

<sup>3</sup>Liberation page 464 The title used in the text is "In particular, how to purify oneself with the four powers."



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be mindful of our daily actions. If our actions are positive we multiply the merit of that action by rejoicing in it, so making a great profit in spiritual terms. If it is negative we feel regret, and so are deterred from doing the same thing again.

However there is no point in feeling guilty and living one's whole life with fear and worry. This is of no benefit and quite unnecessary. Therefore it is said that if one has committed a negative action one should purify it.

One sutra says that the one dharma which can close the door of lower, bad rebirths is to check or examine one's mental continuum. This sutra indicates that we should always be very thoughtful and watchful of our mind and deeds. The advantage of this is that we see our own faults and qualities and so we have a good opportunity for self development. If we wait for others to point out our strengths or weaknesses, we won't make much progress because it will seem that others are always pointing out our faults, and this may become a cause for anger on our part.

Shantideva from *Bodhisattva Charyavatara*:

Suffering arises from negative karma therefore think how to definitely be released from non-virtue or negative karma.

Day and night it is appropriate to just think and contemplate on this.

Here the word "this" refers to the law of karma or cause and effect. As we have already discussed, if we constantly remind ourselves of the truth of this law of karma; when we constantly think of causes and results of positive and negative actions; we are naturally inspired to increase positive karma and decrease negative karma.

Why is it that when we contemplate the law of karma we are naturally inspired to create positive karma and overcome negative karma? It is because our fundamental wish is to be happy (which is the result of positive karma), and to be free of suffering (which is the result of negative karma).

Practice of the law of karma is also essential to make further progress. It is said that even realisation of the concept of ultimate reality, (which in Buddhism is emptiness) depends on a full understanding of the concept of karma. To realise emptiness involves investigating the truth in a very deep sense. If we investigate this deep truth with a lack realisation of the concept of karma, we are drawn to the conclusion that nothing exists. This is nihilism. One of the unique qualities of Lama Tsong Khapa's teaching is by following them, such nihilism can be overcome since the concepts of karma and emptiness are presented as complementary and not contradictory.

#### **Faith In The Law Of Karma As The Root Of All Virtue**

Furthermore a direct quotation from Shantideva in *Bodhisattva Charyavatara* says:

"It is said the root of all virtues is power."

When the *Bodhisattva Charyavatara* says "It is said" Shantideva is quoting the words of a sutra. The meaning of the word "power" (described here as the root of all virtue), refers to faith or conviction.

After the above two lines from *Bodhisattva Charyavatara*, the next line says "Always meditate on the ripened result".

As said before this line indicates faith or conviction in virtue or dharma. But what is meant by "faith or conviction"? Positive karma results in a positive result such as the ripened result, an

environmental result, or results similar to the cause. Negative karma has the same types of result - ripened, environmental and results similar to the cause. Faith or conviction means to be fully convinced of the fact that this is the way cause and effect are experienced. To be specific, the result of killing has a ripened result, an environmental result and results similar to the cause. If, with faith and conviction, we are always aware of the cause and effect of the action of killing, we will try to prevent that action, because of the undesirable results. On the positive side, by thinking of positive results of actions such as refraining from killing, because of faith in the law of cause and effect, and knowledge of the result, we are encouraged to complete that positive action.

This is the way to practise the law of karma in daily life, in terms of what to adopt and what to reject. If following this practice is contrary to what one wants to do, and one does some negative actions, then one should apply the four forces of purification.

By being always mindful, alert and conscientious, one will be always able to prevent immediate negative actions and purify any minor negative actions that may have created. By following this practice of the law of karma and of purification one can be completely rid of negative actions. For example in Angulimala's story, he committed negative actions but then purified them.

A story in relation to purifying negative karma concerns a monk named Dharma Senna. As a rule, in early times, the community of sangha would banish a monk who broke a certain moral code. This monk Dharma Senna broke such a moral code so was banished from the community. In the meantime he lived in a very peaceful, tranquil, quiet place. He did intense purification practice and meditation. In this way he completely purified his transgressions. He went back to the community but they would not accept him. One day all the monks had to cross the river Ganga. He followed them but they would not let him join them in the same boat. However utilising his meditative power he flew to the other side of the river. This surprised the other monks so they begged forgiveness.

The Kadampa master Dromtonpa, who was a close spiritual son to the glorious Atisha, said:

There is no obscuration or sinful negative karma which cannot be purified. The reason is that the one who creates the negative karma and the one who purifies it are the same person. Just as a potter, with a hand wheel, can make as many pots as he wishes, so too he can break all those pots in a moment.

This strongly indicates that just as one creates the negative actions one also has the ability or potential to purify that action.

This example is used by Kadampa Geshes because it is very clear. The potter's wheel is likened to the wheel of existence. In this wheel of life, living beings always create various negative actions and thoughts. Just as the potter can immediately destroy pots, a living being by the power of the four forces of purification can purify all negative karmas.

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

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