

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུང་ས།



6 October 1998

Cultivate the motivation of bodhicitta, by thinking that the purpose of the teachings we are receiving is to benefit all sentient beings.

Our current topic of discussion is Transforming Adverse Conditions Into The Path, which is described under two subheadings:

422.321.231 Transforming By Thought

422.231.232 Transforming By Deed (or Action)

422.321.231 Transforming By Thought

བསམ་པས་བསྐྱར་བ།

[This has two subheadings:]

422.321.231.1 Transforming By Analysis¹

སྒྲོན་པས་བསྐྱར་བ།

We had some discussion on Transforming By Thought [by Analysis] in the previous teaching. What it means is not losing your courage or motivation for practising Dharma when facing mental and physical problems. We may confront some problems in our life which result in either physical hardship or pain, or which cause mental pain and suffering. If we allow mental or physical problems to discourage us and overwhelm our determination and spirit, then we cannot think of practising Dharma.

Of the two subheadings of Transforming By Thought, we have finished Transforming By Analysis, and we now turn to the second one.

422.321.231.2 Transforming By View²

ལྷོ་ལམ་བསྐྱར་བ།

To be able to eliminate problems through transforming our view requires some understanding of the correct view of emptiness, or the ultimate truth. Strictly speaking it is very difficult to apply this technique of Transforming By View without some understanding of this view of the ultimate truth. To explain it in a simple way, this view concerns the reality of these feelings of happiness or of suffering, and the reality of the causes of these feelings, which we perceive as being due to favourable and unfavourable conditions. We have to understand that all these are just the projections of our mind. If we investigate, we find that happiness, and suffering and favourable or unfavourable conditions do

not exist from their own side.

Rather what we call the happiness or suffering is something which arises by depending upon the collection of various causes and conditions. Happiness and suffering do not exist in any other way and yet the way they appear to the mind is different. To our mind they are very real and tangible, as if they existed independently from our mind. When we view things like this, then mentally we grasp at them. If, on the other hand, we can see that happiness and suffering and their causes do not exist from their own side then we can reduce mental grasping at those things.

Looking at things in this way we see how we create both positive and negative karmic actions as a result of having the wrong view of things. With a wrong view of things we cannot stop anger and desire from arising. Desire arises from this wrong view because the object of desire is perceived as existing independently of our perception. There is desire for the object, because of a misconception in our mind about the way in which the object exists. We see it as a pleasant attractive object, with this quality of attractiveness being an inherent quality of the object. With this misconceived thought we might think of acquiring that object, and so desire arises. As a consequence we then suffer frustration if that desire is not fulfilled.

It is the same if we investigate anger and hatred. The initial cause is that we have the wrong view that an object for which we feel hatred has an inherently unpleasant quality, so we feel resentment about that object.

Meditating upon this view of emptiness or ultimate truth will be effective in overcoming problems and their causes. If at the point of death we look back we would see that all the happiness, suffering and all the other experiences of this whole life are just short moments. If we perceive things like this, then we understand that all the events of life are like a dream. For example in a dream of your body drowning or being burnt in a fire you know that all these events are unreal. This idea helps us to decrease the strength of our view that all the events and conditions that we face are very real and concrete. Whether these events are right or wrong, good or bad, if we view them like we view a dream, then we can reduce craving for this life.

It is said that the visual perception of ordinary beings is always incorrect, because whatever we visually perceive has the appearance of being inherently or truly existent. For example from a distance an object might appear to

¹ Editor: The root text says: "When the container and its contents are filled with evil, turn this adverse circumstance into the path to full awakening."

² Editor: The root text says: "Regard all deceptive appearances as being the four kayas."

our eye sense consciousness as very beautiful but if you go closer to that object it is no longer beautiful. Due to some wrong perception of the object it is initially seen as something beautiful and then we become attached to that object. However on coming closer to that object and seeing that it is not beautiful, then our attachment diminishes. In this way we can understand that our delusions such as desire and so forth are all conditioned by our wrong view, which influences the way in which objects are perceived.

To clarify how our eye consciousness can be so misleading, Geshe-la explained how when they first arrived in India, and they were interned at Buxa, Geshe-la had to travel to Bodhgaya and arrived there at night. That night he bought some cloth shoes which looked good for the price and he thought that he had a bargain. But in the daylight he realised they were no good and his attachment for the shoes disappeared!

Lord Buddha said "One who has the view of true existence would have like and dislike. For one who has the view of falsity there is no like or dislike." In other words as long as we have this wrong view of true existence, there will naturally be like and dislike for things. In this way all delusions arise from this wrong view.

At this point an outline of the teaching on cultivating bodhicitta is given. Of the two methods of cultivating bodhicitta we are now discussing Cultivating Bodhicitta By Exchanging Self With Others. This is elaborated in six stages:

1. Equalising self with others wherein you meditate to realise the equality of oneself with all other beings.
2. Disadvantages of self-cherishing.
3. Advantages of cherishing other beings.
4. These are two key stages, because even if we understand the equality of all beings, we still cannot stop desiring those close to us, and stop hating those who are distant from us. The reason why we have these attitudes of desire and hatred is because of our self-cherishing attitude, and being unable to replace this attitude with the one of cherishing others. Therefore we contemplate the disadvantages of self-cherishing, and the advantages of cherishing others.
5. Having made progress in these meditations the next stages are:
6. The actual exchange of self with others.
7. To intensify love and compassion, we engage in the Giving and Taking meditation.
8. Combine Giving and Taking with the breathing meditation.

To remember this method of developing bodhicitta, it is important to do as the root text says,

"Remember this by repeated recollection."

So memorise these stages and recite them repeatedly to remind yourselves.

Next in the commentary is the section on how these two methods of cultivating bodhicitta can be combined together. In the commentary text we learn that they are combined into 11 stages of contemplation. You should

memorise those 11 stages in your own time.³

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

© Tara Institute

Note on authentication

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

³ Editor: The eleven stages are:

1. Equanimity
2. Recognising all sentient beings as your mother
3. Recollecting the kindness of your mother
4. The wish to repay that kindness
5. Equalising self with others.
6. Disadvantages of self-cherishing
7. Advantages of cherishing other beings
8. To intensify compassion we engage in meditation on taking
9. To intensify love we engage in meditation on giving
10. Superior intention
11. Actual cultivation of the mind of bodhicitta

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

འདྲེན་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུང་སྟེ།



13 October 1998

Let us set the bodhicitta motivation by thinking 'I wish to achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings and it is for this reason that I am listening to these lam rim teachings, and shall put them into practice.'

It is very important that we always try to retain a positive state of mind in all our actions whether they be going to sleep, getting up in the morning, or walking. With a positive state of mind we can eliminate all the negative or very ill states of mind. If we are consistently alert and mindful of not allowing any negative state of mind to arise, and always try to maintain a positive state of mind, then eventually this positive state of mind arises very easily, and we shall become familiar with it.

We all wish to be very good people. However we must realise that what makes us good people is maintaining this positive state of mind. Wishing to be a very good, kind person, whilst at the same time having a very negative and ill mind is a contradiction in terms. From a spiritual point of view if we try to relate whatever knowledge we gain from our study of Dharma to our inner continuum, then that knowledge is not just learning. Rather it actually has an impact upon our life. When knowledge is related to our inner continuum our mind becomes more positive, and as our mind becomes more positive then our actions also become more positive. Through cultivating a positive state of mind not only do we transform ourselves into a better person, enjoying more peace and happiness, but we bring benefit to those around us and so they become happier and this brings benefit to ourselves and others in future lives.

The Eleven Stage Contemplation to Develop Bodhicitta

We have discussed how the two methods of cultivating bodhicitta can be combined into eleven stages of contemplation. After learning about these eleven stages the next step is to use them in practice. Such a practice implants a true seed in our mind to produce bodhicitta, and universal love and compassion.

The eleven stages are:

1. Contemplating immeasurable equanimity.
2. Recognising all sentient beings as one's mother.
3. Remembering their kindness in a very special manner.
4. Repaying their kindness in a special manner.
5. Equalising self with other.
6. Disadvantages or faults of self-cherishing.
7. Advantages or qualities of cherishing others.
8. Actual exchange of self with others in which one firstly undertakes the Giving meditation, which is

primarily focussed upon giving loving kindness to all sentient beings.

9. Applying the technique of Taking, in which one primarily focuses upon cultivating compassion for all beings. With the technique of Taking you have to generate a strong visualisation that all sentient beings are free of suffering, and then you place them in a state of everlasting happiness.
10. Superior Intention is cultivated by realising that the love and compassion that you extended to all living beings by doing the Giving and Taking meditation existed only in your mind as a heartfelt wish. Superior Intention, however, is not just a wish in your mind, but you actually take upon yourself the task of liberating all beings, freeing them from suffering, and giving happiness.
11. You then realise that the only way to achieve this task is to become enlightened or achieve the state of buddhahood, so you generate the bodhicitta wish to attain buddhahood in order to liberate all sentient beings.

Doing this profound meditation, (combining both methods), for even a few minutes, has the great benefit of implanting the bodhicitta seed in your mind. So you can see why we are so fortunate to have the opportunity to study and practise these teachings on bodhicitta. Rejoice and pray that you will always be able to hear about bodhicitta, which is the heart of the Lord Buddha's teachings, and that through the practice of bodhicitta you will be able to become like those great Mahayana teachers, Maitreya and Manjushri.

Incorporating Tantric Practice

For auspicious reasons, and the long term benefit of following tantric practice, you can also meditate on bodhicitta by way of taking the result into the path, which is a technique used in tantric practice. You visualise yourself as Shakyamuni Buddha, and then from your body you emit rays of light to all the other beings that you imagine surrounding yourself. These rays of light purify all their suffering, together with the causes of the suffering of all beings, placing them into the state of buddhahood. Having visualised this, cultivate a sense of joy and delight that you have freed all sentient beings and placed them in a state of buddhahood.

These rays of light which you manifest symbolise the omniscient exalted wisdom of Lord Buddha, and represent the power of the Buddha's omniscient mind of exalted wisdom. Sometimes these rays of light are visualised in five colours which represent the five types

of exalted wisdom. The reason why we have to view these rays of light as being in nature the omniscient mind is to remove doubts as to how these rays of light can free others from suffering and lead them to enlightenment.

What do we do when we arise from the sitting meditation?

When we arise from the sitting meditation the Thought Transformation root text says

'There are three objects, three poisons and three sources of virtue.'

This concerns our practice after the sitting meditation session, in which we cultivated love, compassion, realisation of emptiness and so forth.

The three objects mentioned in the root text are enemy, friend and indifferent beings. The three poisons or poisonous minds are desire, hatred and ignorance. The three sources of virtue or the three virtuous minds are non-attachment, non-hatred and non-ignorance.

When we arise from a sitting meditation we confront various pleasant, unpleasant or neutral objects. Usually a pleasant object stimulates desire, or attachment in our mind. The text says that rather than just grasping at that object with desire and attachment we should think of our practice. We should remember that it is not just ourself, but countless other beings who experience these same emotions of desire whenever they see any pleasant or beautiful object. So try to think 'May this desire or attachment that I am experiencing be the desire of all sentient beings', thus taking the desire of all sentient beings upon yourself. Having done this, wish that all other beings will experience the virtuous mind of non-desire or non-attachment in place of desire.

Hatred is generated towards any unpleasant or unattractive object, so think 'Through the hatred which I am now experiencing may all other sentient beings be free of hatred'. Just as all other beings generate hatred when they see any unpleasant object, so you wish that through the hatred you experience all sentient beings will be free of hatred, and instead experience the virtuous mind of non-hatred.

Towards neutral or indifferent objects there is a sense of ignorance through indifference. So think 'May all sentient beings be free of such ignorance caused by indifference towards neutral objects.'

Then go beyond taking upon yourself the desire, hatred and ignorance generated by other beings when they seeing pleasant, unpleasant and neutral objects, to consider how as a result of the influence of these three poisonous minds, they accumulate negative actions which are the cause of future lower rebirth or cyclic existence. Then try to think of taking upon yourself all the negative actions other beings have done which could throw them into lower rebirth or cyclic existence. Wish that they have immunity from both negative actions and their results.

The purpose of these post-meditative practices is to generate love and compassion and thereby to generate bodhicitta mind. When we talk about showing love and compassion to others, it is a very deep level of compassion which is different to the compassion which people naturally feel when they see another being enduring pain or hardship because of their unfulfilled

desire, or because they are unable to cope with their hatred, or because of their ignorance. Seeing others undergoing suffering like this we naturally feel sympathy and we don't feel hatred. [What we are doing in addition is to] cultivate compassion and feel sympathy for them because their actions are going to bind them in cyclic existence and throw them into lower rebirth. Based upon an understanding of the type of karma they create and the results of that karma, this type of compassion is deeper and more profound than the compassion which arises when we see other beings undergoing suffering.

Whatever one experiences - illness, disputes with others, or any crises in life - try to see that the source of these unwanted events is the self-cherishing mind. Try to accept that hardship or problems extinguish the self-cherishing mind and are purifying agents. So rather than feeling very depressed or negative about the problems that we face, try to feel positive that these are all the outcome, or ripening result, of a cause which we have created. Thinking in this way helps us to maintain a positive state of mind about our problems. Thinking 'May no other being experience the same problem' and taking upon yourself their burdens further strengthens this positive state of mind.

Think of how a merchant or a farmer will happily accept any type of hardship when they know that hardship is the way to success and the payoff. So they rejoice in their suffering because it is worthwhile. Similarly with Thought Transformation practice we can feel delight and joy in all the problems we confront in life. All the incidents we experience become a favourable condition to progress on the spiritual path, and to practise Dharma. When we do this then no matter what the situation that we face, we always have inner peace and happiness. As it is said in the text these Thought Transformation teachings are like the city which is the source of joy and happiness.

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

© Tara Institute

Note on authentication

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

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ཅུ་ལམ་རིམ་རྣམས་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



20 October 1998

Having cultivated the bodhicitta motivation, think also of applying this teaching to overcome all negative states of mind.

422.321.231 Transforming Adverse Conditions Into The Path By Transforming Our Thinking (continued)

We need to have a right way of thinking in times of both happiness and in sorrow, because it can be very effective: at the very least adverse conditions do not become worse. These teachings tell us that worrying about problems in life, even physical hardship or pain, is not a healthy way of thinking. In fact worry can cause even more pain and hardship. These Thought Transformation teachings remind us that others also undergo suffering, some of which is far greater than what we experience, and that we can utilise our own suffering as a way of alleviating their suffering.

We have to consider the kind of view we need to cultivate in those situations when we find happiness and are enjoying ourselves, and in those when we experience suffering. The Thought Transformation teachings help us in both these situations. Furthermore it is our way of thinking that determines whether favourable or unfavourable living conditions become a source of happiness, or a source of suffering.

It is not just the obstacles or unwanted things in life that are necessarily the enemy. It is also the conditions which we normally regard as very favourable, such as friends, children and all the beautiful things which we believe will bring more support, happiness and joy in life, that can also cause us suffering. These too can become enemies, and much of the suffering and problems we undergo are associated with them. Why is this? The reason has a lot to do with not being able to adopt the right way of thinking.

It says in the *37 Practices of a Bodhisattva*:

Abandoning one's home country is a bodhisattva's practice.

This implies that when we generate too much attachment to them, even very good places and friends can be a cause of suffering. Thus is due to our own way of thinking or mental perspective whereby even favourable situations become unfavourable. Likewise the reverse is true. Through Thought Transformation techniques we can transform unfavourable conditions which cause unhappiness, into favourable ones. In other words we can transform unhappiness into happiness.

We should also try to bring *The Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* by Geshe Langri Tangpa into the context

of this topic. For instance one of the verses of his text says:

When someone whom I have assisted
and in whom I have placed great hope
inflicts upon me extremely bad harm
I shall view that one as my supreme spiritual friend.

If we face such a problem, then the way to overcome it is to recite this verse from the text and for inspiration pray to Geshe Langri Tangpa that the current situation one is in will no longer be a cause of suffering or hurt. As you recite this verse imagine that Geshe Langri Tangpa is in front of you, and through receiving his inspiration and blessings you begin to integrate the meaning of these teachings into your practice. Practising Thought Transformation in this way is very effective, just like pouring water onto a fire. It soothes the mind and removes all the suffering that we experience.

422.321.232 Transforming by Deed

ལྷན་བས་བསྐྱུར་བ།

The root text says:

Possess the four preparations, the highest of means.

The four preparations are:

- 1 Accumulation of merit.
- 2 Purification of obscurations.
- 3 Offering tormas (or ritual cakes) to interfering spirits.
- 4 Propitiating Dharma protectors.

What we learn in this section is that experiencing unwanted suffering, and not finding the happiness we desire is a message to us. The message is that we cannot find happiness because we have not gathered the right conditions, and the fact that we experience suffering indicates that all the conditions to produce suffering are present.

The natural tendency is wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. As we do not want suffering, then we must prevent its causes, and as we want happiness, we need to think of creating the causes for it. Therefore we should try to understand that in order to find happiness we have to accumulate merit through virtuous action, and to prevent suffering we have to avoid non-virtuous actions.

As a means of accumulating merit and purifying negativities we therefore engage in the four preparations which include: making offerings to the three objects of refuge and giving charity to the poor; giving tormas to interfering spirits to protect us from receiving harm; and engaging in purifying practices to purify negativities.

1. Accumulation of merit.

All [positive] actions performed by body, speech and mind accumulate merit. We take refuge, generate bodhicitta, make offerings and pray to the gurus to bestow upon us inspiring blessings, so that we shall be able to joyfully endure whatever hardship we face in life, even sickness or death, with the thought of compassion for all living beings.

2. Purification of obscurations.

As part of the preparation for purifying negativities try to think that any unwanted suffering is an alarm, alerting us of the need to apply the practice of abandoning negative actions, since all suffering is the result of negative action.

The Four Forces of Purification

In brief these four forces are an essential practice for purifying ourselves of all the negativities which we accumulate. Of course we cannot guarantee that we shall not accumulate any negative actions in future, however it is said that if we apply these four forces we can at least prevent the suffering result of negative actions from arising.

- 1 **Force of Regret:** Having created a negative action, we should not be complacent about it. Unless it is purified we shall have to face the consequences which are suffering and unhappiness, which we definitely do not want. Therefore for any negative action that we have committed, we need to feel regret as if we had consumed a deadly poison. It is said that showing a great sense of remorse and regret purifies at least half the result of any negative action.
- 2 **Force of Promise:** Resolving to ourselves not to repeat such negative actions again is considered as a very effective element of the purification process.
- 3 **Force of Object:** We engage in spiritual practice wherein we take refuge in the Three Jewels, generate bodhicitta and so on, as the third component of purifying negativities.
- 4 **Force of Remedy:** This includes any virtuous or wholesome actions that we accumulate, since all virtuous actions act as a remedy to purify negative actions. In the Force of Remedy however, we can engage in specific practices of remedy.

There is a saying, 'Negativity is light to the wise, but is heavy to a fool.' Even if you are wise you can still create negative actions, however because of your knowledge of this purification practice then these negativities are not too heavy. Whereas if negativities are not purified, they then become a severe cause of suffering.

3. Offering tormas (or ritual cakes) to interfering spirits.

The third preparation of offering tormas to interfering spirits can be done in two ways:

- 1 Cultivate some sense of gratitude towards interfering spirits for all the harm and suffering they have caused you. All these sufferings become a cause to develop and cultivate the bodhicitta mind. By causing you suffering,

these interfering spirits have done you a great favour. So you request even more suffering from these interfering spirits, so that the suffering of all living creatures may ripen upon yourself.

- 2 If the previous way is not feasible, try somehow to cultivate love and compassion towards the interfering spirits who bring suffering to your life rather than hatred. Out of this love and compassion, engage in the ritual practice of offering cakes to the interfering spirits in order to please them. While making this offering request the spirits to bring no harm nor place any obstacles to spiritual practice.

4. Propitiating Dharma protectors.

The fourth preparation, is to rely upon or propitiate the Dharma protectors. Request and pray for support and trust that the Dharma protectors will support and protect you in your spiritual practice.

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

© Tara Institute

Note on authentication

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

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



27 October 1998

Try to reinforce the bodhicitta motivation that you have just cultivated. Also generate the strong intention that not only do you wish to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings by listening to these lam rim teachings, but you also wish to put these teachings into practice for the ultimate goal of full enlightenment.

We have finished discussing the four preparations as cited by the root text.

Possess the four preparations, the highest of means. The previous line of the text said:

Utilise every immediate circumstance for meditation. This means applying Thought Transformation to transform any immediate obstacle or problem that we confront, as a result of suffering physical illness or mental hardship or some other suffering. We do this by thinking of all the suffering that exists, and that affects all living beings in this world, and through this we try to generate sympathy and compassion. Then, through cultivating this compassion we try to accommodate the suffering we personally face, by seeing it as a personal sacrifice for the benefit of all sentient beings. We also generate a genuine wish that through our own personal suffering all other beings will be free of suffering. Our suffering then becomes a positive experience.

422.321.24 Consolidating Into A Lifetime Personal Practice

ཚོ་གཅིག་གི་ཉམ་ལེན་བསྐྱེད་ནས་སྣོན་པ།

We now go onto the fourth main section of the *Seven Verses of Thought Transformation*, Consolidating Into A Lifetime Personal Practice.

To quote the root text:

Gather together the abridged quintessence of this advice. Blend the practice of one life with the Five Forces.

The Five Forces are:

1. Force of Motivation
2. Force of Familiarity
3. Force of White Seed
4. Force of Destruction
5. Force of Prayer

1. Force of Motivation

This means always reminding and motivating ourselves to only perform right actions. Generally it is said that all our actions are regulated by our thoughts. If the preceding thought is positive, then we can be assured that the action will also be positive. Whereas if the preceding thought is faulty, we can be assured the action will also be faulty. The Force of Motivation means that day-by-day we should try to motivate ourselves that right now, or for this day, or even for a whole month or year, or for this whole lifetime, or even until enlightenment is achieved that our self-cherishing mind will not be allowed to rule over our thoughts.

Rather we shall engage in the two types of bodhicitta mind and always hold them [as the dominant thought]. It is so very important to cultivate this bodhicitta mind over and over again, even if it is only a very artificial bodhicitta mind. If we do this we find that it can be very effective in actually cultivating, and developing the true bodhicitta mind. Also, whatever actions we do shall be of some benefit to other beings.

To make this teaching very explicit, if upon waking in the morning of one single day we make some effort to cultivate a very peaceful and positive state of mind, then this can be a cause to find more peace and positive events in that day. Whereas if from first thing in the morning our mind is unchecked, our first thought will be very agitated and distracted, particularly if we have many problems. This kind of mind will then affect all our actions during the day, and we shall lose our focus. Here our practice is to check ourselves over and over again and remind ourselves of the benefit of cultivating bodhicitta, and if there is any self-cherishing in the mind, then generate the motivation to overcome it, and replace it with the mind that cherishes others - the bodhicitta mind.

2. Force of Familiarity

As Shantideva said:

There is no action or object which cannot become easier when we become familiar with it.

If through the Force of Familiarity we become very familiar and used to this bodhicitta mind, then without any effort, in even a second, we can give birth to true genuine bodhicitta. In other words bodhicitta can spontaneously arise in our mind.

On the other hand, when we are unused to doing something, then even simple tasks become very difficult and complicated let alone very difficult ones. In order to generate the Force of Familiarity with this bodhicitta practice, we should integrate bodhicitta mind into all our actions as much as possible. The more we integrate it into all our actions, whether they be walking, sleeping, or talking, then the more familiar with bodhicitta we become, and then the more easily it will arise in our mind.

The word 'familiarity' in Tibetan is 'kom'¹. It has the same meaning as 'gom'² which means 'meditation' or 'to become familiar with'. Thus this continuous practice of making the mind familiar with bodhicitta is by definition meditation.

3. Force of White Seed

This concerns practices of increasing our merit and purifying our negativities. In this practice we aim to give rise to the bodhicitta mind if it has not arisen, and if it has already been generated, the aim is to further increase the bodhicitta mind. Therefore it is important in any practice to

¹ ཚོམས་པ།

² རྒྱུ་ལ།

purify negativities or to accumulate merit, that our motivation is not tainted by self interest, or the aim of worldly benefit.

4. Force of Destruction

This concerns the practice of destroying the self-centred mind, or self-cherishing attitude. Whenever this selfish attitude arises we should try to contemplate how, because of this self-cherishing we have suffered in beginningless past lifetimes, as well as in this current life and even at this present moment. Also we try to see how even in the future suffering is unavoidable because of this. In this way we make ourselves aware of the pitfalls of self-cherishing, and then for all these reasons we destroy and counteract self-cherishing by engaging in meditation practice.

5. Force of Prayer

The Force of prayer is wishing and praying that whatever virtuous practice that is undertaken will be a cause for the two types of bodhicitta to be present in one's mind throughout all lifetimes. Think also 'May any adverse conditions in my life become favourable conditions to enhance this bodhicitta mind'.

The practice of the above Five Forces are to be applied during one's lifetime.

The Five Forces at the Time of Death

The Five Forces can also be practised at the time of death.

As the root text says:

The instruction of the great vehicle transmigration of consciousness is to apply these very Five Forces [at death], while lying in the perfect position.

While the names of the Five Forces at the time of death are the same, there is a different approach.

1. Force of Motivation At The Time Of Death

At the time of death cultivate a strong motivation to not be parted from the bodhicitta mind either during death, or after death in the intermediate state of being. This means reinforcing a strong resolve to not discontinue this practice of the two bodhicittas especially at death or in the intermediate state.

2. Force of White Seed At The Time Of Death

This practice is to remove attachment and grasping at possessions, especially material ones, so that at the moment of death one will be very peaceful, with no attachment to possessions serving as a cause of worry and distraction.

So prior to death, get rid of possessions as much as possible, by offering them to the Three Jewels, or giving them to those in need. In Western culture some parents and grandparents practise this. For those without much wealth there is not much to worry about with wills and so on, but for those with a lot of wealth it can be a big issue. Some people even try to control their children in this way, forcing obedience with threats of changing the Will! As a spiritual practitioner there is benefit in giving away possessions, so that wealth will not be a distraction at the time of death. Do this practice of dedicating your possessions, so that mentally you have given them up before you actually die.

3. Force of Destruction At The Time Of Death

This means undertaking a specific practice in order to purify negativities, and to restore any broken vows and pledges. This is a very powerful and effective practice to do prior to death. Those following the secret mantra path should engage in self-initiation practice at this time, so that they take the bodhisattva and tantric vows again, thus purifying any vows or pledges that have been breached or which have degenerated. It is said that if you have a great store of negativities in your mind, these can be an obstruction to a very peaceful death. So doing a purification practice at death, such as applying the four means of purification, the

practice of confession and so on is very beneficial. The specific purification practice is the one to destroy the self-grasping attitude, wherein you investigate what we call the self or 'I', which we grasp very strongly and tightly. If we investigate that self we realise that neither the mind is that self, nor are our aggregates that self. In this way we realise that the self has no solid concrete existence despite the way we see it, and that there is attachment to this self because there is a notion in the mind that the self is concrete. Through this meditation we try to destroy this concept of self grasping, and the strong attachment we have to this self.

4. Force of Prayer At The Time Of Death

This is the practice which we do at death, where after making offerings to the gurus and all the objects of refuge we pray that we may not be separated from the bodhicitta mind, and the bodhisattvas' deeds during the intermediate state of being, and all future lifetimes. We pray that all the gurus and refuge objects send us blessings and that all the adverse conditions that we may face in the future will become favourable conditions to increase the bodhicitta mind. We also pray to be able always to meet with our spiritual teachers again, who can [continue to] teach us about bodhicitta.

5. Force of Familiarity At The Time Of Death

Through this Force of Familiarity one can die or pass from this life with the bodhicitta mind. Becoming familiar with bodhicitta, by practising it over and over again is not just a practice for this life. It is also so that at death we are able to engage in the bodhicitta practice, and die with bodhicitta in the forefront of the mind. Try to understand that the force of familiarity is something that can only be generated by doing the same practice over and over again. To do this practice easily and comfortably at death, we have to become used to doing it in our lifetime. If we do that then there will be no difficulty doing it at the time of death, and we shall die with a bodhicitta mind.

The root text says:

The instruction of the great vehicle transmigration of consciousness is to apply these very Five Forces [at death], while lying in the perfect position.

The 'perfect position' in which we die should be the same as that of the Lord Buddha's position, when he passed into paranirvana. This is the lion position where one lies on the right side, with one's head in the right hand.

In doing this try to recollect the life of Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, then if possible as one dies practise the technique of Giving and Taking, integrating it with the breathing meditation, and through this cultivating love and compassion for all beings. If at death a virtuous frame of mind can be maintained by undertaking practices such as taking refuge, or cultivating renunciation or bodhicitta, then it is said that the benefit of cultivating bodhicitta makes it possible to take rebirth even in a pure land.

In one of our past teachings we learned the story of how when a mother and child were drowning, because the mother's thoughts were only of rescuing her child, this thought caused her to be reborn in a pure land. When Geshe Chekawa was very close to death, he said to his students 'Now you can begin your practice of offering. I have always prayed to be reborn in the realm of 'Hell without Respite' but there is instead every indication that I shall go to a pure land.' This shows the result of the bodhicitta mind.

TARA INSTITUTE

STUDY GROUP DISCUSSION NIGHT -3rd November 1998

Covering discourses 06/10/98 - 27/10/98

- 1/ Under the heading 'Transforming Adverse Conditions into the path' there are two sub-headings: transforming by analysis and by view. Discuss the meaning of 'transforming by view'.
- 2/ Using attachment as an example, illustrate how a correct view of reality can reduce and even eliminate its arising
- 3/ Why is it important to try and maintain a positive state of mind?
- 4/ What are the eleven stages of contemplation when combining the two methods of cultivating Bodhicitta?
- 5/ Describe the method of meditating on Bodhicitta by way of taking the result into the path?
- 6/ In the post meditation period, the text says "there are 3 objects, 3 poisons and 3 sources of virtue". What are the objects, poisons and sources and discuss how we can integrate this practice.
- 7/ In terms of transforming unfavourable conditions into the path to Enlightenment by deeds. what are the 4 preparations?
- 8/ Name the 4 forces which are the 4 means of purifying negativities and give a brief description.
- 9/ In the teaching on combining the practice to be applied for your whole life with the 5 forces, what are the 5 forces?
- 10/ How should one practice applying the force of motivation in our daily life?
- 11/ How can the force of familiarity be applied at the time of death?

Compulsory Question

Explain the meaning of the third stanza of the 8 point thought transformation

"Examining my continuum throughout all actions, as soon as an emotional affliction arises that endangers myself and others, by facing it I shall strictly avert it"