

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ལྷན་གྱི་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



25 August 1998

Try to establish the bodhicitta motivation which is a genuine wish to achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings. It is for this reason that you are receiving these teachings on the lam rim, or the stages of the path to enlightenment. At the same time, try to cultivate the strong intention to put these teachings into practice in order to calm the mind.

Giving: Enhancing our Love

Having finished the compassion meditation on Taking, we now focus upon the love meditation of Giving, the main purpose of which is to perfect or enhance our love for all beings.

This meditation of Giving begins by first cultivating love for all beings. This is done by imagining as many beings as possible, for example all beings in the three lower realms and also all those in the three happy realms, and observing how they lack happiness and joy. With this observation of the way all other beings lack happiness and joy, you then cultivate love for them in the sense of wishing them to have that happiness and joy.

Of course it must be clear in our minds that the aim of engaging in this meditation of Giving is to quickly achieve a state of complete enlightenment or buddhahood. The main quality we try to perfect or develop in this meditation is genuine love for all others. To make real progress in this meditation it is very important to keep the focus on one's own mind, because the love we are trying to develop is something which exists within our own mind. Here our practice is perfecting and further developing our love, and then extending it to others.

What is love? It is the unconditional wish to give happiness to others. Through this meditation practice we are endeavouring to perfect and fully develop our love, so that there is no bias in it, so that there is no element of attachment or hatred, and so that there is no discrimination in the sense of showing love only to those close to us, and not to those distant. The more faults we remove, the more progress we make in developing and perfecting our love and thus the closer we are to having bodhicitta arise in our mind. This means we are closer to achieving our goal of full enlightenment.

In spiritual terms this meditation practice of cultivating love for others is very important. Even if it takes a long time to see any sign of progress in this practice it is still worth the effort. Even a few minutes devoted to this meditation is not wasted. After a whole lifetime of performing this meditation we may not have developed

impartial love for all beings, and our love may still be imperfect and stained with faults and attachment, but still our effort is not wasted. We should feel very positive and fortunate, and see the long term benefits of this meditation, which are greater than sitting in single-pointed concentration for a long period of time. The effort we make leaves an impression or seed in our mind, and sometime in the future, because of this seed, we shall generate bodhicitta quickly and without much effort. Even simply hearing the word 'bodhicitta' will be enough to enable us to experience the bodhi mind immediately. The reason why we cannot do so now is because our love is not developed enough.

To re-emphasise the point, cultivating love is cultivating a quality within our mind. We should not think that practising love necessarily means changing our relationships with others, although that may occur. The primary focus is upon our own mind, trying to see whether we have love for others, and whether we possess this feeling of love in ourselves. If we have this love then not only do we behave in a loving manner, but there is unconditional love inside as well, and there is no selfish interest. When we experience this feeling of love we find ourselves to be very peaceful and joyful.

We can see that as this quality of love increases, so too does our value as a human being. So love does indeed have some value. It is a human value. The more other people see that love within us, the more faith, trust and respect they will have for us. Therefore we should not see the value of being human merely in terms of material gain or possessions, but also in terms of the human quality of love. [It is love which defines the value of a human existence.]

Love does not stop with just wishing for others to have happiness. It is fulfilled by actually giving that happiness to them. The reason why we need to undertake this Giving meditation is to become familiarised with the thought of giving happiness to other beings. There is no thought of giving if we see other beings who are deprived of something they want or need, and yet we do not do anything about it. This Giving meditation is to cultivate the thought of giving so that later on we can actually give to others.

There are three objects of giving which are:

- our body
- our wealth
- our virtue

There are no other objects in our possession that we can

give to others.

Of these three objects of giving it is said that it is possible to give only our present and future body and wealth but not our past body or wealth. However we can give our virtue of all of the past, present and future.

The reason why we can give our accumulated virtue is that although the action was created in the past, for example by doing prostrations, the result of that action is the seed of positive energy which is left in our mind. It still has the potential to produce pleasant results, so therefore past virtue is appropriate to give to others. Of course we can also give to others the virtue created at present and in the future. Whereas the body and wealth we possessed in the past are now gone and so have no current value at all. However just as we get our next day's wages one day earlier, we can give our present body and wealth to others.

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 September 1998

First of all make sure that you have the right motivation.

As we discussed in the last teaching you can give three things in this Giving meditation: your body, your possessions and your virtue.

The most important aspect of this meditation is loving kindness, and we are aiming to develop a strong love for all beings. So we begin the Giving meditation with the cultivation of true love for all beings, by observing that all sentient beings lack happiness, and then sincerely wish that they have the happiness that they desire.

Giving One's Body To Other Beings

Giving one's body to other beings does not mean actually giving this physical body to others. Rather it involves imagining that one's body has the quality of being able to manifest to other beings whatever they need. Sentient beings who are suffering from intense heat, for example, cannot experience happiness, so one can imagine that giving one's body brings down a cool shower of rain, which frees them from their suffering.

To ensure that the kind of love we generate is very pure and true, we should focus on the needs of other beings. The more we generate this love, the more we think of the reason for generating it, which is the need and suffering of sentient beings. Thus our love will be very pure because it is not influenced by any connection with our selfish mind. Our Giving meditation is made most effective by establishing a sound basis of love for other beings.

The Objects To Which We Give

We can give to either

1. the essence which are the other sentient or living beings, or
2. we can give to the container, which is the universe in which those sentient beings live.

Giving To Other Sentient Beings

When our object of giving is the essence it is important to imagine as many sentient beings as possible. To elaborate upon a meditation on all those sentient beings born in a hot hell realm, think about the sufferings of those hell realms as we discussed in the teachings on the small scope of the path. Feel sympathy for the intensity of their suffering which has no respite. Cultivate the strong wish "may they possess happiness", and "how wonderful it would be if they found happiness". Cultivate love by giving them your body to free them from their immediate suffering in the hell realms. As you give your body, you imagine that you manifest yourself as a cool

shower of rain, and that as a result they are freed from the suffering of the hot hell realms. Not only do you free them from their suffering, but also their life form changes, and they now obtain the excellent human life of leisure and endowment, enriched with superior inner qualities like the Seven Treasures Of Superior Beings¹ and Seven Qualities Of Higher Status or Rebirth²[see editorial note].

Out of your love and through your practice, not only are sentient beings born in the hell realms freed of suffering, but they also attain a precious human rebirth with good living conditions. They receive everything they need to sustain life - excellent food, excellent shelter, clothing and an excellent environment in which to live. They also obtain friends and have only wonderful beings surrounding them. With all these excellent conditions and resources, it becomes very conducive for them to follow the Mahayana Dharma, and these conditions do not serve as a cause to increase delusions in the mind in even in the slightest way.

As an outer condition of achieving full enlightenment, all these sentient beings then find the perfect Mahayana spiritual teacher, and they also find all the holy scriptures and texts which they need for their spiritual progress. In addition to these external conditions, as mentioned earlier, they gain the Seven Treasures Of A Superior Being. They all have the practice of pure morality, and based upon their love and compassion they all generate pure bodhicitta mind, so they master the three-fold training. By engaging in the bodhisattva's deeds of the Six Perfections they all accumulate the two collections of merit and wisdom. Then as a result of the spiritual progress they make, they all achieve the ultimate state of buddhahood, achieving the form body of a buddha, and actualise in their mind the bliss of dharmakaya.

You can apply this same Giving meditation to all other classes of beings. For those sentient beings born in the cold hell realms, for instance, the only difference is that we imagine giving them clothes and warm rays of sunlight. We give food to those beings born in the

¹ The seven jewels of a superior being: The gems of faith, ethics, generosity, hearing, consideration, shame, and intelligence,

² There are generally regarded to be EIGHT qualities of higher rebirth:- long life, physical attractiveness, influence (prestige) due to birth in a high caste, material wealth, speech that is well respected due to being truthful, power and fame, having a strong body, strong will power. Ref: Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey *Tibetan Tradition of Mental Development*, page 102-104

hungry ghost realm, and a discriminating mind to animals. To those born in the realms of the demigods we give equipment such as weapons and shields, and to the gods we give all the desirable objects. For each individual human being, we fulfil all their needs and desires.

You can also include all the gurus and all other enlightened beings in this Giving meditation, by imagining making offerings to them which please them with uncontaminated bliss.

Going Beyond Meditation

What you are doing is training your mind in this meditation practice by mentally giving your body, possessions and virtue to all beings. Then you realise that not only should you do this Giving practice mentally, but you should also integrate it into your actions. However you cannot immediately expect to imitate the deeds of great beings like bodhisattvas who can actually give their bodies. Rather you should do this Giving practice according to your own resources and capacity.

- Try to benefit others and refrain from harming others.
- Try to be always mindful and alert in all actions in order to help others and to avoid causing harm.
- As Shantideva said in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, try to see others through the eyes of love, having some sense of consideration for them. Think of them as being your own kind mother.
- Try to see that others are an excellent field of merit, knowing that by relying upon them you can accumulate all the merit and wisdom needed to achieve full enlightenment. So see them with a great sense of love and gratitude.
- Try to think that through showing love and respect to others, and bringing happiness to them, the buddhas and bodhisattvas are pleased and delighted.
- Try to get used to this way of showing a different attitude to others.

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8 September 1998

As your motivation try to reinforce the bodhicitta motivation which you generated just a few moments ago.

The Practice To Be Followed Between Meditation Sessions

The Giving and Taking meditation develops love and compassion, and is the main Thought Transformation practice. To maintain the practice of thought transformation the root text says:

Remember this by repeated recollection.
Practise every activity by these words.

This advises us to memorise the words of this Thought Transformation text, and to recite these verses as often as possible as a reminder of this practice of Thought Transformation.

It is important that the cultivation and strengthening of love and compassion for all beings continues throughout all actions, and not just during the meditation session. The text says "to practise every activity", which means that the practice should be integrated into every activity of walking, sitting, and so on and at all times of happiness or sorrow. For this reason one is advised to memorise and repeat these thought transformation verses, and throughout all actions to think, "May all the suffering, and causes of suffering of all beings (ie negative acts) ripen upon me, and may all my virtues (ie merits) ripen upon others."¹

In short, what needs to be remembered and contemplated throughout all actions, whether it be walking or sitting is the understanding that one must achieve the essence of this human life of leisure and endowment. The most excellent purpose that one can achieve is the state of buddhahood, and the supreme means to achieve this state of buddhahood is this Giving and Taking meditation. With this understanding, then in

¹ Editor: At this stage in *The Golden Rays Mind Training*, Nam-kha-pel quotes Kamalashila's "Stages of Meditation",

The great compassionate one, in all his actions, whether walking or standing, and at all times, must acquaint himself with all sentient beings. Such a thought should be complemented by reciting the following lines,

May their misdeeds ripen on me
And may all my virtues ripen on them.
May all sentient beings' sufferings mature on me
And through my virtues may they all be happy.
Whatever agonies beings may suffer
May they ripen on me alone.
Through all the virtues of bodhisattvas
May wandering beings enjoy bliss."

whatever actions we do, say or think, we wish that all the happiness and virtue we possess will ripen upon other sentient beings, and that all the suffering of others will ripen upon ourselves. So repeat these verses and contemplate their meaning.

These lines from *The Guru Puja* should also be memorised:

Venerable Guru, please send me your blessings
May all the sufferings of other beings
Ripen upon me right now
May all my virtue and happiness
Ripen upon other beings right now.

Depending upon your time and ability you can recite this verse as often as you wish during the day, and meditate on its meaning.

Combining Two Meditations

Having made good progress with this Giving and Taking meditation the root text says:

Place these two astride the breath.

That is, the Giving and Taking meditation is combined with the breathing meditation. There are many benefits in combining the two in this way, however first of all one needs to become familiar with just the Giving and Taking meditation by itself.

A special significance of combining Giving and Taking with the breathing meditation is that it accords with secret mantra practice. Furthermore if one is familiar with combining this practice with the breathing technique, then as death approaches, when the breathing becomes longer and slower, because of familiarity with the breathing technique one can easily do this practice of giving and taking. The benefit of doing this practice with a mind of love and compassion at the last cycle of breath in this life, is that without any doubt our next life will be a better rebirth, and we shall be able to cultivate bodhicitta mind easily in that life.

The Actual Technique Of Combining Giving And Taking With Breathing Meditation

On the outward breath do the Giving meditation as discussed in the previous teachings, by giving all your body, possessions and virtues to all other beings. Through this you bring joy and happiness to their minds, and establish them in the state of dharmakaya or buddhahood.

As you breathe in do the Taking meditation by taking upon yourself all the suffering and the causes of

suffering of other beings.

It is said that with training in this meditation we can combine breathing meditation with Giving and Taking. If we master this technique over our lifetime then at the time of death there will be no difficulty doing this meditation, at which time there is tremendous benefit.

We have now completed the first two headings of the Thought Transformation text which are:

422.321.21 The Preliminary Teaching on Form of Life

422.321.22 Actual Teaching on Bodhicitta

The actual teaching on bodhicitta had five headings:

422.321.222.1 Meditation on Equality of Self and Others

422.321.222.2 Disadvantages of Self Cherishing

422.321.222.3 Advantages of Cherishing Others

422.321.222.4 Actual Method of Exchanging Self With Others

422.321.222.5 Meditation on Giving and Taking

We now turn to the third main heading of this Thought Transformation text.

422.321.23 Transforming Adverse Conditions into the Path

Under this heading we learn of the importance of transforming adverse conditions into favourable ones. We have to see that this is the only way to ensure the complete success of any spiritual practice from its beginning to its end.

Why is this so important? In this degenerate age there are many more hindrances to the practice of Dharma than there are favourable conditions. It is almost as if unless we learn to apply this Thought Transformation practice to make the unfavourable conditions we face in life favourable, we shall not be able to complete whatever practice we begin, because we cannot avoid obstacles to our practice.

In other words we may encounter certain conditions that can generally be regarded as obstacles to practising Dharma, but through the practice of thought transformation these obstacles can be transformed into favourable conditions for Dharma practice.

The whole point of this section of the teaching is to inspire us so that whatever the situation that we face in life, whether it be good and bad, we do not allow that situation to cause us to forsake our practice of Dharma.

If we are not careful it is so easy to forget our Dharma practice in good situations. For example, it is so easy for those who have achieved a position of power or gained wealth to feel pride. If we are not careful the good name we have gained can be an obstacle to Dharma practice, causing it to deteriorate. Likewise when people acquire a lot of wealth they may wish to increase and protect that wealth, so they devote their time to that end rather than to Dharma practice. So power and wealth can be an obstacle to practising Dharma if we are not careful.

Rather than being obstacles these good conditions can be transformed into favourable conditions for making spiritual progress. For example you can utilise the high position you have gained to overcome pride, and use the

power and privileges you have gained to benefit other beings. Thus your power supports your Dharma practice. Likewise overcoming attachment to wealth through giving can be used to help others, as well as facilitating one's own Dharma practice.

Adverse situations in life, such as losing a partner or losing money, can be a cause of such great suffering and misery, that people become very depressed and frustrated. Then, let alone thinking of practising Dharma, people lose all hope and interest in even worldly activities. In such a situation, it is so obvious that it will become impossible to practise Dharma if you do not do something about yourself.

We have to realise that even the worst situations such as losing money or a partner are only external losses. Because they are outer difficulties, we should not think that we cannot practise. We have to understand that the practice of Dharma comes down to our state of mind. Even if you lose everything, you have still not lost the conditions of Dharma which are inner factors. Thinking in this way we can encourage ourselves to rise above the most adverse circumstances, and be fully motivated to engage in Dharma practice.

The teaching on transforming adverse situations into the path has two subheadings:

422.321.231 Transforming By Thought

422.321.232 Transforming By Action

We shall continue these teachings next week.

We may not have any problems now, but we always have to be prepared for the problems that we see other people face. Many things will happen to us in our lifetime that we never anticipated. Therefore it is very important to be determined to never lose one's courage no matter what the problem. Rather what is most important is to work out solutions to problems, and being easily discouraged makes that very difficult. By keeping one's courage and spirits high, the focus stays upon the possible solutions, and then the problem can be solved. When the solution is found, then there is no longer a problem!

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karma, then as human beings we also have the opportunity to find a remedy to lessen the pain, and cope with the situation. If that negative karma ripened in a future life, rather than this present one, the result could be rebirth in a lower realm where there is even greater suffering. If you can understand that the outcome in that instance could be much worse, and that what you undergo now is very minor compared to what it might be, you would feel happy to take a loss in this present life. This teaches us to cultivate a broader and more positive way of thinking.

Of course we cannot expect to integrate this profound practice immediately and to make rapid progress. First of all we just have to try to understand the benefit of this teaching, and try to apply these methods as much as possible whenever difficulties or problems arise in life. Problems, as we all know, are unavoidable. Usually things go as we wish with friends and possessions, but at other times things go in the opposite direction. We must endure these bad times, and in such circumstances it is very easy to lose interest and to forsake our spiritual practice. However we do know that some people when they face serious problems such as a threat to their life, turn to spiritual teachings hoping that this can help them.

We also have to think that problems are a very good opportunity to practise Giving and Taking meditation. In the past you might have imagined taking on the suffering of others, and giving them your happiness. Here is an even better opportunity. Now you can imagine that the actual suffering you are enduring is the suffering of other beings. You can gladly accept that suffering and hope that no other being will have to undergo that problem. Not only this but you can also pray that all the other problems that sentient beings face will come upon you. If you use this meditation when you face any adverse conditions, then rather than forgetting about practising Dharma you are reinforcing your practice. So in this way problems are actually favourable cause to practise Dharma.

Benefits of Suffering

According to Shantideva's text *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, the benefits of undergoing misery and difficult situations in life are that they can be a cause to eliminate feelings of pride. Suffering can also be a cause to cultivate compassion for other beings, based upon one's own experience of suffering. It can be a both cause to refrain from negative actions, which serve as a cause of all unwanted things, and a cause of encouraging the practice of virtue which is the cause of all that you desire.

What we always have to remember is to practise Dharma at all times: in times of both pleasure and pain, and not to lose your practice of Dharma. In times of pleasure we must ensure that our mind is not completely distracted by pleasure. Rather we should think of increasing the bodhicitta mind, and understanding that all the pleasure found in life is the fruit of all the virtuous actions we created in the past. Then when we find such favourable conditions we are inspired to create more positive actions, which is the very cause of the conditions we enjoy. Similarly when you undergo pain or difficulty, which is the result of negative actions try not to see it as

an obstacle to practice. Rather try to apply these Thought Transformation teachings to see the situation, and thus bringing the practice of Dharma more alive in your mind. These unfavourable conditions then become a favourable cause to practise Dharma. We have to find a way to ensure that the spiritual practice we have begun is carried on continuously, on a very consistent basis.

The compulsory question for the written test is to explain the verse from *The Guru Puja* on giving and taking:

The compulsory question for the written test is to explain the verse from *The Guru Puja* on giving and taking:

Kind and venerable guru
Grant me blessings that all sufferings
Of sentient beings ripen upon me
And all my virtues be given to others.

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TARA INSTITUTE

STUDY GROUP DISCUSSION NIGHT -22nd September 1998

Covering discourses 25/08/98 - 15/09/98

- 1 Define love and discuss the benefits of cultivating this virtuous mind.
- 2 What should we contemplate/visualise when engaging in the meditation of giving?
- 3 What are the 3 objects of giving in the giving meditation.
- 4 Describe the meditation of giving one's body to other beings.
- 5 Having become familiar with the meditation of giving and taking, one may then combine it with one's breathing. How is this done and what are some benefits?
- 6 Changes in our life situation, whether to unfavourable or favourable conditions, can become obstacles for us continuing our Dharma practice. Give some examples.
- 7 Why is it so important for us to learn about transforming adverse conditions into the path?
- 8 What might be the consequences of blaming outside conditions for causing the adverse situations that arise in our lives?
- 9 If there are two people, one of whom is a believer in the teaching of karma and one who is a non-believer, the difference between the two can be seen when both face some problem in their life. What do you understand would be the difference in perspectives?
- 10 In what way-could we perceive that there are benefits in undergoing difficult situations in this life?

Compulsory Question

Discuss the meaning of the following verse from *The Guru Puja*

And thus of venerable compassionate gurus. we seek your blessings that all karmic debts, obstacles and sufferings of mother beings may without exception ripen upon us right now.

and that we may give over our happiness and virtues to others
and thereby invest all beings in bliss.