

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



3 October 2000

As usual we should try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation, thinking that we shall practise these lam rim teachings after receiving them. The aim of our practice is to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings.

## 422.322 The Ritual Ceremony of Taking Vows (cont)

There are two main parts of the ritual ceremony to generate bodhicitta, the preliminary and the actual. We have finished describing the preliminary part, and now turn to the actual ceremony. The entire ritual ceremony is carried out over two days. The first day covers all the preliminary activities. The second day is the actual ceremony.

### The Actual Ceremony of Taking Vows

Just as on the preliminary day, on the second day the ceremony is done in two sessions. In the first session you recite the sutras and make tormas offerings and so on. You begin the second session when the lama is invited to it. After he or she takes the throne the gathering does an extensive practice of making offerings, prostrations and so on. Then the gathering makes a grand mandala offering to the lama as a request for bestowing the bodhisattva's vow, and leading this ritual ceremony to generate bodhicitta mind.

Traditionally as part of this offering mandala you are required to have some object of offering as a substance to generate this bodhicitta mind. While making this mandala offering you hold this object in your hand. Then at the last line of the mandala offering, which says, "Lama, I offer this mandala to you", you offer this object, and all these offerings are traditionally piled together.

When His Holiness the Dalai Lama conducts this ceremony he usually advises everyone to keep their offerings as a souvenir in remembrance of this occasion. This is so that afterwards you will always remember the occasion, and in particular generating the bodhicitta mind.

Following the mandala offerings the lama then teaches about the benefit of generating bodhicitta mind. This was summed up by Lama Tsong Khapa<sup>1</sup> when he described the bodhicitta mind as being like the trunk (or body) of the supreme path, and the basis for engaging in all the extensive deeds of bodhisattvas; as being like an alchemic liquid which transforms any action that you do into the means of gathering enormous accumulations of merit and wisdom; and as like a treasure which gathers the virtuous merit of all actions. Recognising all the benefits of the bodhicitta mind, all bodhisattva practitioners generate this bodhicitta mind as the essential core of their practice.

As Lama Tsong Khapa said, we should try to remember and review all the benefits of bodhicitta mind at this point. We are

also advised to engage in a reflecting meditation on the entire stages of the path. This important lam rim meditation begins with contemplating the preciousness and the rarity of human life. It proceeds through every stage of the path in such a way that it becomes deeply embedded as a core element in your mind.

The next thing is to establish a visualisation of all sentient beings in the aspect of human beings surrounding oneself, imagining all male beings as one's father and all the females as one's mother. Try to generate this visualisation as clearly as possible.

If you are receiving this vow directly from your spiritual Guru, then of course here you have to visualise your spiritual Guru in the aspect of Shakyamuni Buddha. Surrounding the Guru-Buddha visualise the 1000 buddhas of this fortunate aeon as well as all the objects of refuge. Imagine the entire space filled with infinite numbers of refuge objects.

Next, one has to kneel on one's right knee and place both hands in a prayer gesture at heart. Kneeling on one's right knee in this way adopts the posture used by one of the principal disciples of the Lord Buddha, Rabjor, who always knelt this way when receiving discourses.

The first prayer which one recites is the prayer of taking refuge and generating the bodhicitta mind. This is the prayer which we normally say beginning:

I go for refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha,  
Until I achieve complete enlightenment.

The first line shows the three objects of refuge, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Of course it goes without saying that we have to recognise these three objects of refuge in the context of the uncommon Mahayana objects of refuge.

This first line also indicates the manner of taking refuge. As we discussed not long ago in another session the three objects of refuge can be identified in terms of the resultant three objects of refuge and the causal three objects of refuge. Accordingly when you take refuge in these three resultant objects of refuge you have to recognise those three as your future spiritual attainment with wholehearted faith in that as your future attainment. The causal three objects of refuge are recognised as a perfect means to achieve that future attainment, of actualising the resultant objects of refuge within oneself.

The second line of the refuge prayer says, "until I achieve complete enlightenment". This indicates the length of time of taking refuge. That is, you take refuge in the three objects of refuge until you achieve the omniscient mind of a Buddha, until you manifest the Dharmakaya or the Truth Body of a Buddha.

In the first line, the "I" indicates the person who takes refuge in the Three Jewels, and "go for refuge" indicates the actual nature of taking refuge in the Three Jewels as a result of generating the two causes for taking refuge. The main significance of taking refuge in the Three Jewels is to distinguish one's path from the perverted or wrong path.

The last two lines of prayer of going for refuge and generating bodhicitta are:

<sup>1</sup> Editor: *Concise Meaning of the Stages of the Path* by Lama Tsong Khapa: "Producing bodhi mind is the king post of the Mahayana path, the base and support of Bodhisattvas' great deeds, a philosopher's stone transmuting all into merit and wisdom, a treasure of merit assembling glorious virtue. Understanding this, the heroic offspring of Buddha hold the precious bodhi-mind as their central meditation. The reverend lama practised like this; those desiring liberation should do likewise."

Through the virtuous merit that I gather by practising giving and so forth,  
May I achieve the state of enlightenment for the sake of all beings.

These two lines are mainly to generate the bodhicitta mind. They also show that the person who is generating this bodhicitta mind is oneself. "Through the virtuous merit that I collect by practising giving and so forth" indicates all the virtuous actions that you create, including all the perfections of giving and the morality and so on, and the merit one creates by engaging in such deeds of morality and so on.

These virtuous actions are a cause to be dedicated to generating this bodhicitta mind to benefit all other beings. This shows the purpose for which the bodhicitta mind is generated. In other words, it indicates the aspiration to benefit other beings.

The final line says, "May I achieve the complete enlightenment or the state of Buddhahood". This shows the ultimate goal that you seek with this bodhicitta mind; what you are aspiring to achieve is this state of Buddhahood. The "May I" in this line implies that you are praying. It is said that the term praying further implies the actual bodhicitta mind.

This prayer of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta should be said three times. The two lines generating bodhicitta mind are to distinguish the path that one is following from the inferior path of the lesser scope. It is very beneficial even to recite this prayer of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta as our regular daily prayer.

Then aspiring or wishing bodhicitta is generated, and one vows to maintain this bodhicitta mind. To generate this mind in the ritual ceremony we use this verse from the Six-Session Yoga:

I generate the bodhicitta mind  
Even at the risk of my life  
I shall maintain this until I reach the state of Buddhahood  
In order to liberate all migrating beings  
From the fear of samsara and nirvana

This is to generate the aspiring bodhicitta mind.

Next both the aspiring and the engaging bodhicitta mind are generated at the same time. The ritual prayer for generating both the aspiring and the engaging bodhicitta mind is also in the Six-Session Yoga. Most of you are familiar with the two verses beginning with, "Oh Gurus and the Bodhisattvas, please pay attention to me"<sup>2</sup>. If you want an explanation of these two verses you can refer to any commentary on the Six Session Yoga, and also to the commentary which Geshe Doga gave on a weekend course not long ago.

These verses are said three times and at the end of this one has taken the vow.

After taking this vow you recite a verse, the original source of which is Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. The words are also in the Six-Session Yoga.<sup>3</sup> Just to briefly mention the meaning of the lines "Now my life is made meaningful since I have become a bodhisattva". This is a

statement rejoicing in the act of generating bodhicitta mind and taking the bodhisattva's vow.

Then one repeats after the Guru a verse that concerns maintaining all the bodhisattva's deeds and practices, and safeguarding all the bodhisattva's vows. This verse is also found in the Six-Session Yoga. It clearly says that what you have to think is, "Since I have now taken this bodhisattva vow, I shall safeguard this without bringing any corruption, or stain to the best of my capacity"<sup>4</sup>. This verse is also repeated.

The lam rim commentary text says that the power of giving rise to such a bodhicitta mind is so great that that it can cause the earth to shake in the infinite land, the field of the buddhas in the ten directions. It can even cause the throne of the Buddha to shake. It is said that when such a sign occurs in the pure land of the buddhas the retinue of the Buddha will ask Him, "What was the cause of this movement?" Then the Buddha will reply, "This is a sign that indicates that in a solitary place called Chusang Ritro (which Geshe-la says is not far from Sera Monastery) under the guidance of a lama called Jampa Tenzin Trinlay Gyatso, a great number of followers have generated bodhicitta mind. The force of generating that bodhicitta mind causes this movement to happen here."

After this some prayers are recited as a cause to safeguard this bodhicitta mind and the vow that has been taken.

Finally comes the dedication of the merit. For dedicating the merits, the prayer of the Maitreya Buddha is recited. When reciting that dedication prayer of Maitreya Buddha the Guru holds a portion of the students' offering in his hand, and the attendants hold the rest of what the students offered.

During these dedication prayers you pray that whatever virtuous merit you have accumulated by generating bodhicitta mind, or taking bodhisattva vows, or creating virtuous actions is not lost. You entrust this merit with Maitreya Buddha asking him to always take care of the root virtues you have accumulated in the past, present and future.

You pray that, "When Maitreya Buddha appears in the world as a supreme manifestation performing the supreme deeds of such a manifestation, may I be amongst the forefront of his disciples and be included in the prophesy of achieving Buddhahood".

While reciting the dedication prayer the Guru throws rice or flowers into the air. What is thrown represents the substance you have offered to the Buddha. Imagine that the offerings thrown in the air go to Maitreya in the pure land, and fall there as the eight auspicious symbols or seven royal offerings. Maitreya Buddha accepts those offerings with delight and on your behalf makes prayers and so forth. The prayer is two verses from Maitreya's Prayer, which are recited three times. The first verse begins, "Maitreya Buddha when you come to Bodhgaya, open my mind just like the rays of the sun can open the lotus flower". The next line asks to be included among all the fortunate beings who are within the circle of the Maitreya Buddha.

The next verse says:

May the Maitreya Buddha with great delight place his right hand on my head, and predict when I shall achieve Buddhahood.

I pray that I achieve the state of Buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings.

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<sup>2</sup> O Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Gurus please listen  
To what I now say from the depths of my heart.  
Just as all Buddhas of the past have developed  
The thought of enlightenment, true bodhicitta,  
Then practised its stages of graded development  
Following the trainings for all Buddhas' sons.  
May I too, for the sake of all beings,  
Develop bodhicitta and follow the trainings  
Exactly as all bodhisattvas have done

<sup>3</sup> At this moment my life has become truly fruitful,  
For, having attained an endowed human body  
Today I have developed the true Buddha essence -  
Bodhicitta and thus have become Buddha's son

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<sup>4</sup> Applying now any skilled means whatsoever  
May I always accord what I do with this essence  
(And follow the actions of the Buddhas' sons).  
May I never confuse with this faultless essence  
(Any teachings that lack this Enlightening Thought).

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We finish here. Next week we shall continue with how to safeguard the bodhisattva vows, which we have already received.

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༄༅ ལམ་རིམ་རྣམ་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



10 October 2000

Keep in mind that the importance of always cultivating a motivation is that it helps to direct and keep one's mind on whatever spiritual practice is being performed. Therefore, as a motivation we should try to cultivate the bodhicitta mind by generating a genuine wish to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of beings. Then think that to fulfil this wish for enlightenment one is now receiving these teachings, and also that one will follow up these teachings by practising them.

Whenever we spend time cultivating our motivation we should examine the state of mind that we possess. If it is a faulty state of mind we should modify it. We may have a state of mind that sees our practice as a means of achieving some goal in this life, which would bring more happiness, satisfaction, and pleasure. We have to recognise that goal as a faulty mental intention. It is also a faulty intention if our practice of Dharma is to find a better rebirth, such as a human or godly rebirth, in the future.

Cultivating the proper motivation means replacing or modifying these faulty states of mind with the altruistic mind of benefiting other beings, so that whatever practice we do is to benefit other beings.

## 422.322.2 How to Safeguard the Bodhisattva's Vow We Have Received

We are up to the second heading which is how to safeguard the bodhisattva's vow we have received. This heading is explained under two subheadings, which are (1) instructions on maintaining aspiring bodhicitta, and (2) instructions on maintaining engaging bodhicitta.

### 422.322.21 Instructions on Maintaining Aspiring Bodhicitta

The instructions on maintaining aspiring bodhicitta are explained under two further subheadings which are (1) maintaining the aspiring bodhicitta which we have already generated in this lifetime, and (2) maintaining the aspiring bodhicitta in future lifetimes, so that our mind is never separated from the aspiring bodhicitta mind.

#### 422.322.211 Maintaining Aspiring Bodhicitta Generated in This Lifetime

There are four types of causes which maintain the aspiring bodhicitta that we have already generated within us in this lifetime.

##### 422.322.211.1 Remembering the Benefits of Bodhicitta

The first cause of maintaining and safeguarding the aspiring bodhicitta is remembering the benefits of bodhicitta. We studied a list of ten benefits of bodhicitta in the section on the bodhicitta teachings.

Even if we do not possess the genuine or fully-fledged bodhicitta we still have to recognise all the benefits of the bodhicitta mind, understanding how precious and wonderful it is. If we are relating the benefits of bodhicitta to our own practice then we have to see that they follow from the degree of love and altruism that we hold in our mind towards other beings. Even though that love and care for others is not a true bodhicitta, we can understand that for us it is no different from true bodhicitta. We have to see that it is the source of extending benefit to all other beings, as well as the source of preventing the giving of harm to others.

We have to understand how this loving nature in the mind is precious. As long as one has that nature then one will engage in the practice of, for instance, the ten wholesome actions, because the ten non-virtuous actions (like killing or stealing and so forth) will be abandoned. All non-virtuous actions are prevented by the virtue of having such an altruistic thought towards other beings.

## 422.322.211.2 Retaking the Bodhicitta Vow Three Times Morning and Night

The second cause to develop and increase the bodhicitta mind is to retake the vow three times in the morning and again at night. Of course those of you who have been doing the Six-Session Yoga do this as part of that practice.

However if you do not have the Six-Session Yoga commitment then you can do the same by simply saying the prayer of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta three times in the morning and evening. This prayer includes both the practices of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta. It also reviews all the commitments of generating the bodhicitta mind.

## 422.322.211.3 Preventing the Development of Bad Thoughts

The third cause is preventing any ill thought towards any other beings. This means generating any thought of questioning the point of benefiting a particular person, and thinking "I shall stop helping that person". It is said that giving way to such a thought of not benefiting others saying, "I won't help that person" is the cause of losing the bodhicitta mind.

Having such a thought shows that there is a prejudice in your love and altruistic thought. Therefore, it is saying here that one has to be very strong about preventing such thoughts, especially when someone who you have helped a lot shows you hatred in return. They give a response that is completely the opposite of what you expect! At such a time it is said that someone on the bodhisattva's path has to pay special attention to their practice, exerting themselves to make a special effort, because the circumstances make it very easy to lose the bodhicitta mind.

Even in our ordinary life it is harder to be patient when you receive harm from someone you care about and always help. It is very difficult for parents to endure it when their children are rude or mistreat them in some way. It is very difficult when those who you have always tried to help, in terms of giving material objects to please them, or giving spiritual advice and so on, turn against you.

When you face such circumstances it is very easy to lose your determination to benefit all sentient beings. It is so easy to say, "OK, I shall stop helping them if this is how they respond to whatever good deeds I do". If you think in this way then your bodhicitta mind is declining. In order to prevent such thoughts of not helping that person any more, try to train your mind by thinking that maybe others behave abnormally because it is in their nature, or personality. Try to see that they are behaving in such a wrong way, and not acknowledging your help because of their ignorance of what, or who, is benefiting them, and what is harming them. Try in this way to continuously maintain your good heart towards the other person all the

time.

As said before, on the one hand it is very difficult to be patient, but on the other hand if we think deeply then we can see that in these circumstance we need to be even more patient. In fact we need to be showing more love and more compassion towards the other person. If we observe another person facing the same situation where they are receiving a hostile response from someone they have been helping, we feel very sorry that the other being is not able to acknowledge the benefit and help that they receive from others. If we have this deeper understanding then instead of losing our patience we can see that we should be even more loving and even more compassionate towards those other people.

#### **422.322.211.4 Accumulating Merit**

The fourth cause of increasing bodhicitta is to accumulate merit. This means that in order to further develop the bodhicitta which we have already generated, we should be engaging as much as possible in any virtuous actions which can boost our spiritual merit. It is saying that if we engage in any of the other Six Perfections, such as the perfections of giving, morality, patience or joyous effort, they all contribute to increase our bodhicitta mind. However, the immediate cause to increase bodhicitta and intensify its force is meditating on love and compassion.

#### **422.322.212 Maintaining Aspiring Bodhicitta in Future Lifetimes**

There are two sets of four causes to safeguard the bodhicitta mind in future lifetimes. These are:

##### **422.322.212.1 The Four Black Dharmas**

##### **422.322.212.2 The Four White Dharmas**

##### **422.322.212.11 Deceiving One's Guru, Abbot or Master by Lying to Them**

The first of the four black dharmas is deceiving one's Guru or Abbot by lying to them.

The Guru or the Lama is the one who you regard as your spiritual guide and teacher. Abbot is a title that is used in different ceremonies following the Vinaya teachings, such as ceremonies of bestowing the celibate or layperson's vows. Master, or in Tibetan *lopen* is another title with different roles as explained in the Vinaya teachings. The role of the Master includes the Vajra Master in tantra and so on.

##### **422.322.212.21 Abandoning Telling Lies**

The antidote to the first black dharma is the first of the four white dharmas, which is abandoning the telling of intentional or deliberate lies. One should not lie to any other person even as a joke. Of course you cannot prevent it if you happen to tell a lie out of naivety or ignorance.

##### **422.322.212.12 Feeling Negative about the Virtuous Acts of Others**

The second black dharma is feeling negative about the good or virtuous actions performed by others.

##### **422.322.212.22 Being Honest with Others, Without Any Deceit**

The antidote for the second black dharma is the second white dharma, which is being honest with others without any deceit or cunning thoughts

With the **second black dharma** showing some negative feelings about the good deeds done by others indicates a sort of dishonesty in one's mental attitude towards others. It obviously shows a lack of acknowledgment of their deed as being a positive one.

The **second white dharma** is being honest towards others in the sense of acknowledging their good deeds, and rejoicing in those good deeds. On top of that, one should even try to think of ways one could cause that person to do even more virtuous actions. For instance if the other person is following the path of lesser vehicle, and if it is appropriate in the sense that the

person is ready to listen, then one should be encouraging that person to follow the path of the greater vehicle. Try to cause that person to strive for complete enlightenment for the sake of all other beings.

##### **422.322.212.13 Speaking Unpleasantly to Bodhisattvas out of Hostility**

The third black dharma is speaking unpleasantly to a bodhisattva out of hatred and ill thought.

##### **422.322.212.23 Recognising Bodhisattvas as Spiritual Teachers**

The third white dharma is the antidote to the third black dharma. It is recognising the bodhisattvas as spiritual teachers, and accordingly offering them due praise. Although bodhisattvas are used as an immediate example here, in fact one should be extending this practice to all other beings. One should train one's mind to recognise all other beings as spiritual guides, and try to see all other beings with a very pure mental attitude.

##### **422.322.212.14 Acting Deceitfully, Without Altruism**

The fourth black dharma is showing deceit and cunning towards others, out of the lack of a sense of responsibility for the welfare of other beings.

##### **422.322.212.24 Leading Others to the State of Complete Enlightenment**

In fact the meaning and the practice of the fourth white and the second white dharmas is being honest with all other beings without showing any deceit, so these two are pretty much the same in meaning.

The corresponding Tibetan terms for 'deceit' and 'cunning' have very specific meanings. The Tibetan word for deceitfulness is *gyu*. It means pretending to others that you possess real knowledge and real qualifications even though you do not possess those qualities. An example is if you lack inner peace and serenity and mental control, but outwardly you try to show to others that you are a very calm controlled person. Usually the motivation behind such pretence is to gain to gain some material benefit, respect, admiration and so on from others. The Tibetan *gyu* has a much broader meaning than the English term 'deceit' usually implies.

The Tibetan word for 'cunning' is *yo*. This term is used to indicate those actions where we try to hide all our weaknesses, faults and our shortcomings. The motive for doing this is also to gain material wealth or respect or so on. This was what the second dharma means when it refers to being honest towards others without any deceit or cunning.

##### **422.322.22 How to Maintain Engaging Bodhicitta**

This section concerns the Bodhisattva vows which include the 18 root vows and the 46 secondary bodhisattva vows.

If we do not discuss each of these vows, we would finish the lam rim teaching over two more sessions. But then what would we do until the end of this year? I thought about teaching on the topic of Mind or on Taking Three Basic Bodies into the Path. However, I am not sure whether there will be enough time to cover either of them. So, we shall continue next week with the teaching on the Bodhisattva vows. After the teaching we shall have tea in Landcox Hall and do some mantra rolling for the new Buddha statue, which is arriving soon.

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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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Note on authentication

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17 October 2000

Try to reinforce the bodhicitta mind by generating the strong wish to achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings. Think that one is receiving these profound Mahayana teaching to achieve that state of buddhahood. Also make sure that this motivation is associated with a strong intention to put this teaching into practice.

## 422.322.22 How to Maintain Engaging Bodhicitta

This heading refers to the practices related to the engaging bodhicitta mind. Here we find out about the Bodhisattva Vows, which consist of refraining from the eighteen root downfalls and forty-six secondary offences.

### Classification of Vows

According to the Vinaya or ethics scripture, vows are explained in terms of the different groups of moral misdeeds to which they are related. The misdeeds are classified into five groups and two groups and so on. When they are classified into two they are called *pham pa* (moral defeat) and *tung-wa* (downfall) in Tibetan.

The Bodhisattva Vows are in the *pham pa* category. More precisely in the Vinaya, when talking of transgressing Bodhisattva Vows, the term *nye wai pham pa* is used, which means resembling or near *pham pa*, rather than actual *pham pa*.

Literally, *pham pa* means defeat so the implication here is that when one's vow is stained with *pham pa*, it is destroyed and defeated. Since the Bodhisattva Vows can be restored after being stained by root downfalls, the term *nye wai pham pa* (near *pham pa*) is used to describe them. Whereas Pratimoksha (individual liberation) vows cannot be restored once they are lost, so the term *pham pa* is used in that context.

### Who Breaks the Vows?

First of all we have to consider the prerequisites that the person who breaks the vow should possess. They must already have received the vow of the engaging bodhicitta mind, which is the bodhisattva's vow. The vow should not have been allowed to degenerate and still be present. Furthermore the person should be of sound mind and not mentally insane.

### The Eighteen Root Downfalls

#### 1. Praising Oneself and Criticising or Belittling Others.

##### The Action(s)

There are two actions in this transgression. First there is 'praising oneself' and secondly 'criticising others'. 'Praising oneself' is done out of the desire to receive wealth, material gain, or praise from others. Criticising others is done out of the same motivation, and refers to the criticism of those who, because of various qualifications, are worthy of praise. Instead of praising their qualities you criticise them.

Obviously this root downfall involves another person, in the

sense of an object of your criticism, or audience for your self-praise. This is any other person who has a separate continuum from oneself. Furthermore, it says, the person has to be in the same class of migrating being as oneself: that is the other person has to be human. They should not be another form of life such as a godly being and so on. They must be also be mentally sound, and have the capacity to hear and understand what you are saying to them.

The theme or subject of the first root downfall is to praise oneself and criticise others.

### Motivation

We can also go into detail about the motivation behind this first root downfall. It is generally one of strong self-interest to receive either what are called in Tibetan *nye pa* or *kur ti*. (I have to use these Tibetan terms because they have no direct English equivalent here). *Nye pa* includes receiving food, clothing and a means of transport. Whereas *kur ti* refers to receiving items like shelter or a throne, which inflate the status of the recipient beyond what it actually is. The term *kur ti* refers to ostentatious items, which feed pretentious desires.

Whatever *nye pa* you desire to receive should be something which belongs to another, and in which you do not hold any share. This is similar to the action of stealing in that the object or property you are stealing has to belong to others, and not be something in which you have a share. If you have a share of the thing that you take, then we do not call that stealing.

It is also said that the motivation for this first downfall arises from self-interest, and is completely based on strong craving or desire for those objects. It excludes the motivation of receiving objects in order to make an offering to the objects of refuge, the three Supreme Jewels, or in order to give it away to others who are desperate for those objects. The motivation has to be completely based on self-interest and desire and craving for those objects.

If out of the desire to receive *nye pa* or *kur ti* merely for your own self-interest, and personal benefit you praise yourself or criticise others, that is the meaning of the first root downfall, which therefore can be sub-divided into two: praising oneself and criticising others.

#### 2. Not Giving Dharma and Wealth to Those in Need

##### The Action(s)

This refers to not giving Dharma and wealth to those who are afflicted with pain or suffering, or those who are without any protector or any spiritual guide, and who are very much in need of Dharma and wealth.

This downfall is committed when someone comes to beg for Dharma or wealth and so on, and you do not fulfil their request.

### Definitions

The type of person who comes to ask for help is afflicted with some problem or suffering because of the lack of wealth or material conditions. For instance, they beg for food and drink and so on, because they suffer from hunger or thirst.

The person may also be requesting you to teach Dharma because they are very keen, and they are a fit vessel to receive the Dharma. However they lack a spiritual guide or any other person with the qualifications to spiritually assist them.

As someone with Bodhisattva Vows you possess all the resources and capabilities to fulfil the need of that person.

We also have to consider the person who comes to beg for things. They are very desperate and genuine, and have come to beg you for those things with genuine hope and some expectations. Under these circumstances if you do not give Dharma or wealth, then this is the downfall of the second root vow.

The exceptions here are if the other person asks for harmful objects like weapons or poisons. Of course you are not advised to give these things, and this circumstance is excluded.

Also we have to possess whatever object, or wealth, or skill the other person requests.

#### **Motivation**

If because of your stinginess and miserliness you do not give to a person who begs for help out of desperation, and you and he possess the above qualities, then you are staining your vow with the second root downfall. Like the first root downfall, it can be also sub-divided into two: not giving dharma, and not giving wealth.

### **3. Not accepting an apology from others**

#### **The Action(s)**

The third root downfall is not accepting an apology from others even if they acknowledge the faulty or harmful actions that they committed. Through a lack of forgiveness you hold strong resentment and hatred, and so verbally or physically abuse or harm the other when they offer the apology. This third root downfall has two elements, not accepting the apology and harming others.

#### **Motivation**

The downfall of causing harm to others depends upon specific thought and actions. The thought or motivation has to be a hostile thought of hatred towards others. For instance if they have said something very bad or hurtful things you feel hatred because you cannot tolerate what they said. Therefore in your thought there is a strong hatred and strong ill thought towards that person, accompanied by a desire to retaliate and harm them. The result of such thought is the action of actually injuring them by hitting them or abusing them.

Here we could perhaps exclude actions arising from thoughts of genuine love and care. For example, parents can physically show some aggression to children in order to help discipline them. They do this out of love and care. Therefore when you talk of the motivation behind committing this third root downfall there is no love, or care, or thought of helping and benefiting others. The motivation is just hatred and harmful thought towards other beings.

#### **Definitions**

The first part of this third root downfall is not accepting an apology or not forgiving. In order to commit this downfall there are some points to consider.

The person who makes the apology has, of course, inflicted

some harm on you, the bodhisattva. The other person should genuinely ask for forgiveness properly, making a very appropriate statement of apology, in an appropriate manner.

To commit this downfall, someone has apologised and requested forgiveness, but all your thoughts are of harm and resentment. In fact, when the person makes an apology, your resentment and hatred becomes reinforced by remembering the harm that you received from them. When it takes place the nature of this downfall is such that your mind is boiling with hatred and resentment, and so your speech is very unpleasant. Then you say to yourself that you are not going to forgive the other person. When this happens, it is the transgression of the vow of not accepting an apology.

Although we learn about this transgression as part of the bodhisattva's vows, it is not a question of maintaining this vow only because we have taken the bodhisattva's vow. Regardless of or not whether you have taken this bodhisattva's vow it is a very beneficial practice to integrate into our lives.

Tonight we could finish only three of the vows, which means we might have to go a bit faster in the next teaching.

#### **Summary**

In fact of the eighteen root downfalls, each one of the first four consists of a set of two vows, so the first four are really eight vows. This might appear to be a contradiction but if we examine each of the four primary vows we find each has one motivation.

The motivation for transgressing the first root downfall is mainly the attachment. For the second root downfall the motivation is miserliness, and harmful thought was the motivation behind the third root downfall. There is only one motivation for each root transgression.

However when you talk of the actual actions or the deeds, then each root downfall has two separate actions. With the first one there are the actions of praising oneself, and of criticising others.

Likewise with the second one, there are the actions of not giving Dharma and not giving wealth.

The third one too has the actions of not accepting an apology from others, and actually harming other beings.

So really it in terms of the actions, the first four root downfalls become eight.

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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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#### **Note on authentication**

Transcribed from the tape by Kathi Melnic

Edited by Adair Bunnett and Alan Molloy

Checked by Sandup Tsering and Alan Molloy

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

༄༅ ལམ་རིམ་རྣམ་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



24 October 2000

Try to reinforce the bodhicitta motivation by thinking, "I want to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all beings, and it is for this reason that I am receiving these teachings and shall put them into practice".

## The Root Downfalls of the Bodhisattva Vows

We have been discussing the 18 root downfalls of the bodhisattva vows, and we have finished the first three.

4. The fourth root downfall is abandoning the Mahayana teachings and giving false teachings.

Here 'Mahayana' refers to the Mahayana teachings, which comprise the teachings on both profound emptiness and extensive deeds. 'Abandoning' means generating the thought that these profound and extensive Mahayana teachings could not be the words of Lord Buddha.

The second aspect of this fourth root downfall is promoting faulty teachings. Here 'faulty teachings' means a teaching from the outsider, or non-Buddhist schools. It also includes fallacious teachings, which are not authentic Buddhist teachings. This root downfall includes not only showing a great enthusiasm and interest and even joy in acquiring knowledge of false teachings, but also teaching these false teachings to others, and causing them to follow these false teachings. This is the meaning of teaching false teachings.

5. The fifth root downfall is stealing the property of the Supreme Jewel, which is the refuge objects.

The act of stealing refers to taking the belongings or the possessions of other beings. In the fifth downfall, the owner of the stolen goods is described simply as the Supreme Jewel, or the refuge objects. In a sutra it is said that Supreme Jewel refers to stupas and Sangha communities. Using that sutra then the term Supreme Jewel in fact includes all the three objects of refuge, because the stupa symbolises both the refuge objects of the Buddha and the Dharma.

The **actual object** of the theft refers to objects which belong to the three refuge objects, which of course are the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. We generally understand that these three objects of refuge refer to the actual Buddha as the refuge object Buddha; to the truth of cessation and the true path which are the refuge object Dharma; and that Sangha refers to superior or Arya beings. However, here the **refuge object Buddha** refers to not only the actual Buddha, but also to the symbols or representations of the Buddha, such as the image of Buddha in the form of a sculpture or painting, as well as to a stupa.

The **refuge object Dharma** refers to the two types of Dharma. One is the spoken Dharma, which is the

scriptural texts, and the realised Dharma which is inner realisations.

There are two types of the **refuge object Sangha** - ordinary Sangha and Arya Sangha.

In the case of **ordinary** beings the term 'Sangha' refers to a group of a minimum of four ordained monks or nuns. However in the case of superior beings this is not necessary, as even a single **Arya** Sangha is entitled to be called 'Sangha'.

So the three objects of refuge as just described are the owner of the things that you steal when committing this downfall. The actual substance of the theft can be any object which has been offered to these three objects of refuge. Even taking up the residence of the Three Jewels can also be the object of theft.

What is the **measurement of having committed this downfall**? It is said that it is the time when one engages in the actual action of stealing the property of the refuge objects. If the theft is of items belonging to Sangha, we say that if it is ordinary Sangha then it must be theft of a thing belonging to a group of four ordinary Sangha members. However if you are one of that group of ordinary Sangha members, then taking something owned by the group is not regarded as theft.

There is also the consideration of the **type of the thought** which presides over the action of theft. That thought has two elements - recognition and motivation.

**Recognition** means knowing that the item which you are stealing, belongs to the three objects of refuge.

**Motivation** refers to your intention of stealing the property of the Supreme Jewel.

The motivation can be general or specific. Let us use the example of an act of stealing the property of a Sangha. Your motivation is general if it is to steal the property of Supreme Jewel, although the thing to be stolen may be a property of a particular Sangha. Such a general motivation can serve the purpose of being a motivation to complete a particular action. The recognition is correct as long as the stolen thing belongs to any Sangha.

Your motivation can be specific. You do not intend to steal from the Supreme Jewel generally, but from a particular Sangha (Sangha A). In this instance, if you ended up stealing something which belonged to Sangha B then your recognition was wrong, and so there was no consummation of the action of stealing.

As to **the means of stealing**, one can either personally engage in the action of stealing, or have someone else steal it for you. Whether one steals directly or indirectly, by force or other means, it is all the same thing - it is the act of stealing. Upon the completion of the act of stealing

one would have the thought of having now obtained that object. If you commit a full action of stealing the property of any of the three objects of refuge, you are committing the downfall of stealing the property of the Supreme Jewel.

6. The sixth root downfall is abandoning the Dharma. This downfall occurs if you declare that the teachings, which constitute the three baskets of the teachings of the three vehicles of Hearer, Solitary Realiser and Bodhisattva vehicles, are not the actual teaching of the Buddha.

Dharma includes the entire teaching of the three vehicles - the great vehicle or Mahayana, and the lesser vehicles - Hearer, and Solitary Realiser.

The great vehicle-Mahayana is a teaching which is complete in itself. It consists of the three baskets of Scriptures which mainly deal with the profound topics of wisdom and extensive deeds. Abandoning the great vehicle teachings means generally criticising the complete Mahayana teachings, and even falsely claiming that they are not the real word of the Buddha. If you generally declare that the Mahayana teachings are not the teachings of the Buddha, then this is the downfall of abandoning Dharma.

Likewise with the teachings of the Hearer vehicle which are mainly about the four noble truths showing the entire path and the fruit of the Hearer vehicle. Here again, generally saying that the Hearer teachings are not the words of the Lord Buddha is committing this downfall. For it to be considered a downfall you have to criticise the entirety of the teachings of the particular vehicle, and not just direct your criticism to a particular aspect of the teaching. For instance if you have some criticism of the teaching on the noble truth of suffering which is in the teachings of the Hearer vehicle, it is not a general criticism, so it is not necessarily the downfall of abandoning the Dharma.

Likewise with the teaching of the Solitary Realiser vehicle which mainly concern the Twelve Links. Again, if you criticise this teaching of the Solitary Realiser (which explains the Twelve Links) as not being the word of the Lord Buddha, this is the downfall of abandoning the Dharma of the Solitary Realiser vehicle.

So we can see that the sixth root downfall has within it three downfalls in terms of abandoning the Dharma of the three vehicles.

### **The Importance of Knowing the Teachings**

Along with regular practice it is also important to try to develop an understanding and knowledge of the teachings, because it is said that one of the doors of negative actions is ignorance. Therefore through gaining knowledge and understanding of the teachings one can prevent any negative actions, which might result from ignorance of the teachings.

We have just been discussing the teachings of three vehicles, and we have to understand from that how essential it is for us to learn the teachings according to lam rim terminology and structure.

The teaching of the small stages of the path focuses on the basic practice of abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions. The only way to make any progress in one's spiritual path is to progress from the small stages of the

path. This is because without a sound base we are not going to achieve anything if we try to engage in some higher form of practice. As Lama Tsong Khapa said, "having become an vessel of the common path, may I soon enter the Vajrayana, the supreme of all vehicles". The common path means lam rim which includes the three stages of the path. Making progress in those three stages is done in a systematic orderly fashion by first making progress in the small, then in the medium and finally in the great stages of the path. So the practice of the small stage is not something to be underestimated, or ignored. As we learn from all the texts, if we do not make any effort with that, there is no point to our practice, and we cannot benefit from engaging in any higher stages of the path.

### **Discussion Night**

For the coming Study Group discussion night and the test, could we select two questions from each one of the test papers this year? For the compulsory question everyone is to write about their own experience of studying the lam rim, focusing especially on the part of the lam rim teachings which you find most beneficial for your practice and your life. Is it the teaching on renunciation or on death and impermanence or on bodhicitta? The compulsory question is to write about what you find most beneficial for your life from the lam rim teachings. So the detail of the compulsory question is up to you!

### **The Activities of a Scholar**

There are three activities of scholars: teaching, composing, and debating. This compulsory question gives you the opportunity to exhibit your skills in composition. In fact by joining this Study Group everyone has been receiving training in all three of these scholarly activities.

As you all know, there is the opportunity to give teachings and lead meditations, and also as part of the Study Group you have the discussion nights, which involve debating. Then our test involves writing or composing. In fact if you were to put all your study group test answers together then it is a bit like your own lam rim composition, and so you are all the authors of lam rim texts. So Study Group gives everyone the opportunity to become great scholars!

These three scholarly activities of the Dharma practitioner are all directed towards the flourishing of Dharma, as well as its preservation. The activity of teaching Dharma ensures that the Dharma is sustained and will never decline. In fact, teaching ensures the maintenance and preservation of the Dharma. The activity of composition ensures the longevity of the Dharma. Finally, the activity of debate ensures that the Dharma is preserved faultlessly.

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

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# TARA INSTITUTE

## STUDY GROUP DISCUSSION NIGHT -31st October, 2000

1. How do the three stages of the Path differ in terms of motivation and goal? Is it necessary for one to follow these three in order to achieve the state of Buddhahood? If so, how can one combine the three in a single Path to Enlightenment?
2. Briefly describe each state of mental abiding.
3. Why is it essential to realise emptiness in order to be liberated from samsara?
4. What are prerequisites for realising emptiness?
5. What is the object of negation? Why is it important to identify this clearly?
6. Explain the essential point of Pervasion. What is the pervasion here?
7. The analogy of the magician's illusions is used to explain the meaning of Emptiness. How does it do this? What similarities are there between the 3 categories of people described in each circumstance?
8. What is "consciousness"? How does one apply the reasoning of 'lacking oneness and many' to consciousness?
9. Before entering the vehicle of Tantra, it is important to gain a clear understanding of the 3 principles of the path. Explain why these are a prerequisite. Why is the Tantric path regarded as the swift path to Enlightenment.
10. The ritual taking of vows is a means to further enhance the Bodhicitta mind. Describe the preparations needed for the two day Bodhisattva Vow ceremony. Must one have first generated Bodhicitta in order to take the vows? Discuss the difference between the aspiring and engaging forms of Bodhicitta.

### **Compulsory question**

11. Discuss your experience of studying the Lam Rim. Which part of the Lam Rim have you found most beneficial to your life in bringing more peace and contentment, e.g. Death & impermanence, Karma, Bodhicitta, etc. Which part of the Lam Rim helps you most in challenging your delusions?

**YOU ARE IN GROUP**

# TARA INSTITUTE

## STUDY GROUP TEST - 7 November 2000

Answer any four from question nos 1-6

Question no.7 is compulsory

Time allowed - one hour

1. How do the three stages of the Path differ in terms of motivation and goal? Is it necessary for one to follow these three in order to achieve the state of Buddhahood? If so, how can one combine the three in a single Path to Enlightenment?
2. Briefly describe each of the nine mental abidings.
3. Why is it essential to realise emptiness in order to be liberated from samsara?
4. What is the object of negation? Why is it important to identify this clearly?
5. Explain the essential point of Pervasion.
6. The ritual taking of vows is a means to further enhance the Bodhicitta mind. Describe the preparations needed for the two day Bodhisattva Vow ceremony. Must one have first generated Bodhicitta in order to take the vows? Discuss the difference between the aspiring and engaging forms of Bodhicitta.

### **Compulsory question**

Describe your experience of studying the Lam Rim. Which part of the Lam Rim have you found most beneficial 'o your life in bringing more peace and contentment, e.g. Death & Impermanence, Karma, Bodhicitta, etc. Which part of the Lain Rim helps you most in challenging your delusions?