
Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

16 June 2015

Based on the motivation we have just generated during the recitation of our prayers, we can now engage in our meditation practice. *[meditation]*

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.

2.1.2.1.2.1. Abandoning laziness by contemplating the disadvantages of this life

2.1.2.1.2.1.2. *Since one is under the control of death, acting leisurely is unsuitable (cont.)*

2.1.2.1.2.1.2.1. One should not be lazy as one is under the control of the lord of death

The verse relating to this heading reads:

6. *Having closed off all roads,
The lord of death has cast his eye on us.
How can you enjoy food?
How can you enjoy sleep?*

Gyalsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

The butcher that is the lord of death has closed off all roads leading to the deathless city and has already cast his eye on us. How can you be like a careless buffalo and enjoy eating food or crave for sleep. This carelessness is unsuitable.

Here, *deathless city* refers to the state of liberation. The presentation here is that the road to liberation is blocked by the lord of death. Just as the butcher's task is to slaughter animals, the task of the lord of death is to take one's life. Our life can be taken by the lord of death at any time. Gyalsab Je uses the analogy of a buffalo who continues to enjoy eating grass and drinking water, despite the fact that other buffalos are being slaughtered around it. Even though such careless buffalos are on the verge of being slaughtered themselves, they behave as if there is no immediate danger to their life.

The Tibetan word, *bak-mepa*, translated here as *careless*, carries the meaning of lacking conscientiousness. The buffalo lacks conscientiousness about the fact that it is about to be killed, and we will be like that buffalo if we also lack conscientiousness and fall into a state of enjoying food during the day and craving sleep at night. As we are in the constant grip of the lord of death, death is imminent, yet we act like the buffalo who continues to enjoy food and drink, even as it is about to be slaughtered.

Taking this as a personal instruction, we need to reflect upon the fact that we are very fortunate in that we have obtained a human life with the eight freedoms and ten endowments. Furthermore, we have come in contact with the Dharma. So it would be a great pity if we were to

focus only on the worldly affairs of this life, such as eating, drinking and sleeping, and not utilise this life to engage in some form of virtue to secure our wellbeing in our future life. Engaging in virtue and practising the Dharma becomes meaningful when the focus is at the very least for the betterment of our future life. This is really the point to consider here. The imminence of death exhorts one to engage in some practice of virtue. So, as the commentary explains, *this carelessness is unsuitable*.

To really take this instruction on board, we need to reflect upon how our remaining lifespan is constantly decreasing, and how the end of this life is definitely approaching. Now if our life were to completely cease to exist at the time of death, and if we didn't have to take rebirth again, then one might say that it is acceptable to devote ourselves entirely to worldly affairs, and enjoy ourselves as much as we like in this life, which, of course, involves accumulating non-virtues. If this approach were to actually bring some genuine sense of happiness, then we might again consider that approach as being worthwhile. But from our own experience we have found that when we are completely engaged in worldly affairs, our life isn't all that happy anyway. The main point here is that if we reflect on the fact that there is some continuity of life after death, and that we have to prepare for that future life, then we will understand why it is worthwhile to engage in virtue.

When we take a farsighted approach, and engage in activities that benefit our future life, then the natural by-product is benefit in this life as well. Whereas if one focuses only on the worldly affairs of this life, there will be no benefit in our future life, and only minimal benefit in this life. This is the significant point that we need to reflect upon.

There is a continuity of life that has no beginning, and at the end of this life we will not cease to exist. In fact this was the point of young Tenzin's question to His Holiness Dalai Lama in the recent teaching in Brisbane: if sentient beings need to rely upon the Buddhas to become enlightened then how did the first Buddha become enlightened? His Holiness definitely paid great attention to that question, and looked directly down at Tenzin as he answered it at length. I also have to say that many people have this same question.

His Holiness explained how there is a continuity of our mindstream, and that there is no beginning to samsaric existence, and that there are two interpretations about the end of samsaric existence. On a general level there cannot be an end to the cyclic existence of all sentient beings at once. In fact it is almost an irrelevant question, because some say 'yes', and others say 'no'. We could never be certain when that end has actually occurred.

However there will be an end to one's personal samsaric existence. Gyalsab Rinpoche elucidated the fact that because one can overcome all one's defilements, there is definitely an end to cyclic existence for an individual being. From the moment they gain the direct realisation of emptiness, cyclic existence ceases for that person, and they will not be involuntarily reborn into cyclic existence again. So there is definitely an end to an individual's cyclic existence.

The assertion that there is no beginning to cyclic existence relates to not being able to find a beginning to one's consciousness. When you trace back your consciousness you cannot find a particular point in time where you can say, 'This is when the consciousness first started'. So because there is no beginning to an individual's consciousness, it is asserted that there is no beginning to cyclic existence. Here of course the term *consciousness* particularly relates to the subtle awareness of an individual's mind.

Tenzin is to be congratulated for his very good question—he is a young person with a sharp mind! He also helped to clarify an earlier question asked by another person, to which His Holiness also gave a lengthy answer.

To summarise the point: an individual's cyclic existence ends at the moment the ignorance of grasping at a self is overcome by the realisation of emptiness. When the very cause of individual cyclic existence is severed, then the consequences of having to be reborn again in cyclic existence naturally ceases as well. When the cause of cyclic existence, the ignorance of grasping at an inherently existent self, is overcome, then the result, which is cyclic existence, ceases. This is the law of cause and effect—when there is no cause there cannot be an effect.

2.1.2.1.2.1.2.2. *Strive in virtue since you will die soon*

Again, the outline by itself explains the meaning of the following verse. Gyaltsab Je uses the outline as an exhortation to engage in the practice of Dharma: because one will die soon, one must strive in virtue.

The lines of verse are preceded by this hypothetical statement:

Argument: I still have some time

Then two lines of verse are presented as an answer to that statement:

*7ab. Since one is certainly going to die soon
One should build up the two accumulations
until then*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on these lines explains:

Answer: One is certainly going to die soon and hence one should build up the two accumulations as long as one is not captured by the lord of death

The meaning of the verse is quite clear. *One is certainly going to die soon, and hence one should build up two accumulations for as long as one is not captured by the lord of death.* We can relate this point to the Lam Rim teachings on the certainty of death, which explain that our lifespan is constantly decreasing, and that it is never extended. The reality of our life is that with each moment that passes, our lifespan is decreasing. It is not as if it decreases, and then stops for a while. Our lifespan is constantly decreasing, and there is no way to add more time on to it. So we need to seize the opportunity to engage in virtue right now.

One should build up the two accumulations refers to accumulating virtues and abandoning negativities or non-virtues. Death is inevitable, and we can't do anything about the fact that we will have to face it. However, what we do have in our hands is the capacity to ensure that we

will, at the very least, not experience any fear at the time of death, and that, by accumulating virtue, we can even take a better rebirth than our present one. That will then enable us to continuously engage in the practice of Dharma. That is something we can do now. We can't prevent death, but by accumulating the merit for a good rebirth next life we can definitely prevent fear at the time of death, as well as prevent an unfortunate rebirth.

We've all seen people who are completely obsessed with happiness in this life, and who end up being quite miserable. Things never seem to go well for them. They seem to be constantly facing difficulties and problems, because they are constantly trying to make things comfortable for this life. When things don't work out in that way, they experience despair and agony, and end up being quite miserable. Whereas those who focus on their future life engage in activities that will help them in the next life, while being more relaxed and contented, and thus happier in this life too. So you can see that there is a different outcome from these two different attitudes, one of which focuses only on this life, and the other which focuses on the future life.

What we can take as a personal instruction here is that it is really worthwhile to pay heed to preparing for our future life, by engaging, as much as we can, in accumulating merit with the intention that it will benefit us in the future. We are very fortunate that not only have we met and come into contact with the Buddhadharma, but we have come in contact with perfect teachers who explain the Buddhadharma, and we have the intelligence and means to understand it. It would be a great pity if we let all these good conditions go to waste, and pay no attention to accumulating virtue and merit for our future life. We have the ability to not only make this life happy, but also to prepare for our future life. So why not seize the opportunity to achieve both?

2.1.2.1.2.1.2.3. *The time of death is the wrong time to abandon laziness*

At the time when one is about to die, one might think, 'Oh, I need to practise Dharma and abandon laziness now'. But it is already too late, as death will occur at any moment. As there is no time left, abandoning laziness at that point will not really enable one to accumulate virtue. The implicit meaning here is that right now is the best time to abandon laziness, and engage in accumulating virtue.

The next two lines of verse are:

*7cd. Though one abandons laziness then,
What shall one do when it is the wrong time*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains that:

Though one may abandon laziness when one is held by death, what is striving at the wrong time supposed to accomplish? One will not achieve the slightest purpose.

We have just covered the meaning of this.

2.1.2.1.2.1.2.4. One should not be lazy since one can die suddenly without finishing one's work

The verse relating to this subdivision is:

8. *This started without completing it,
This one left half done,
With the lord of death coming all at once
One thinks, 'oh no, I am doomed.'*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Since one will die soon, at the time when this work is undone, just started, or half done, the lord of death comes suddenly. Then, regretfully, one thinks, 'Oh no, I am doomed.' When one is regretful from fear what shall one do? Strive in virtue, starting from right now onwards.

Here we can recall the story of the teacher who regularly used to tell his student, 'when we finish our work we will go on a picnic'. One day, the teacher saw a procession in the distance, and he asked the student what was happening, and what were they carrying? The student replied, 'Oh that is someone who has finished all their work, and who is going on a picnic'. In fact it was a corpse being carried in a funeral procession!

Since one will die soon indicates that death will not wait. At the time *this work is undone* means that a task has not yet been started, or a task may have *just started*, and *half-done* means that the task has yet to be completed. At any one of these stages the *lord of death* may come *suddenly*. Then one will *regretfully think*, 'Oh, no, I am doomed'. The implication is that if one has not engaged in accumulating virtues then one will feel regret and fear at the time of death. There is nothing that one can resort to if one has not accumulated virtue. The conclusion is that one should *strive in virtue starting from right now onwards*.

It is good to really contemplate these points and take them as a personal instruction, thinking that by engaging in virtues, there will, at the very least, be no regret at the time of death. That would be a good way to die. A peaceful death is one where one has no regrets, and with that lack of regret comes the consolation that one has done one's best to accumulate virtues and merit. When one has accumulated some virtue there definitely seems to be an ease at the time of death. This is a really significant point.

2.1.2.1.2.1.3. If one does not strive in virtue, one shall be overwhelmed by suffering

Here there are two subheadings.

2.1.2.1.2.1.3.1. At the time of death one shall be overwhelmed with misery

2.1.2.1.2.1.3.2. If one does not strive in virtue starting right now, one will not achieve one's aims

2.1.2.1.2.1.3.1. At the time of death one shall be overwhelmed with misery

The relevant verse reads:

9. *With swollen red eyes due to misery
And tears running down their faces,
Near and dear ones lose hope
And I look into the faces of the lord of death's
messengers.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary of this verse reads:

At the time of one's untimely death, near and dear ones, with swollen red eyes due to misery and tears

running down their faces, lose hope, and one, though being afraid, will have to look into the faces of the lord of death's messengers.

First of all, *untimely death* refers to the situation where someone might have a lifespan of, for example, one hundred years. However due to misadventure or accident, they can die prematurely. There used to be a student called Norman Henderson who asked questions, very respectfully, with his palms together. One of his questions I remember, concerned the meaning of untimely death. He wondered how, if there is a fixed time for everyone to die, one could die before that fixed time. He was quite baffled as to how someone could die when it was not their time.

It is quite clearly explained here in the commentary that it would be unfortunate if one were to be completely consumed by fear at the time of death. And if one has not prepared for one's death, then the prospect of death can definitely be a cause for fear and so forth. The exhortation here is to prepare for death by engaging in virtue and so forth. By accepting death and being prepared for it, there will be no place for fear.

As we contemplate these passages talking about death, we need to remind ourselves that the main point is that they are not intended to cause irrational fear about death. Rather, their purpose is to exhort one to engage in virtue, or in more simple terms, to lead a more meaningful life. So it is good to understand these passages in their proper context. Generating irrational fear or paranoia about death doesn't really serve much purpose.

2..2.1.2.1.3.2. If one does not strive in virtue starting right now, one will not achieve one's aims

Again, the meaning of the outline is be quite clear.

10. *When overwhelmed by the memory of one's negativities,
And covering one's body with excrement
As one becomes mad with fright because one
Hears the sounds of the hells, what shall one do
then?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

When being overwhelmed by the memory of the negativities that one created before, and one covers one's body with excrement as one becomes mad with fright, thinking 'I too have to go there', because one hears the sounds of the great sufferings of hell that one will definitely experience, such as being burned and so forth—at this time, when it is unsuitable to practise enthusiasm, what shall one do? One needs to strive in virtue straight away.

As explained quite clearly in the commentary, if, at the time of death one's mind is disturbed by *the memory of the negativities that one has created* in the past, it causes fear and so forth to arise. On a physical level one has no real control over one's bodily functions, and *one's body* can, uncontrollably, be covered by *one's own excrement*. It seems that at this time such people do have fearful visions and so forth in relation to the prospect of their future existence, which causes even more fear. But it is too late *to practise enthusiasm*, because the end of one's life is already in sight. The point here is that one needs to apply enthusiasm and engage in virtue, right now.

2.1.2.1.2.2. Abandoning laziness by contemplating the sufferings of the next life

This is has four subdivisions:

2.1.2.1.2.2.1. Sufferings will definitely arise

2.1.2.1.2.2.2. They are difficult to bear

2.1.2.1.2.2.3. It is contradictory to wish for happiness and not to strive in virtue

2.1.2.1.2.2.4. Exhorting to strive in the method for becoming liberated from suffering

These four points are an exhortation to strive in the method for becoming liberated from suffering.

2.1.2.1.2.2.1. Sufferings will definitely arise

The verse relating to this heading reads:

11. *Since one will have dangers in this life,
Like a flapping live fish,
What need is there to mention the unbearable
sufferings
Of hell, created by negativity.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

When you die you will have sufferings like a live fish flapping on hot sand. If one has such fears even in this life then what need is there to talk about what happens when you experience directly the unbearable sufferings of hell due to the results of the negativity you created?

This is an explanation of the suffering that can be experienced just before the moment of death, if one has spent one's life in negativities and not taken the initiative to accumulate virtue. Their suffering will be just *like a live fish flapping on hot sand*. If you put a fish on hot sand, its suffering will be unbearable as it flaps about in constant motion.

As the commentary further explains, *such fears* or sufferings, *even in this life* are just a prelude to the sufferings that will be experienced after death. So *what need is there to talk about what happens when you experience directly the unbearable sufferings of hell you will experience as a result of the negativity you created?* The main point here is that if the sufferings just prior to death are so unbearable, then one can just imagine the great unbearable suffering that will have to be experienced in the lower realms like the hell realms.

In order to prevent such suffering one needs to engage in virtue, as a mind that is imbued with virtue assists a peaceful death. Normally we consider that a good death is when the body is relaxed, and there is no experience of agony or pain. So we are being exhorted to prepare for our own comfortable death now, by engaging in virtue.

The point of the main heading, Abandoning Laziness by Contemplating the Sufferings of the Next Life is that we can prevent the prospect of suffering at the time of death, and most importantly the sufferings in the future lifetime. Thinking about that with a calm, logical and factual understanding will encourage one not to waste time now. Rather than engage in laziness, one needs to apply enthusiasm in order to accumulate virtues and avoid negativities. This is the main way to avoid these fears and sufferings.

We will conclude here and recite the tenth chapter of Shantideva's text as a dedication for Tenzin—Ingrid's oldest son—who passed away recently. I don't have to go

into a detailed explanation about the dedication, as the text itself is quite clear. When I received the message about his passing I did my best to do prayers from my side, with the hope that they will benefit him. The message could be passed on to Ingrid that this practice is the best thing we can do for him now. Feeling remorse and regret will not help him in any way, but doing this practice together will definitely benefit him.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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While maintaining the motivation we have just generated during the recitation of our prayers, we can now engage in our meditation practice. [*meditation*]

We can now generate the positive motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the Mahayana teachings and put them into practice well.

Having just engaged in the *tong len* (giving and taking) meditation practice, we need to recognise how to incorporate its real essence, which is to generate and strengthen love and compassion in our heart. We need to do this to the extent that when we see suffering sentient beings deprived of happiness, we will be naturally inclined to help free them from sufferings and establish their happiness. The essence of Dharma practice is when we develop these attitudes and incorporate them in our practice.

Engaging the practice of *tong len* should not be a matter of just visualising it while sitting in a formal meditation posture. It needs to actually move one's mind, to transform it so that there is a more genuine sense of love and compassion extending towards other sentient beings. We need to ensure this.

I regularly emphasise that to actually embrace the practice of love and compassion extending to all beings in general, one needs to first establish love and compassion towards those who are close to oneself. If one cannot really generate a genuine sense of love and compassion towards those who are close to one, then it is quite unlikely that one will be able to develop it to the greater degree of focusing on all beings. Indeed, one needs to take the initiative to cultivate a true sense of love and compassion, beginning with those closest to oneself. One can then definitely experience the practical benefits to the extent that it will reduce problems and conflicts one may have with those who are close. In fact all our problems will naturally begin to subside. We can see that any problems that arise due to conflict, or that arise with those we are close to or deal with regularly, really arise from a lack of genuine love and compassion towards them.

When a genuine sense of love and compassion starts to take root, it is a fact that it overcomes a lot of unwanted problems and conflicts. Thus one can have a more joyous and happy relationship with one's companion and others in general.

We all already have the seeds of love and compassion within us, and it's a matter of further developing and strengthening them. This occurs gradually when we take

the initiative to contemplate on the great advantage and the essential need to develop love and compassion, and put the methods into practice. Gradually we will see that a true sense of love and compassion starts to develop in one's heart.

We can definitely see the positive outcomes of someone who has developed love and compassion as they contribute to the wellbeing of the community or society they may live in. A true sense of love and compassion means a true sense of concern for others, so such people will strive to bring about the wellbeing and betterment of that community or society. They will not engage in any destructive activities that harm their community or society's wellbeing. The positive outcome is that they will be appreciated and welcomed by others everywhere. They themselves will always have a sense of ease and natural calmness about them, and because they're not causing trouble for anyone, they won't have any enemies confronting them. This is how we need to relate to developing love and compassion on a practical basis—that real benefit does occur.

I definitely see the practice of cultivating love and compassion as essential and the most beneficial practice. In my regular practice I try to associate my mind with love and compassion, to recall it and remind myself of its essential qualities. Wherever I go, whatever the occasion might be I try to make my mind become close to the feelings and attitudes of love and compassion.

In my own personal experience, the positive consequences I experience are because I have imbued my mind with that positive attitude. Wherever I go I'm personally joyful and feel happy in whatever circumstances I find myself in. Ordinary everyday people I don't regularly associate with, or know well personally, befriend me and are happy to help me in whatever circumstance I may be in. Even though I don't ask for their help they seem naturally drawn towards trying to help me. I definitely attribute this to my efforts to try to cultivate positive attitudes. So from my own personal experience I can say that a practical benefit of befriending others and seeing everyone as close, is that it brings companionship and friendship. This is a real and positive outcome of the practice.

Most importantly, the more we familiarise ourselves with the *tong len* practice of giving and taking to strengthen our love and compassion, the more it will particularly assist us at the time of death when we may experience difficulties. Being familiar with *tong len* then allows us to take on the sufferings of all sentient beings while experiencing suffering oneself. If at that time we immediately resort to *tong len* and take on the sufferings of other sentient beings, this will purify extensive negative karmas and assist us to have a good rebirth. When very heavy negative karmas are purified, the consequences can only be that one experiences the positive results of one's karma, which will assist one for a future good rebirth.

Familiarity with the practice of exhibiting love and compassion and cultivating a positive attitude creates positive imprints, which are carried on to the future life. We can see the result in young children where some are naturally considerate and compassionate towards others.

Without being influenced they exhibit genuine concern, love and compassion towards others from their own side. This is a clear sign that they have been familiar with positive attitudes in their previous lifetimes.

I'm trying to exhort you to really take this practice to heart. The practice of Dharma really is the means of accumulating virtue and abandoning negativity. In summary that is really what Dharma practice encompasses, because any practice we relate to will be either the specific means to accumulate merit and virtues, or the means to purify one's negative karma as a way to abandon negativities.

In simple terms, if one were asked what one needs to accumulate in one's practice, it is virtue. And what one needs to abandon is negativity. When we can ensure in our heart that we are engaging in practices that encompass the means to accumulate virtues and abandon negativities, then we can be assured we are doing Dharma practice. This is, in essence, what we need to keep in mind.

That is the basis that forms a strong foundation from which we can then establish further practices. In fact we can find this base of accumulating virtues and abandoning negativities in all major religions.

This has been a summary of how to engage in the practices presented in the following verses.

2.1.2.1.2.2.2. *They are difficult to bear*

The commentary commences with the statement:

It is unsuitable to be lazy because of the many negativities created previously, and also if one analyses the various causes for the lower realms one is still creating them every day.

The verse reads:

12. *Having created the karma for the hells
Where one's delicate flesh is burned
When scalded with hot water,
Why does one abide happily?*

The main emphasis under this heading is that the sufferings *are difficult to bear*. When intense sufferings actually befall oneself at the time of death it will be extremely difficult to bear them. This highlights that we might fall short if we think, 'oh well, if sufferings occur later that's fine, I'll be able to bear them then'. But this highlights that if even small sufferings are difficult to bear now, then when extreme sufferings occur later on then it will certainly be extremely difficult to bear them at that time.

The commentary continues:

Why does one abide happily now, having created the karma to be reborn in the lower realms, where one's body of delicate flesh will have to experience the sufferings of being burned intensely when scalded by the hot water that boils angrily in the hell realms.

One should strive in virtue just like one's head is on fire.

The commentary explains that when one has created many negativities, non-virtuous actions, these become the cause to experience intense sufferings in the hell realms. It vividly explains that when it comes to one's awareness that one has created such negativities, and our delicate

body's flesh will be exposed to the extreme sufferings in the hell realms, then how can one just remain idle and do nothing about it now?

One should engage in immediate practices of purification and the accumulation of virtues. The gravity of the situation is presented with an analogy that one should *strive in virtue just like one's head is on fire*. If this were literally the case, then one would immediately react and put out the fire before one's head was scalded and burned. Just as one would have an immediate response of putting out a fire on one's head, likewise in relation to negativities one should immediately apply antidotes to purify negativities when one has created negative karmas. This is the practice that true practitioners engage in. As soon as they realise that they might have created a fault of any kind, they take the measures to immediately confess and purify it.

The essence of this presentation will also be explained in further verses, but I mention it now as a way to exhort you to engage in the means to purify negative karmas and prevent an unfortunate rebirth in a lower realm such as a hell realm. We need to bring to our awareness that one has all the conditions intact right now to actually purify negativities one has created in the past.

The commentary brings a vivid image to one's mind describing the intense sufferings of the hell realms such as *being burned intensely when scalded by the hot water that boils angrily in the hell realms*. Personally when I see volcanic eruptions spewing molten rock I imagine the extreme heat. I then bring forward the unbearable imagination of how much suffering one would experience if one were actually consumed by that lava. Apparently the fires of the hell realms are said to be even more intense, but we can only relate to something equivalent to that on this earth, like lava. The point is that these analogies are ways to exhort one to actually engage in the practice of virtue. We have favourable conditions, and so it is as if we have our fate in our hands, and whether we will experience intense sufferings or a good rebirth in the future is our responsibility. We have the choice, so we need to make that choice.

2.1.2.1.2.2.3. *It is contradictory to wish for happiness and not to strive in virtue*

The points being presented in the explanation of the verse here are very relevant for one's practice. Take it as personal instruction.

If one were asked whether one wishes for happiness, without any hesitation we would say 'yes'. But if we asked ourselves whether we were creating the causes for happiness (accumulating virtue), and found that we were not creating many of those causes, then these two thoughts would be completely contradictory. That is, while we wish for happiness, we are not taking any initiative to create the causes for happiness, which is virtue. That is definitely a contradiction.

The meaning of the verse and the explanation from the commentary are not difficult to understand, the main point is to actually try and put it into practice as this is how it will benefit you.

The verse reads:

13. *Those wishing for results without effort
And who are sensitive receive much harm
And, like the gods gripped by death,
Wail, 'Alas, I am overwhelmed by suffering'.*

The commentary explains:

Those wishing for the result of happiness without striving in its cause, virtue, and who are sensitive even towards the smallest of sufferings, will receive much harm. Like the gods gripped by death whose wish for a long life will not be fulfilled, and who will receive what they do not wish for, one will wail, 'Alas, I am overwhelmed by suffering'.

The first line in the commentary, that *those wishing for the result of happiness without striving in its cause, virtue*, is a statement we can definitely relate to. Again, it encourages us to think about the fact that we do definitely wish for happiness, but seldom find ourselves seriously engaging in creating its cause, which is virtue.

As the commentary further explains, while wishing for the results of happiness and not striving in its causes, virtue, then those in the condition of being very *sensitive even towards the smallest of sufferings, will receive much harm*.

Reflecting on the truth of the statements here we can definitely see that for someone who is sensitive, or lacks tolerance for even the smallest of problems and difficulties, would naturally be someone who always complains and who always seems to have many problems, because things are bound to go wrong and not always work the way they want. Those unable to tolerate even the smallest things going wrong will evidently experience much harm. We can see now such individuals who always complain that something is not right, and they seem to lack a true moment of relaxed and peaceful joy.

The statement that they *will receive much harm* means that difficulties and problems will always be present for those intolerant to small sufferings. In such a situation these individuals will be *like the gods gripped by death whose wish for a long life will not be fulfilled*. The gods referred to here are the long-lived gods who, due to their karma, have a very long lifespan. Then, with a long life full of luxuries and pleasures they become very complacent and don't think about the suffering they'll experience in the future.

If we become complacent, then, while in the grip of death (which can occur at any time), we would have the same mentality as a long-lived god. Like them we too become complacent with a lot of time on our hands, so when the actual time of death comes, we, like them, will realise that our time is over, and we have not had time to fulfil all our wishes and hopes. This is a time when great suffering is experienced.

The main point here is that if one doesn't prepare for the greatest time of suffering, then when it occurs one won't be able to cope with it. As mentioned previously, the best way to cope with difficulties is to endure hardships, willingly accept them now, then one will not experience a continuous sense of dissatisfaction and unhappiness.

The point of the long-lived god analogy is that one should not spend one's life as if one has all the time in the world to enjoy pleasures. If one has this attitude one becomes a victim to complacency and laziness. The actual time of death is inevitable and approaching by the moment, with the moments in our life getting shorter rather than longer. So, if we engage in frivolous activities and completely ignore the fact that death is imminent, then when death occurs, because we have failed to prepare for it, and instead become consumed with distracting activities, we will experience great suffering, as we will be unprepared to deal with the sufferings. That is the main point.

2.1.2.1.2.2.4. *Exhorting to strive in the method for becoming liberated from suffering*

As one does not want to experience suffering, this part of the outline exhorts one to actually become liberated from suffering.

The commentary starts with a hypothetical question:

If asked, 'How then should one act?'

The verse presents the response:

14. *In dependence on the human boat
One will be liberated from the great river of suffering.
Since this boat will be difficult to find later on,
Deluded one, do not fall asleep at this time.*

The commentary explains:

Since one can attain liberation if one strives in dependence on the basis that one has attained freedoms and endowments. In saying liberate yourself from the great stream of suffering in dependence on the boat of the human body, it shows that the freedoms and endowments have great purpose.

In essence the presentation here explains that, first of all, we definitely wish to be liberated and free from suffering. Then, in order to be free from suffering one has to depend on a basis which will enable one to be free from it. The basis presented here is none other than one's precious human rebirth, intact with the eight freedoms and the ten endowments. The value of a rebirth is presented in three points: our basis has great meaning as one can achieve great purpose; it is difficult to find such a good basis; and having found this basis of a precious human rebirth it can disintegrate very easily.

The commentary explains that *since one can attain liberation if one strives in dependence on the basis that one has attained freedoms and endowments*, and says you should liberate yourself from the great stream of suffering in dependence on the boat of the human body. Here our human rebirth is presented as analogous to a ferry boat that carries people across from one shore to the other.

To extend the analogy to ourselves, our body is like the boat and our individual being is like the passenger being ferried across to the other side. Just as a boat carries the passengers from one shore to the other, so our precious human body can assist us to move from samsaric existence to liberation. This shows that the freedoms and endowments have great purpose.

The commentary continues:

Since the achievement of the freedoms and endowments is extremely rare, it is very difficult to find this boat again later on. Hence, deluded one, at this time of having found this boat do not fall asleep, but liberate yourself from the great stream of cyclic existence by way of practising the paths of the small, medium and great capable beings.

This shows that one needs to strive while having found the difficult-to-find freedoms and endowments.

Having first explained that this body has a great purpose, this next point shows that it is very rare and we could easily lose it *since the achievement of the freedoms and endowments is extremely rare, it is very difficult to find this boat again later on*. Therefore, the text says, *deluded one, having found this boat do not fall asleep*, but use it for the purpose of liberating yourself.

The commentary concludes with, *this shows that one needs to strive while having found the difficult-to-find freedoms and endowments*.

2.1.2.2. ABANDONING THE LAZINESS THAT GRASPS AT NEGATIVE ACTIONS

This part of the outline explains the laziness we may have in allowing ourselves to engage in negative actions.

The verse reads:

15. *Having abandoned the supreme happiness of the infinite
And holy Dharma, which is the cause for happiness,
Why do you like the distraction, mental excitement
And so forth, that are causes of suffering?*

The commentary expands upon this:

Having abandoned the supreme joy in practicing the infinite methods of the holy Dharma, which are the causes for all the happiness of this and future lives, why do you like unsuitable actions resulting in suffering, such as negativities, the distractions of many different thrills, mental excitement and so forth? It is unsuitable to like them because they are the causes of suffering.

In stating that *having abandoned the holy Dharma which are the causes for happiness of this and future lives*, the commentary answers to a hypothetical question with the exhortation, *why do you like unsuitable actions resulting in suffering, such as negativities, the distractions of many different thrills, mental excitement and so forth?* The conclusion is *it is unsuitable to like them because they are the causes of suffering*. So this is quite clear.

The thing we need to rejoice about is the practice of virtue. When one practises any Dharma practice which involves accumulating virtues, then we can feel glad about, and rejoice in that. Then the more we feel glad and rejoice in these practices, the more this helps us increase the positive results of those positive actions.

These explanations are relevant to one's personal status. As I've mentioned previously, there are times when we would have been glad of the opportunity to accumulate some negativity, and feel sad when we've missed the opportunity. This is the point being presented here, one which brings to the heart the real issue of the attitude we

lack if we are to accumulate more virtues and engage in Dharma.

The hypothetical question in the commentary is a good one to ask yourself, 'why do I like unsuitable actions resulting in suffering, such as negativities, the distractions of many different thrills. The Tibetan word *drud-tsi* used here has the connotation of allowing oneself to be surrounded by many things which influence one into negative ways. It includes people and negative friends etc. who cause one to engage in bad behaviour. The word *drud-tsi* is translated here as *many different thrills*, followed by *mental excitement* and so forth.

This is a significant question to ask oneself. Why do we like things that are unsuitable to like, as they are the causes of suffering? If one can recognise certain activities as a cause for one's own suffering, then why would one intentionally want to engage in them? This is an exhortation to start contemplating our normal activities as a way of slowly transforming our three doors of body, speech and mind (which are otherwise inclined to creating negativity), to actually engage in more and more virtuous activities. For that transformation to take place we need to seriously contemplate these points.

The point to reflect upon is the fact that if we allow ourselves to be influenced by negativities and engage in distractions and assorted thrills and mental excitement, these then become the causes for problems in our life. When we consider the various difficulties that arise in our life, it is because we've followed these negativities or distractions that then cause the problems in our life. As such one should exhort oneself to engage in the practice of Dharma.

Leaving aside the sufferings which will have a result in the future, even in our current day-to-day life, if we want to have a more meaningful life with less problems and less conflict with others etc., then leading a life that practises virtue and conducting ourselves with positive behaviour is what ensures a more meaningful life.

Contemplating on these points takes time and we need to think it through well, but it becomes quite clear that it is quite absurd for one to willingly engage in negativities if we don't wish to experience difficulties and problems in our life. It is absurd that we engage in the very things that bring us difficult problems. These are significant points to transform.

To summarise earlier points, if we lead a life where we dislike the very causes for happiness, while on the other hand willingly like and engage in the causes for our suffering, the negativities, then the consequences are bound to be more suffering for ourselves.

We need to ensure that we practise the opposite of that, and that we begin to willingly accept and like the causes for happiness and engage in virtues, and willingly engage in abandoning the causes for suffering, which is to abandon negativities. That would be the proper way to go about our practice.

The following verses also present very significant points which we will cover in the following sessions. Just to summarise again the significant points which were presented this evening: a personal instruction is to really contemplate the fact that all the sufferings that one has

experienced thus far are none other than having engaged in the causes of suffering, the negativities. If we feel we have been deprived of happiness, then that is because we have failed to actually accumulate the causes for happiness which is virtue.

Even recognising this point takes time because it involves the subtleties of karma—the cause and effect sequence of how virtue is the cause of happiness, and negativity is actually the cause of all our sufferings. One needs to reflect upon the points of the cause and effect sequence as a way to exhort oneself to reflect upon how one needs to reverse one's inclination of liking to engage in negativities, and start putting more time and thought into the value of what we call virtues.

Contemplating these points is the way transformation will take place. We need not go too far back into the past to contemplate the negative consequences of negativity. If we could reflect on our own life so far, even within the past fifteen years, we can see the kinds of activities we have engaged in, which have clearly resulted in more problems and difficulties for ourselves. It becomes very clear when we know certain activities were clearly negative, and have definitely contributed to the unwanted circumstances and difficult problems in our life.

Conversely, if on reflection one has willingly taken upon oneself certain virtuous activities, see how these have resulted in a more peaceful and happier sort of mind, and how that has contributed to one's wellbeing. When we really reflect on how our own activities and deeds have brought about certain kinds of consequences, then that clarity is like looking in a mirror and seeing everything clearly.

The negativities here refer to the obvious ones such as killing or stealing or sexual misconduct. When we reflect upon the ten non-virtues, these are the obvious negativities. One would have engaged in these and they would have brought about negative consequences for oneself. Reversing this means to willingly abandon the taking of others' lives, to willingly make a commitment to abandon taking others' possessions and to willingly make a commitment to refrain from sexual misconduct etc. The willingness to actually take up the practice of avoiding non-virtue means we are practising the opposite, virtue.

Starting in this simple way is a means to understand how one can actually adopt these practices to avoid negativities and engage in virtues. Again, we can reflect that even in a short span of one's life one can definitely notice the negative consequences of engaging in negativity. Whilst the positive results are also experienced in this life, the positive results in the future life are also definite. Even in this life we can see that our life becomes much more meaningful, much less hectic, less problematic, and more purposeful. To that extent we can see the benefits of the practice.

2.1.2.3. ABANDONING THE LAZINESS OF DISCOURAGEMENT

This is subdivided into three, which we will cover next week.

2.1.2.3.1. Advice to strive in the antidotes to discouragement

2.1.2.3.2. How it is taught in the scriptures to practice the antidotes

2.1.2.3.3. One can attain enlightenment if one strives, by stopping laziness

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Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

30 June 2015

Based on the motivation generated whilst reciting the refuge prayer, we can engage in our usual meditation practice. (*meditation*)

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for this purpose I will listen to the teachings well, and put them into practice.

I regularly emphasise the importance of cultivating a joyous and happy mind within oneself. Once cultivated this becomes our true, unfailing companion, able to assist us at all times. We don't regularly pay attention to this factor; rather we seem to become more obsessed with trying to look for external conditions for our happiness, like finding friends or objects. We think these are going to be our companion and make us happy, but when something fails with these external conditions, it brings us great distress. That is because we have not paid attention to developing our true inner friend, and thus we feel distraught and lonely.

Taking the initiative to develop our unfailing inner companion, which is a joyous and happy mind, is of course dependent on the practice of Dharma. This is actually what the practice of Dharma is meant to be for. Practising Dharma doesn't mean listening to the teachings just to acquire an intellectual understanding. It means actually putting whatever understanding we gain from the Dharma into practice, because that is how we develop our mind to become more positive and, consequently, happier.

The reason we need to take this initiative is the fact that there will never be an occasion where we will be separated from our mind, so developing it becomes essential. Wherever we go, whatever we do during the day in our everyday life and even during the night when we go to sleep, it is not as if we leave our mind somewhere else. It is with us all of the time, up until the last moment of this life, when we experience death and are separated from our physical and material conditions. Then, what goes on is the continuity of the mind and also the individual self. Up until the time of death the combination of our body, our mind and our individual self are together at all times. Therefore the wellbeing of our self as an individual is relative to the wellbeing on all three levels: the body, mind and individual self. They all contribute to the wellbeing of others. Recognising this is how we take the initiative to establish our own wellbeing.

Basically the state of our mind is what determines what kind of individual self or characteristics we have. To explain further, when the mind is harsh that makes the individual person harsh. When the mind is gentle, kind and positive it makes the person with that mind a kind

and gentle person. In other words, what determines whether a person is harsh and unruly or kind and gentle is the state of their mind. At any given time it is the state of mind that influences an individual to behave in a certain way. This, then, shows that the person is not innately good or bad right from the beginning. Bad characteristics are not in their nature, it is dependent on their state of mind (or attitude). As these can change from negative into a more positive state, we cannot say that an individual is an innately harsh and unruly person from the beginning.

Further on, at the point of the end of our life, when we separate from our physical body, the individual self and the mind continue on. From this we can begin to understand how our individual self and mind are a continuum that comes from past lifetimes. There is a very clear sign that the individual self and mind we possess now is actually a continuity from past lives. We can say that there are two levels to our individual self: a self which is related to our individual name associated with this life, and a deeper and more subtle level of self which is not associated with our name. We all have a very strong, deep sense of 'me', and when we hold onto this we are not particularly relating to the self that our name or personality represents in this lifetime. This sense of 'me' or self beyond the self related to our current individual personality or name is an indication that such a sense is coming from a previous lifetime. If we actually pay attention we might be able to detect the deeper sense of self within ourselves. This is how the consciousness can be proven to come from a previous existence.

The main point here is to understand why the teachings explain that along with the self comes an individual's consciousness or mind, which is inseparable from it. The actual reasoning presented in the teachings on past lives is that there is a continuity of our consciousness that comes from the past. This is established through reasoning, which then follows on to prove that the individual consciousness goes on to future lives. This is how one proves logically that there are past and future lives.

The point of analysing this is so we can say an individual is not something that is fixed. Thus if we term someone mean or bad we should understand the person is just influenced by a state of mind (at a given time) and when this state of mind changes, the person consequently becomes a more positive person. So a person who is considered mean at one time can become a gentle and positive person at a later time. This understanding can be very helpful in not being fixated on a particular characteristic that one may identify with now—there is a possibility of change for self and others. It can be very helpful to not identify with others solely on the basis of their immediate behaviours, gestures and habits. There is something beyond this; it is not their true nature, and this is helpful as way to have more acceptance of others.

In relation to oneself not taking things too personally and not being too negative and judgemental about others, it really helps to think about this, then any hostile feelings about them can immediately subside. We can definitely learn from others; when they do positive things we can be inspired and learn from that, but even when they do

negative things, we can take the initiative and learn from that too. We can learn that this is not their true nature and how change is possible. From that understanding we can develop a more positive mind and attitude towards them. That is something that will benefit oneself.

So it is by beginning to incorporate this understanding into one's practice that it is possible for some practitioners to state without hesitation that being with an angry person helps them to practise patience. Because of their positive attitude, others being unruly and angry only becomes a cause to find more reason to develop patience, rather than retaliate and create negativity for oneself.

2.1.2.3. ABANDONING THE LAZINESS OF DISCOURAGEMENT

This is divided into three subsections:

2.1.2.3.1. Advice to strive in the antidotes to discouragement

2.1.2.3.2. How it is taught in the scriptures to practice the antidote

2.1.2.3.3. One can attain enlightenment if one strives, by stopping laziness

2.1.2.3.1. Advice to strive in the antidotes to discouragement

The verse reads:

16. *Without discouragement, with armies,
Sincerity and self-empowerment,
Equalise self and others,
Exchange self and others.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with:

Kings conquer their enemies with the four types of armies.

Under the heading Gyaltsab Je presents advice on how to apply antidotes for overcoming discouragement, or the laziness of despondency.

The commentary states that a king conquers the enemies with four types of armies, which is an analogy for a person applying the four types of enthusiasm to overcome discouragement. Earlier in the text 'overcoming' referred to the king overcoming external enemies like enemies of a country. Here overcoming relates to the inner enemies, the delusions within oneself. That is how the analogy is to be understood.

As the commentary further explains:

Similarly, bodhisattvas initially lift up their minds and generate the armour-like enthusiasm free from despondency that intends to train in the path.

The essential point here is *bodhisattvas initially lift up their minds*. To lift up one's mind means to have a strong, courageous mind right from the beginning, which is a significant way to overcome despondency. This is important for any kind of task one wishes to undertake, but here the advice relates to bodhisattvas engaging in practices to benefit other sentient beings in great ways. In relation to our own practices, whatever level we may be at or whatever task we might undertake, we too need to have a courageous mind initially. If we don't have this from the beginning, our mind would be wary and uncertain, and it would be very hard to take on the task at all. And even if one did, it would be easy to lose one's

enthusiasm. So having a courageous and uplifted mind right from the start is what is being recommended.

Bodhisattvas who initially uplift their minds generate armour-like enthusiasm (which was explained in earlier sessions). And having generated armour-like enthusiasm, which is being *free from despondency*, they intend to train in the path.

The commentary continues:

Then they generate the enthusiasm of application that builds up the army of the two accumulations as preparation.

At the time of the main part they sincerely practice introspection and mindfulness, and thus gain control over themselves as their body and mind become serviceable.

Having done that, one should equalise and exchange self and others as explained below.

Next, bodhisattvas *generate the enthusiasm of application* and that enthusiasm *builds up the army of the two accumulations as preparation*. Then, at the time of the main part of their practice, *they sincerely practise introspection and mindfulness and thus gain control over themselves*. I have emphasised regularly that mindfulness and introspection are the two most essential tools for securing one's practice, for it not to decline, and to ensure it has unceasing continuity. *Mindfulness* is a state of mind that constantly remembers the points of the practice, and *introspection* is the state of mind that helps detect whether one's mind is wavering away from the practice and brings it back again. Therefore mindfulness and introspection are the most essential tools for ensuring one has a steady practice.

When one has incorporated introspection and mindfulness into one's practice, then one gains control. The bodhisattvas practise this way *and thus gain control over themselves as their body and mind become serviceable*. Here we need to understand the meditation on calm abiding, the state of mental quiescence, in a very detailed way. When one uses the tools of mindfulness and introspection, and continuously focuses single-pointedly on the meditation object, through discipline and practice one reaches a state where one overcomes the defects of one's body and mind. The *physical defects* are the faults of the body that make the body feel very heavy and sluggish. When trying to meditate, aches and pains are all defects of our physical body. *Defects of the mind* make the mind feel weighed down, sluggish and heavy.

Gaining control over themselves relates to gaining complete control over their body, speech and mind and all the activities related to the body, speech and mind. In gaining this serviceability one then gains full capacity to apply them in virtue at all times.

The commentary continues that having gained complete control over one's body and mind *one should equalise and exchange self and others*. What the bodhisattvas do next is develop and further enhance bodhicitta by applying the method of exchanging self and others, right from the beginning, and it becomes a powerful method. This is the optimum method for generating bodhicitta, and is explained in detail in the eighth chapter. Here Gyaltsab Je strongly suggests that to generate bodhicitta one first

needs to achieve calm abiding, as it is difficult to generate bodhicitta without having steady concentration. He clearly states this in another text as well, although there are different interpretations as to whether this is the case or not.

2.1.2.3.2. *How it is taught in the scriptures to practice the antidotes*

The next section of the commentary explains how the antidotes are presented in the scriptures, the sutras themselves.

The commentary first presents this statement:

The Buddha alone, being of very sharp faculty, achieved his aim by practising for many countless great eons the extremely difficult trainings and accumulated infinite merits by making an effort in enthusiasm. Do not become discouraged and despondent, saying, 'Since I am not like this, how could I attain enlightenment?'

When one contemplates how the Buddha attained the state of omniscience by accumulating virtue and merit over countless great eons, it can bring about a sense of despondency, where one thinks 'How can I possibly achieve that myself?' Understand that this despondency is not a passing despondency, where one feels 'I cannot do that' but rather a specific type of despondency that arises after analysing and contemplating what it takes to become an enlightened being.

One accepts that to benefit other beings one has to achieve enlightenment. One then contemplates on what the Buddha must have done to develop his qualities. One then realises that no virtues or qualities can arise without depending on causes. In recognising the countless qualities and virtues in the Buddha's mind, one realises they are all dependent on numerous causes that had to be created in the past, and each of these involved overcoming each and every non-virtuous deed. Overcoming one non-virtuous deed yields one virtue, and in that way over countless eons the Buddha, as a bodhisattva, created all the causes required to obtain all those results. After contemplating this, a sense of despondency can arise. This is also clearly explained in the Lam Rim teachings.

The verse reads:

17. *Do not be despondent,
Saying 'How could I become enlightened?',
Since the Tathagata speaks the truth,
He taught also this truth thus.*

The commentary continues:

Question: In what manner did he teach?

Answer: From the *Sutra requested by Subahu*.

Further, bodhisattvas should practice correctly and with emphasis like this: They should think, 'If those that turned into lions, tigers, dogs and jackals, vultures, cranes, crows and owls, worms, bees, flies and mosquitoes become awakened in highest enlightenment, then now, while I am a human, I need to practice the enthusiasm that achieves enlightenment, even at the cost of my life.'

The same is also taught in the *Clouds of Jewels Sutra*.

As the commentary explains, one should not become discouraged or despondent by saying or thinking *Since I*

am not like this, how could I attain enlightenment?' This sentiment is expressed in one's present state of being, which is riddled with delusions and faults. Having a deluded state of mind in this life one may think one could never change, could never attempt to accumulate all those causes to achieve enlightenment. This is the laziness of discouragement or despondency.

In explaining the meaning of the second two lines the commentary says:

Since the Tathagata speaks the truth, he thus also taught this truth, which is suitable to accept since he has no cause to speak deceptively.

The main point here is that the Buddha abandoned all causes of deception, and that as there are no causes of deception there is no way the Buddha would speak deceptively. We can relate this to our ordinary lives, when we sometimes feel we can't trust somebody because they might be deceptive. So even though they might appear to be telling the truth, it can seem like they have cause for speaking deceptively, and we may be a bit unsure about what they say.

Contrast this with the Buddha's words. The Buddha has overcome all causes of deception, so there is no possibility for the Buddha to speak deceptively. Thus that which was taught by the Buddha can be taken as the truth as presented in the sutra below.

The commentary explains if asked: *In what manner did he teach?* Then the answer, which is presented here is *From the Sutra requested by Subahu*.

The Sutra presents:

Further, bodhisattvas should practice correctly and with emphasis like this: They should think, 'If those that turned into lions, tigers, dogs and jackals, vultures, cranes, crows and owls, worms, bees, flies and mosquitoes become awakened in highest enlightenment, then now, while I am a human, I need to practise the enthusiasm that achieves enlightenment, even at the cost of my life.'

Rebirth as one of the animals listed here would be considered as being inferior to a human rebirth. Yet what is being presented here is that even these animals and insects have a buddha-nature, and with it they have the possibility of becoming enlightened. The commentary emphasises that animals like *flies and mosquitoes become awakened in highest enlightenment, then now, while I am a human, I need to practise the enthusiasm that achieves enlightenment, even at the cost of my life* and exhorts us to embrace our human existence with all its conditions intact. The Buddha said that even beings in an inferior state, with less intellect, have the potential to become enlightened, so surely this means that as a human with all the reasons to create the causes for enlightenment, we should definitely not be despondent. In this way we are being exhorted to overcome the laziness of despondency and discouragement. The main point is that each and every living creature has the buddha-nature and the ability to achieve buddhahood. With our human rebirth we should make the most of this opportunity.

2.1.2.3.3. One can attain enlightenment if one strives, by stopping laziness

This has four subdivisions:

2.1.2.3.3.1. Considering that one can attain enlightenment if one generates the power of enthusiasm

2.1.2.3.3.2. The austerities that accomplish enlightenment are suitable to bear since they do not possess even partially the sufferings of the lower realms

2.1.2.3.3.3. They are suitable to bear since the king of physicians heals great diseases with gentle methods

2.1.2.3.3.4. It is suitable to like the austerities since they lack suffering and are strengthened by happiness

2.1.2.3.3.1. Considering that one can attain enlightenment if one generates the power of enthusiasm

This is a significant point relating to how the power of generating enthusiasm within oneself can assist one to attain enlightenment.

18. *Those that became flies, mosquitoes
Bees and likewise worms,
Even they, if they generated the force of
enthusiasm,
Attain the difficult to attain highest
enlightenment.*
19. *One like oneself, who has been born into the
human race,
And knows what is beneficial and what is
harmful,
If one does not give up the practice of
enlightenment,
Then why should one not attain enlightenment?*

The commentary explains the meaning:

As it was taught earlier, even those that became flies, mosquitoes, bees and likewise worms, will attain the difficult to attain highest enlightenment if they generate the force of enthusiasm and build up the accumulations.

Since it is taught like this, then someone like oneself, having been born into the special human race, knowing what is beneficial and has to be adapted, what harms and has to be abandoned to attain the aim of the wish for enlightenment, if one takes up the practices of enlightenment and does not give them up, then why should one not attain enlightenment? Determine that you can definitely attain it.

It is clearly explained here that the way to develop enthusiasm and overcome the laziness of despondency is to recognise that even the animals mentioned here can become enlightened. So compared to the animals' inferior physical condition, we should not be despondent as we have been born as a human with a supreme body.

Coupled with this state of mind, this discriminative wisdom of *knowing what is beneficial and has to be adapted, what harms and has to be abandoned to attain the aim of the wish for enlightenment* is the intelligence we possess as humans to attain enlightenment. Therefore, if the Buddha stated that even animals in their inferior state can generate the force of enthusiasm and build up accumulations able to attain enlightenment, then someone like oneself, who is born with all the conditions intact, with a sound physical body and sound mind, with the wisdom understanding the

causes of enlightenment, then why should one not attain enlightenment, if one were to formally take up the practices of enlightenment and not give up? One would definitely achieve it. As I often emphasise, in our condition right now, it is not as though we lack understanding. What we lack is putting it into practice. In terms of understanding the Dharma. We definitely have sufficient understanding, but if we don't put it into practice then this is when we fall short in accumulating the causes of merits etc. One should determine that one can definitely attain enlightenment, and ask oneself, 'Why shouldn't I attain enlightenment given that I have all the reasons and all the conditions necessary to attain it.'

2.1.2.3.3.2. The austerities that accomplish enlightenment are suitable to bear since they do not possess even partially the sufferings of the lower realms

This has three subdivisions:

2.1.2.3.3.2.1. Fear of the austerities of giving up legs, arms, and so forth is unsuitable

2.1.2.3.3.2.2. One does not need to experience the sufferings of the lower migrations even partially

2.1.2.3.3.2.3. The example of how it is suitable to bear small sufferings to destroy a big sickness

We will cover this next week.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

*Transcript prepared by Judy Mayne
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Edited Version
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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

7 July 2015

While maintaining the motivation that we generated during the prayers, we can now engage in our meditation practice. [meditation]

We can now generate a positive motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

In order to fully benefit all mother sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the Mahayana teachings and put them into practise well, so that they become the means to subdue my own mind.

This is an essential motivation.

The *tong-len* meditation that we did earlier is an optimum method for developing bodhicitta. In particular, it serves as the method for developing the superior intention that is part of the equalising and exchanging self with other technique of developing bodhicitta. Superior intention is not specifically listed as a separate cause with this technique, as it is integrated in the giving and taking practice.

When we do this practice wholeheartedly and sincerely, it involves the intention of taking on the responsibility for freeing all beings from suffering, and thus taking upon oneself all the sufferings of other beings. It also involves taking responsibility for establishing all sentient beings in happiness by giving them one's own happiness. In the taking part of the practice we imagine taking upon ourselves every type of suffering experienced by sentient beings, and in the giving part, we give all joy and happiness to all sentient beings. When we do this meditation sincerely it becomes a very powerful practice.

As indicated in the teachings, this is a core Mahayana practice because it involves generating the highest altruistic intention. By training our mind in taking upon the sufferings of others, and giving them all happiness, we are actually engaging in a Mahayana practice.

Doing this practice sincerely means bringing to mind the actual meaning of the words as we recite them. As explained in the teachings, we familiarise ourselves with any practice first by reciting the words, then we reflect and meditate on the meaning. If we just recite the words and don't really think about their meaning, then of course it remains at the level of being just words. Acquainting one's mind with the words means not just reciting the words, but actually bringing their meaning to mind. With the *tong-len* practice, as we recite the words from the verses we also envision that the giving and taking is actually taking place.

2.1.2.3. ABANDONING THE LAZINESS OF DISCOURAGEMENT

2.1.2.3.3. *One can attain enlightenment if one strives, by stopping laziness (cont.)*

2.1.2.3.3.2. **The austerities that accomplish enlightenment are suitable to bear since they do not possess even partially the sufferings of the lower realms**

2.1.2.3.3.2.1. *Fear of the austerities of giving up legs, arms, and so forth is unsuitable*

These explanations relate to actual states of mind that occur during a practice. When bodhisattvas practise developing great love and compassion, they reach the point of taking upon themselves the responsibility for helping all other sentient beings. One reaches the point of feeling determined that one definitely has to obtain enlightenment in order to fully benefit sentient beings. There's no other way to fully utilise one's potential to benefit sentient beings other than actually attaining enlightenment.

Having developed that intention, one considers the practices that one needs to engage in if one is to achieve enlightenment. These include the practice of generosity. Here one may be daunted by the thought of practising generosity of giving away one's legs, arms and limbs and so forth. Doubt about one's capacity to actually engage in the practices that are required to achieve enlightenment may then arise. This is not just a theoretical thought; these are states of mind that actually do occur.

These two verses present the point:

20. *If: 'Well, because one has to give up
Legs and arms I am afraid.'
Not discerning between heavy and light
One becomes afraid due to ignorance.*
21. *For innumerable tens of millions of eons
One has been cut many times,
Stabbed, burned and slashed,
But one has not attained enlightenment.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins by expressing the doubt:

If one were to say, 'Well, though one can achieve it through enthusiasm, I am afraid, because one needs to practise the generosity of giving away one's legs, arms, head, and so forth, and I am not able to engage in these difficult practices'.

The response to this is:

Answer: Though one needs to practise generosity with these, without having distinguished well between heavy and light suffering, one is ignorant with regard to what has to be abandoned, and what has to be adopted, and one is afraid, although it is unnecessary to be afraid.

That is because, while circling in cyclic existence since beginningless time one has experienced the sufferings of one's body being cut, stabbed, burned by fire and slashed by weapons not only once, but many times for innumerable tens of millions of eons in the hells. But, however much one has experienced this, it has only exhausted purposelessly the vitality of one's body, and one has not achieved highest enlightenment.

As presented here, when a bodhisattva initially considers the possibility of achieving enlightenment, they see that when the appropriate causes are accumulated, then the

result of enlightenment is definitely possible, and that if one applies enthusiasm then one can definitely achieve enlightenment.

When further considering the types of causes that have to be accumulated, one thinks about, for example, the practice of generosity, where one might have to give away one's legs, arms and so forth. That may cause a sense of fear such as, 'Oh, I might not be able to engage in these practices to that extent'.

One definitely needs to practise generosity in such ways, and fear of practising like that would arise when one is not able to distinguish *between heavy and light sufferings*. As explained here, heavy sufferings are the sufferings experienced in the hell realms, where one involuntarily experiences great extremes of suffering. If one neglects to recall that, one fails to see that the relatively minor sufferings, such as giving away one's limbs and so forth, which brings about great purpose, lead to great achievement. Feeling daunted and fearful of engaging in some practices will arise if one does not recall this.

When one is able to distinguish clearly between heavy and light suffering, one will understand that practising generosity by giving away limbs and so forth is really quite a minor suffering when compared to the great sufferings to be experienced in the hell realms. Furthermore, it has a great purpose, as it is a cause for actually achieving enlightenment. Thinking like this one develops a courageous mind of willingly taking these sufferings upon oneself, and is then able to endure them.

On a contemporary level, we can see in our normal day-to-day activities that those who wish to achieve some significant result in their work or studies definitely need to put up with some hardships and difficulties for one, two or three years. If one believes that one could achieve something quickly, and is daunted by small hardships, then one would never be able to achieve any significant result, in either study or work. So even in mundane activities we can see that in order to achieve a significant result, one also needs to endure some hardships and difficulties.

The text refers to being *ignorant with regard to what has to be abandoned and what has to be adopted*. Even though not explicitly mentioned here, one can derive from this explanation the understanding that it is reasonable to develop the fear of having to experience the sufferings of the lower realms, which will prevent one from creating the causes of those sufferings, which is negativity. Whereas being fearful of austere practices will prevent one from engaging in virtue and accumulating merit from practising generosity and so forth, which is the cause for achieving enlightenment. The first type of fear is a reasonable fear that we actually need to cultivate, as it will prevent us from creating the numerous types of negativities that are all causes for the sufferings of the lower realms. The unreasonable fear that we do need to abandon is the fear of engaging in austere practices of generosity and so forth, when in fact they are supreme causes for accumulating virtues and merits, and thus the cause for enlightenment. When we think about it in these practical ways, we can see that Shantideva is giving us very personal and profound advice.

The qualm that was raised earlier is *well, though one can achieve it through enthusiasm, I am afraid*. Now while this may be explicitly related to practicing bodhisattvas, it is also a significant personal instruction. The reason why one should not be afraid of such austerities is that *while circling in cyclic existence since beginningless time one has experienced the sufferings of one's body being cut, stabbed, burned by fire and slashed by weapons not only once, but many times for innumerable tens of millions of eons in the hells*.

What is being presented here is that it is not as if one is afraid of something that one has not previously experienced. In fact, one has already experienced the sufferings of being cut and so forth, many times over. In other words, we might feel fearful about being generous with our limbs, arms and legs and so forth, but, in fact, we've already experienced the sufferings of having our legs and limbs cut off numerous times in the past.

Despite having experienced all these sufferings in the past, it has not until now become a cause for our enlightenment. However this time around it is actually worthwhile to engage in the practice, as it will become a cause for enlightenment. That is the point being made here.

2.1.2.3.3.2.2. One does not need to experience the sufferings of the lower migrations even partially

While one may experience some kind of suffering from these practices, it is nowhere near the extent of sufferings that one would otherwise have to experience in the hell realms. At this point it is good to bring to mind the importance of the practice of patience, as a way of enduring the sufferings one may experience from practising generosity and so forth.

We can recall here that Lama Tsong Khapa's advice that we need to really acquaint our mind particularly with the patience of definitely thinking about the Dharma, and the patience of willingly accepting sufferings. There are many more opportunities to experience the natural sufferings that fall upon us than there are occasions when we need to practise patience when others harm us. Being intentionally harmed is much rarer than the suffering that one perpetually experiences at any given time.

We have all experienced the different types of suffering that occur continuously—it is one problem after another. We always seem to be faced with some sort of problem, either from our immediate surroundings or mentally, and they never seem to end. Therefore the patience of willingly accepting suffering is an extremely important practice, as a way of not becoming overwhelmed and daunted by these problems. As explained in the teachings, the best way to be able to deal with a problem is to willingly accept that problem. Then, whatever the problem may be, one will have the capacity to actually deal with it, and solve the problem. If we don't engage in the practice of willingly accepting suffering, then we become overwhelmed and anxious about not being able to cope, and this creates even more suffering for us. That is why this essential advice is so relevant.

If we fail to engage in the practice of willingly accepting suffering, especially psychological or mental suffering, then we can become completely overwhelmed, and reach

a point where we are seemingly not able to cope. Whereas when we are able to practise patience by accepting mental suffering and problems, then when we experience some physical suffering we will not be daunted it, due to the strength derived from willingly accepting that suffering. That is because when the mind is in a strong position it will be able to handle the physical suffering, and cope much better with it. Conversely, if one is not able to deal with mental suffering, then even the slightest physical suffering can also cause great distress.

If we can maintain the practice of patience where our mind does not become overwhelmed and daunted, then we will be able to maintain our mental strength and tranquillity. Regardless of the difficulties and problems that may be occurring, they will not disturb the mind. Otherwise the mind becomes disturbed and chaotic, and really distressed, and everything appears to be very grim. Then one may lose hope and so forth. Whereas when one has mastered that practice to the level of withstanding those difficulties and problems, then even when there are difficulties they will not disturb the mind, which will be able to maintain its integrity and practise continuously.

Patience is particularly important when dealing with the hardships and sufferings that occur during our practice. We can all relate to this. If we were not to have the mind of endurance and patience, then we might feel that a practice is too difficult and just give up even with the slightest of difficulties. If we had the choice, would we willingly accept some hardships and engage in practice, or not engage in practice so that we don't have to experience any hardship? If we choose the second then there's a great danger that we might choose not to practise at all, and as presented earlier in the text, just enjoy ourselves during the day and sleep through the night. So we need to have a really courageous mind to choose wisely.

We need to relate any given points in the text to earlier explanations, which in this instance is to also apply the practice of patience.

The verse relating to this heading reads:

22. *There is a measure to
One's sufferings in attaining enlightenment,
Similar to the sufferings of a bodily procedure
To clear the harm of tormenting diseases.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

If one considers the sufferings of the lower migrations, then the sufferings of the austerities of attaining enlightenment are of small measure and last a short time by comparison. They are also easy to bear, similar to being able to bear the sufferings of a bodily procedure to clear the harm of a tormenting disease.

As the commentary explains, *if one considers the sufferings of the lower migrations, then the sufferings of the austerities of attaining enlightenment are of small measure and last a short time by comparison.* According to the Mahayana Perfection Vehicle, we have to practise for three countless eons to achieve enlightenment, but one can spend many more countless eons in the lower realms. While that is the general presentation in the Mahayana Perfection Vehicle, it is explained in more advanced teachings that one can

actually achieve enlightenment even in just one lifetime. Lama Tsong Khapa is said to have obtained enlightenment in one lifetime, and there are many other examples of great masters who also obtained enlightenment in one lifetime. So one actually can achieve the state of enlightenment in a very short time if one engages in, and applies the practices. In comparison to the sufferings that have to be experienced in the lower realms, it's really of very short duration.

The example that is presented here is that *they are also easy to bear, similar to being able to bear the sufferings of a bodily procedure to clear the harm of tormenting diseases.* A tormenting disease is a disease that can cause great suffering if it is not cured. The cure might also cause some suffering, especially if the body is cut open as part of that cure, yet that is willingly accepted. It is considered to be a small suffering to be endured for the sake of removing the cause of a much greater suffering caused by a disease.

2.1.2.3.3.2.3 *The example of how it is suitable to bear small sufferings to destroy a great sickness*

The verse relating to this outline reads:

23. *All physicians make unpleasant sickness
Go away with cures.
Hence, one is able to bear small unpleasantness
To destroy many sufferings.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains that:

All physicians will employ slightly unpleasant cures to make an unpleasant sickness go away. Likewise, since the austerities to achieve enlightenment are very small sufferings, one should bear the small suffering of the austerity to destroy the many sufferings of cyclic existence. In this way one pacifies boundless sufferings of self and other.

As clearly explained here, *all physicians will employ similar methods of applying unpleasant cures to make an unpleasant sickness go away. The sufferings of the austerities needed to achieve enlightenment are, in comparison, very small.* One needs to be able to bear these sufferings, as they are a cause to remove the many sufferings of cyclic existence. This pacifies the suffering of oneself and others.

2.1.2.3.3.3. They are suitable to bear since the king of physicians heals great diseases with gentle methods

This is subdivided into three:

2.1.2.3.3.3.1. The Buddha shows methods to cure great diseases without having to experience the slightest suffering

2.1.2.3.3.3.2. It is forbidden to give one's body for as long as one has difficulty

2.1.2.3.3.3.3. It is not difficult since the time taught for giving one's body is when one is habituated to give it like a vegetable

These three outlines systematically remove all of the doubts that may occur relating to engaging in the practices.

2.1.2.3.3.3.1. *The Buddha shows methods to cure great diseases without having to experience the slightest suffering*

The relevant verse reads:

24. *The supreme physician does not act
In accordance with common cures;*

*He cures boundless great diseases
With extremely gentle methods.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

While one is working to achieve enlightenment, the supreme of physicians, the Able One, does not employ austerities like the common cures to cure sicknesses. He heals the boundless heavy sickness of having to wander in cyclic existence due to the afflictions with the method of an easy path leading to a happy result, without the extremes of being disheartened and exhausted or sensual decadence. Therefore, how is it suitable to be afraid of the austerities?

As the commentary explains, *while one is working to achieve enlightenment, the supreme of physicians, which refers to the Able One, or the Buddha, does not employ austerities like the common cures to cure sicknesses.* The methods that normal physicians use to treat disease can involve harsh and invasive treatments like cutting or even burning flesh, piercing it with needles and so forth. Even the tools they use are quite frightening—I recall seeing a young child crying when he saw the needle, before the treatment had even begun. This is how normal diseases are treated. The Buddha, who is likened to a supreme physician, does not use the harsh methods employed by normal physicians. In fact his methods are not invasive, are all very gentle, and do not harm in any way.

The method that the supreme physician, the Buddha, employs is that he *heals the boundless heavy sickness of having to wander in cyclic existence due to the afflictions with the method of an easy path leading to a happy result.* The easy, or suitable path refers to the practices leading to enlightenment, such as the six perfections. Practising generosity is a relatively easy practice, while practising moral ethics is a very gentle practice of refraining from harming others. When it comes to concentration, very suitable methods are presented. One develops concentration by sitting in the seven-point posture of the Buddha Vairochana, and developing a clear mind. These precise and gentle methods, which gradually lead to the development of higher realisations, are very meticulously presented.

Following this easy and suitable path leads to the happy result of enlightenment. Thus, the path itself is a happy and gentle path, which leads to the ultimate happy result of achieving enlightenment. Such a path is free from the *extremes of sensual decadence, and being disheartened and exhausted. Therefore, how is it suitable to be afraid of the austerities?* This implies that one should not be afraid of austere practices, when, in fact, they are gentle and suitable to practise, and moreover lead to the great result of enlightenment. That is definitely something that one should not be afraid of. Indeed one should willingly engage in them.

2.1.2.3.3.2. It is forbidden to give one's body for as long as one has the thought that holds it difficult

This relates to the earlier point of being daunted by the thought of giving one's body parts. As presented here, one should not be engaging in such practices for as long as one has the thought that considers it difficult to give one's body.

The verse relating to this outline is:

*25. The guide induces one to initially train
Even in the generosity of vegetables and such.
Having become habituated, then subsequently
One gradually also offers one's flesh.*

Then Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Initially, when one is not even acquainted with offering vegetables and the like, the guide, the Buddha, induces one to train in the generosity of food, drink, vegetables and so forth. When one has become acquainted with this without difficulty, then subsequently one also gradually offers one's flesh.

It is not being suggested that one should start the training in generosity by giving away one's body parts or flesh, blood and so forth. As explained in the commentary, the Buddha presented the methods for practising generosity in a very skilful way. He advised familiarising oneself with the practice of generosity with things that are plentiful, such as food and drink, *vegetables and so forth*, which one can offer without much difficulty. As one becomes acquainted with that, one can further develop one's practice of generosity by giving more valuable things.

When one has become habituated to, or acquainted with this without difficulty, refers to having become acquainted with being generous with the material possessions such as food, drink, clothing and so forth. Through that acquaintance one reaches the point where one has no hesitation in giving away more valuable possessions. Through acquaintance and familiarity with that level of generosity, *then subsequently one also gradually offers one's flesh.* Through familiarity with easier acts of generosity one can reach the point where there is no hesitation in offering one's flesh, limbs and so forth when necessary.

2.1.2.3.3.3. It is not difficult since the time taught for giving one's body is when one is habituated to give it like a vegetable

Following on from the previous point, this section covers when it is suitable to offer one's body, flesh and so forth.

The verse relating to this reads:

*26. Once one has generated the awareness
Of one's body as a vegetable or the like,
Then one offers one's flesh and the like.
Where lies the difficulty in that?*

As the commentary explains:

Once one has, through familiarity, generated the awareness of the generosity of one's body as the generosity of a vegetable or the like, then one can offer one's flesh and such.

Where lies the difficulty in that? Since there is not the slightest difficulty, it is unsuitable to be afraid.

As explained in the commentary, through familiarity with being generous with material possessions, one increases the mind of generosity to the point where there is no hesitation in offering these material possessions. Through that familiarity one reaches the point where offering one's body parts is no different to being generous with material possessions. In other words, it is suitable to offer one's body parts, as giving a vegetable and giving one's body parts amount to the same thing.

2.1.2.3.3.4. It is suitable to like the austerities since they lack suffering and are strengthened by happiness

This section is to remove any doubt about whether bodhisattvas suffer. When bodhisattvas reach the higher paths and grounds, then engaging in practices of generosity is a cause for great joy and happiness, rather than unhappiness and suffering. Therefore it is suitable for them to practise austerities.

This section is subdivided into four:

2.1.2.3.3.4.1. Though a person who is unskilled in the sequence of training in the path has physical and mental unhappiness, those who are skilled do not have the suffering of austerities

2.1.2.3.3.4.2. There is no cause then for a great bodhisattva to be disheartened with cyclic existence

2.1.2.3.3.4.3. For these reasons they are said to be more skilled in achieving the path than a Hinayana

2.1.2.3.3.4.4. Hence, it is unsuitable to be discouraged from the actions of a bodhisattva

2.1.2.3.3.4.1. Though a person who is unskilled in the sequence of training in the path has physical and mental unhappiness, those who are skilled do not have the suffering of austerities

The verse relating to this is:

*27. No suffering because of having abandoned negativity,
No dislike because of being skilful.
Therefore, wrong conceptions
And negativities harm mind and body.*

The commentary reads:

Bodhisattvas with the pure thought of compassion do not have physical suffering when they offer their body, because they have abandoned all the negativities of the three doors, and they also do not experience mental dislike because they are skilful regarding the time for offering the body.

Therefore, the wrong conceptions of grasping at the self of person and grasping at mine, and the negativities of killing and so forth, harm mind and body, and the great bodhisattvas have abandoned these causes for harm.

As the commentary explains, *bodhisattvas with the pure thought of compassion, do not have physical suffering when they offer their body, because they have abandoned all the negativities of the three doors, and they also do not experience mental dislike because they are skilful or have the knowledge regarding the time for offering the body.* As presented here, great bodhisattvas, who have attained high levels on the paths and grounds have no physical suffering, because they have abandoned all the negativities of the three doors.

This indicates that any mental or physical suffering that we experience on any of the three levels, is due to the negativities we create because we still have the negativities of the three doors. When negativities have been abandoned, then any suffering in relation to the three doors ceases.

Furthermore, *they also do not experience mental dislike because they are skilful regarding the time for offering the body.* Thus, because they have the skill of knowing the suitable time to give their body they do not hesitate to give their body parts whenever necessary.

Wrong conceptions of grasping at the self of person and grasping at mine, and the negativities of killing and so forth, harm mind and body, yet the great bodhisattvas have abandoned these causes for harm. More specifically, abandoning the wrong conceptions of grasping at a self of persons, and grasping at 'mine' refers to bodhisattvas who have gained a direct realisation of emptiness.

Bodhisattvas at the lower levels don't have any wrong conceptions of grasping at the self of person, and grasping at 'mine', but they don't yet have the direct realisation of emptiness.

Because the bodhisattvas who have obtained the direct realisation of emptiness have removed all the negativities of killing and so forth, they've removed the causes of harm to the mind and the body.

What is specifically explained here is that the negativity that one accumulates from engaging in the ten non-virtues such as killing and so forth, is a cause for physical and mental pain and suffering. Since *the great bodhisattvas have abandoned such causes*, they do not experience any physical and mental pain or suffering. What this implicitly points out is that if we wish to avoid suffering, then we need to avoid its causes, which are the ten non-virtues.

2.1.2.3.3.4.2. There is no cause then for a great bodhisattva to be disheartened with cyclic existence

The doubt which may arise is whether bodhisattvas who, with their commitment to benefitting sentient beings, remain in cyclic existence for a long time, will be daunted by having to remain in cyclic existence?

The presentation under this heading explains that bodhisattvas will not be disheartened about remaining in cyclic existence.

We can conclude here, and finish this in our next session.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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Edited Version*

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Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

14 July 2015

While maintaining the motivation we generated during the prayers, we can now engage in our meditation practice. [meditation]

Now we can generate a positive motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines:

In order to fully benefit all mother sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the Mahayana teachings, and put them into practice well.

The more we familiarise ourselves with a positive motivation like this (as we do in our meditation sessions and in listening to teachings etc.) the more we can readily generate it, and apply it to whatever practice we engage in. This is very meaningful. In meditation it is questionable which renders a better chance of accumulating merit: generating a positive motivation, or the meditation practice itself. In spending even a few moments generating a very positive motivation, one definitely accumulates extensive merit.

Our motivation involves generating an intention to achieve enlightenment for the sake of limitless mother sentient beings, so to that extent, even for a few moments when we generate it, we definitely get a sky full of merit. If we cannot generate such a motivation before our practice, it is questionable whether it will arise spontaneously during the actual practice. The most essential attitude one needs to try and adopt at all times is a positive and kind attitude. If we ensure we have that, then whatever we do, whatever the situation we find ourselves in, we can make it most beneficial. If we lose that, it is a great loss. That is why I emphasise the importance of developing loving kindness again and again.

2.1.2.3.3.4. It is suitable to like the austerities since they lack suffering and are strengthened by happiness (cont.)

2.1.2.3.3.4.2. *There is no cause then for a great bodhisattva to be disheartened with cyclic existence*

The outline here reflects the meaning of the verse and relates to bodhisattvas who have control over their rebirths. These bodhisattvas are not reborn in cyclic existence due to uncontrolled delusions and karma, but are actually born out of their aspiration to benefit sentient beings. For as long as they remain in samsara they do not become disheartened or daunted, because their purpose is solely to benefit sentient beings.

The verse reads:

28. *If the body is happy through merits
And the mind is happy through skill,
Though remaining in cyclic existence for the
purpose of others
Why should those with compassion be
disheartened?*

The commentary reads:

Bodhisattvas have physical happiness through the merits of generosity and so forth, and they have

mental happiness, like the bodhisattva ever-crying, through being skilful regarding what has to be adopted and what has to be rejected, and the meaning of emptiness. So, since there is no cause for suffering, why should those with compassion become disheartened, even though they remain in cyclic existence for the purpose of others?

The commentary explains that the *bodhisattvas have physical happiness* which is gained *through the merits of generosity and so forth*—which includes the merits gained from observing morality, practising patience, joyous effort and concentration. What is being presented here is the aspects of merit and wisdom incorporated in the practice of the six perfections. The merits accumulated from such practices as generosity, contribute to having a physically sound body up to the point of not having any physical discomfort. Therefore a bodhisattva's body, which is the result of these practices, is one which experiences happiness rather than suffering. Furthermore, *they have mental happiness, like the bodhisattva ever-crying, by being skilful in what has to be adopted and what has to be rejected, and the meaning of emptiness.* Wisdom here also includes a precise understanding of karma, how to apply and abide by the law of cause and effect, as well as the realisation of emptiness. The accumulation of wisdom becomes a cause for mental happiness. Thus, through the combination of merit and wisdom, bodhisattvas obtain a body endowed with physical happiness, and a mind which experiences mental happiness. As explained further in the commentary, *since there is no cause for suffering, within their physical aggregates or the mental continuum, why should those with compassion become disheartened even though they may remain in cyclic existence, for the purpose of others?* This rhetorical question implies that since there is no physical or mental suffering and only happiness, a bodhisattva in fact does not become disheartened by remaining in samsara for the sake of benefiting other sentient beings.

A relevant point made in the earlier part of the chapter was that bodhisattvas reach a level where they are able to be generous with their body parts, and they regard giving them away as no different to giving away food or vegetables. At that point, when they have no hesitation at the prospect of giving away their bodies (when necessary) to others, it is a suitable time for them to actually give their body, because they don't become disheartened by that act of generosity. On our own level we can relate to the fact that when we have a strong physical illness, or mental distress, we are more vulnerable to becoming disheartened. It is very easy for one to lose enthusiasm and become disheartened and daunted by the tasks one has to perform, because of the physical and mental suffering entailed in them. Conversely, when we are feeling quite well physically and mentally, we are more capable of engaging in any activity we intend to accomplish. While the direct advice here is for bodhisattvas, we can definitely relate the importance of using our own physical and mental wellbeing as a way of continuing with virtuous activities in our own practice.

We need to understand that bodhisattvas not being disheartened with cyclic existence means they are not disheartened by the prospect of being in samsara for the sole purpose of benefiting other sentient beings. If, on our ordinary level, we don't utilise our wellbeing properly when we are feeling good physically and mentally, we can lose our disheartenment with samsara, and actually lose the purpose for practising Dharma. You probably find it true that when everything is going quite well, there is a danger of forgetting about the practice of Dharma. This means we are actually

enjoying samsaric pleasures at that time and don't feel disheartened with samsara. To develop renunciation at an ordinary level we first need to become disheartened with samsara as a way to be free from samsara itself. This doesn't imply that bodhisattvas don't have renunciation! Of course they do, but it is a renunciation based on having great compassion and love for other sentient beings whereby they don't become disheartened by the prospect of being in samsara. You need to understand this in its proper context.

2.1.2.3.3.4.3. For these reasons they are said to be more skilled in achieving the path than a Hinayana

The outline here indicates that because of being undaunted by the prospect of being in samsara for the benefit of mother sentient beings, bodhisattvas are much more skilled in achieving the path than those who follow the Hinayana path. The presentation here provides immaculately profound instructions on how to really engage in the practice. Even contemplating on the meaning of these verses and pausing for a few moments to think about their meaning can, in itself, become a powerful meditation practice that greatly benefits our mind.

The verse reads:

*29. They exhaust previous negativities
Through the power of the mind of
enlightenment,
And they contain an ocean of merits.
Therefore they are said to be superior than the
hearers.*

The commentary reads as follows:

Since those with compassion exhaust previous negativities with the power of the mind of enlightenment and because they contain an ocean of accumulations of merits and wisdom they are said to be superior in progressing along the path than the hearers.

The commentary explains this quite clearly, but I'll just extract some of the main points. *Those with compassion* relates to the great bodhisattvas who are endowed with compassion who *exhaust previous negativities with the power of the mind of enlightenment*. At this point, recall how the benefits of bodhicitta were explained in the previous chapters. Generating bodhicitta for even a moment is a means to accumulate extensive merit and purify great amounts of negative karma. Hence, when someone is endowed with a perpetual state of bodhicitta in their mind, there is no question about the great extent of negativities that have been purified through the power of that mind, along with the accumulation of merit. Thus *because they contain an ocean of accumulations of merits and wisdom they are said to be superior*.

The accumulation of merit and wisdom are known as the two accumulations, so we need to understand what the accumulations refer to and what results they bring about. I have mentioned these numerous times in the past but it is good to reflect upon these points again. The whole doctrine is presented on the basis of the two truths, the path which consists of the two accumulations, and the result which consists of the two bodies of a buddha – the rupakaya and dharmakaya.

The accumulation of merit is the particular cause for obtaining the *rupakaya* which is a buddha's form body, and the accumulation of wisdom is a substantial cause to obtain the *dharmakaya* which is a buddha's wisdom truth body. Hence the two resultant enlightened bodies are the *rupakaya* and the *dharmakaya*.

The two accumulations include the practices of the six perfections, the first five of which are the particular means for accumulating merit, and the practising the perfection of wisdom is the means to accumulate wisdom. In particular, the wisdom realising emptiness forms the means to perfect the accumulation of wisdom. It is presented here that bodhisattvas *are said to be superior in progressing along the path than hearers*; this is particularly due to the fact that they have generated bodhicitta.

The main factor that differentiates bodhisattvas from hearers is the mind of bodhicitta. Hearer *aryas* (noble beings) have also gained the realisation of emptiness, so if it was just the realisation of emptiness that is required to obtain the ultimate goal of enlightenment, then when hearers on the paths of seeing and meditation obtain the hearer's path of no-more-learning, and become an *arhat* (foe-destroyer), they would have then obtained enlightenment. The factor which prevents them from obtaining enlightenment - that which obstructs them from achieving an omniscient mind - is that they have not yet developed bodhicitta. Furthermore, when a hearer or solitary realiser obtains the path of seeing, although they gain the realisation of emptiness, it is said that their body still remains a contaminated body.

However, when a bodhisattva obtains the path of seeing, their body transforms into an uncontaminated body. This has been clearly explained by Lama Tsong Khapa, and His Holiness also explained this point in his recent teachings. Therefore the key factor that makes bodhisattvas far superior to hearers is the mind generation of bodhicitta. This is the main factor to understand in order to derive the essential understanding of this verse. Obtaining the ultimate state where one has completely actualised, surpassed and perfected the two purposes comes only through following the Great Vehicle path, which focuses on the development of bodhicitta. This is why it is not sufficient to just rely on the hearers' path, as it lacks the sufficient causes for one to obtain the ultimate and perfected state of fulfilling the two purposes.

2.1.2.3.3.4.4. Hence, it is unsuitable to be discouraged from the actions of a bodhisattva

Following on from the earlier points, this part of the outline is saying *hence, it is unsuitable to be discouraged from the actions of a bodhisattva*.

The verse reads:

*30. Therefore, mounting the horse of bodhicitta
That dispels all tiredness and weariness,
Who, that knows the mind that goes
From happiness to happiness, will be
discouraged?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains as follows:

Therefore, having mounted the powerful horse of the mind of enlightenment that dispels all mental tiredness and physical weariness, who of those proficient that know the mind that goes from the path of mental and physical happiness to the result of happiness, will be discouraged? It is unsuitable to be discouraged from practising the bodhisattva actions.

For the reasons presented previously, bodhisattvas have *mounted the powerful horse of the mind of enlightenment*. The mind of enlightenment or *bodhicitta* is analogous to a powerful horse, and when one has mounted that *mind of enlightenment that dispels all mental tiredness and physical weariness*, the powerful mind of bodhicitta enables one to dispel all mental tiredness and physical weariness. The

passage ...*who of those proficient that know the mind that goes from the path of mental and physical happiness to the result of happiness* relates to having a clear understanding of how following an easy path of mental and physical happiness will result in obtaining ultimate happiness. Knowing that, *who will be discouraged?* This implies that with this understanding, no-one would be discouraged. So it concludes that, having understood the great benefits, *it is unsuitable to be discouraged from practising the bodhisattva actions.*

2.1. Increasing the antidote, the power of enthusiasm

The antidote here relates to the antidote for overcoming laziness hence increasing the antidote to laziness is *the power of enthusiasm*. The particular type of laziness here relates to the laziness of despondency.

The power of enthusiasm is subdivided into three:

2.1.1. Increasing the powers that are the conducive conditions for enthusiasm

2.1.2. Being diligent about practising the actions with mindfulness and introspection

2.1.3. Empowering oneself to achieve the actions

2.1.1. Increasing the powers that are the conducive conditions for enthusiasm

This is subdivided into two:

2.1.1.1. A short presentation by way of identifying the four powers

2.1.1.2. An extensive explanation

2.1.1.1. A SHORT PRESENTATION BY WAY OF IDENTIFYING THE FOUR POWERS

The first verse that relates to this reads:

31. *The armies for accomplishing the purpose of sentient beings
Are belief, stability, joy and relinquishment.
Belief is generated by reflecting on its benefits
And the fears of suffering.*

The commentary explains the meaning:

Regarding the generation of the armies that destroy the opposing factors of enthusiasm so as to achieve the purpose of sentient beings: Similar to the king's four armies destroying his opponents, the four powers are the conducive conditions for enthusiasm.

The analogy here explains that the four powers are similar to the four types of a king's army. This relates to ancient warfare and refers to an army mounted on horses, an army mounted on elephants, an army that goes forth on chariots and an army that goes on foot (as explained in *Precious Garland*). Of the four powers analogous to the four types of army, the first is belief.

The commentary continues:

a) Belief that is aspiration regarding the practice of adopting and abandoning, generated through contemplating karmic cause and effect.

Belief here, and as also presented in the Lam Rim teachings, particularly relates to aspiration, particularly the aspiration *regarding the practice of adopting and abandoning.*

Next the power of stability is explained:

b) Stability that does not start something without investigation, and which finishes what was started.

Again, this is also explained in the Lam Rim teachings. The power of stability is continuously applied enthusiasm. Once one engages in a particular virtue, continuously applying

enthusiasm in engaging in that virtue, it is the power of stability.

Next the commentary explains the power of joy.

c) Joy that engages in effort without satisfaction, but with uninterrupted joy, like a child engaged in play.

Joy is explained here with the analogy of children playing naturally, and not wanting their joy and happiness in that play to be interrupted.

Next is the power of relinquishment, which relates to taking a rest. When engaging in an activity, putting in too much effort can often become an obstacle to accomplishing it, so there are times when one needs to take a rest and find the right balance. As will be explained later on, in meditation this means for one's focus not to be too tight or too loose, but to find the right measure. Thus, in whatever practice, when one is pushing too hard one needs to apply the power of "relinquishment" or rest.

d) Relinquishment that takes a break when body and mind are tired through the practice of enthusiastic effort, only to start straightaway again once refreshed.

If one doesn't take a break one may get stressed.

The commentary explains the four powers with belief as an example:

Explaining them by taking the power of belief as an example, they are generated by contemplating the fears of the suffering of cyclic existence and the benefits of the respective power, i.e., here belief.

The powers *are generated by contemplating the fears of the suffering of cyclic existence*, refers to generating the fear of the suffering, and then the benefits of the respective power. With 'belief', one contemplates on the benefits of the belief that will be generated.

The next verse reads:

32. *Giving up the opposite in this way
Strive in increasing enthusiasm through
Belief, pride, joy and relinquishment
And the power of diligence and control.*

The powers are presented briefly in the verse, and the commentary further explains:

Giving up the opposing factors of not engaging in virtuous dharmas though seeing that one is able to, or the discouragement of thinking, 'I am not able to do this', one generates the conducive conditions of the four powers of belief, the pride of stability, joy and relinquishment.

Then, during the actual practice one diligently practises enthusiasm with mindfulness and introspection, and through the power of subsequently gaining control over body and mind one increases enthusiasm further and further. Strive in such a way.

Giving up the opposing factors such as *not engaging in virtuous dharmas though seeing that one is able to*, relates to the fact that one may see the benefits of the virtuous Dharma, but, despite that, one does not engage in the virtuous Dharma, which is caused by laziness. This type of laziness, where one thinks 'I'm not able to do this' is despondency, so at that point *one generates the conducive conditions*. *By giving up the opposing factors, one generates the conducive conditions of the four powers of belief, the pride of stability, joy and relinquishment*. Stability is referred to as a virtuous pride. The commentary further explains applying these conducive conditions of the four powers:

Then, during the actual practice, one diligently practises enthusiasm with mindfulness and introspection ...

It is not sufficient to apply the conducive conditions of the four powers initially. In *the actual practice, one needs to also diligently practise enthusiasm with mindfulness and introspection*. The point presented here is that mindfulness and introspection are an essential aid for maintaining enthusiasm during the actual practice.

... and through the power of subsequently gaining control over body and mind one increases enthusiasm further and further. Strive in such a way.

This is the way one actually adopts the practice of the four powers, and the two powers of diligence and control as well.

2.1.1.2. AN EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION

This is subdivided into four:

2.1.1.2.1. The power of belief

2.1.1.2.2. The power of stability

2.1.1.2.3. The power of joy

2.1.1.2.4. The power of relinquishment

2.1.1.2.1. *The power of belief*

This is subdivided into four:

2.1.1.2.1.1. The object of belief

2.1.1.2.1.2. The result of belief

2.1.1.2.1.3. The cause for belief

2.1.1.2.1.4. Concluding summary

Each power is presented very meticulously by defining the object of belief, the result of belief, and the actual cause of belief etc.

2.1.1.2.1.1. *The object of belief*

This is further subdivided into three:

2.1.1.2.1.1.1. Abandoning faults

2.1.1.2.1.1.2. Taking qualities

2.1.1.2.1.1.3. Analysing what one has done and what one has not

Again, in order to gain a clearer understanding of each power, the text sequentially and meticulously presents the ways to remove doubts in our minds. This will help the wisdom in our mind to really grow.

2.1.1.2.1.1.1. *Abandoning faults*

The next two verses read:

33. *One should destroy the boundless
Faults of self and others.
Even if for each individual fault
It will take an ocean of eons,*

34. *If it is not observable that one has
Started to exhaust faults even partially,
One becomes an abode for boundless suffering.
Why does one's heart not burst?*

The commentary explains the meaning:

One should destroy the boundless faults of self and others, because one has made that promise at the time of generating the mind. When one destroys these faults one familiarises oneself with the antidote for an ocean of eons even for each individual fault. Since it will come like this, if one does not observe the beginning of having started to abandon faults even partially on oneself, then one will have to experience the sufferings of the lower realms, since one cannot bear to become familiar with the antidote even that much. Since one will become an abode for boundless

suffering, why does one's heart not explode? One's heart is completely made of stone, I say.

The commentary explains here that one definitely needs to strive to *destroy the boundless faults of self and others*. Why? Because one has already made a promise when generating the mind of enlightenment. One then reflects on that when destroying these faults and *familiarises oneself with the antidote for an ocean of eons even for each individual fault*. When applying the antidotes for overcoming these faults one needs to familiarise oneself with the antidotes for many eons. Even for one fault one has to repeatedly apply the antidote and familiarise oneself with it again and again. This is the way to completely overcome that particular fault.

Having realised this then *if one does not observe the beginning of having started to abandon faults even partially on oneself, one will have to experience the sufferings of the lower realms*. If one feels daunted that one cannot familiarise oneself with the antidote for that amount of time, one will see that by not doing so one will have to experience the sufferings of the lower realms. Then *since one will become an abode for boundless suffering, why does one's heart not explode?* This is a way of exhorting us to take heed; if one does not apply the antidote to overcome the faults then the consequence is to experience the boundless suffering of the lower realms. So if one contemplates that, one's heart should feel moved to expend real effort, and strive to overcome these faults.

The extensive Lam Rim explains these points by quoting Shantideva's verses. It gives detailed explanations of how one has to apply the antidotes to overcome the faults for many eons. So if, right now, one doesn't even consider applying an antidote for even one of the faults, even partially, then how can one possibly believe one will not have to experience the sufferings of the lower realms. This is explained in the Lam Rim more elaborately, and referring to a Lam Rim text on the point of enthusiasm will complement the explanation presented here.

Another point made in the Lam Rim text is that contemplating like this is a way not to become discouraged. Rather it encourages you to realise that you have spent a lot of time in meaningless thought and activity and not much time on applying the antidotes for overcoming the faults. Thus by reflecting upon how much time one has already wasted, to take heed and apply enthusiasm to overcome the faults. That is the main point.

These presentations are all very meaningful and we can definitely relate them to our personal practice.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

21 July 2015

Based on the motivation we have just generated during our prayers, we can now engage in our meditation practice.

[meditation]

As usual we now generate a motivation that is based on the altruistic motivation of bodhicitta, such as:

May all sentient beings be free from all suffering and endowed with happiness. By taking personal responsibility for making that happen, may I be able to free all sentient beings from all suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness. It is for that purpose that I will engage in listening to the teaching and put it into practice well.

We can also use this as a motivation for engaging in the meditation practice that we have just done. When one genuinely generates an altruistic motivation such as 'How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from all suffering and led to the ultimate state of happiness, then that needs to be followed with the commitment 'I myself will do that for them, and for that purpose I will engage in this meditation practice'. The practice then becomes very powerful and meaningful. By generating this motivation again and again we become more and more familiar with this positive state of mind. So spending even just a few moments generating this motivation is a highly meaningful practice.

As mentioned previously, while we might not have generated bodhicitta yet, by cultivating this altruistic mind to the extent that we actually feel that sentiment, we are going beyond the mere aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and actually generating the wish to take that responsibility upon oneself. Generating the direct intention, 'for that purpose I will engage in this practice' brings in the element of personal responsibility; thus it is called the superior intention. A superior intention is the active intention to take full responsibility for freeing all beings from suffering, and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness.

By familiarising ourselves with this motivation we will definitely reach a stage where, at the very least, no-one will appear as an enemy. Rather, all beings will start to appear appealing and worthy of love and compassion, and an object of practice that leads to enlightenment. As also mentioned previously, when one develops the intention to do everything possible to benefit sentient beings, and to not harm any living being, then all sentient beings will appear as appealing and not hostile. This pure appearance contributes to a real sense of personal joy and happiness.

This is also a significant practice for our own personal development. As we familiarise ourselves with this attitude more and more, we can see its benefit, and thus be encouraged to continue with the practice; then our wish to benefit others will also increase. By understanding how familiarising ourselves with this motivation further strengthens it, we can understand how, when bodhisattvas

become enlightened, they actively engage in going out and helping sentient beings on a constant basis. They certainly don't sit back, relax and enjoy themselves. Because they are enlightened, there is nothing to hold them back anymore, and they can benefit sentient beings constantly. It is through familiarity with this training that one reaches that perfected state of enlightenment.

This has been an abbreviated explanation of how to generate the bodhicitta mind as the basis of one's motivation. As you would know, in the seven-point cause-and-effect sequence one works through earlier states of mind until one reaches the stage where one spontaneously takes on the responsibility for benefitting sentient beings, and for that purpose engages in practising the six perfections. Based on feelings of love and compassion, one develops great love and compassion, which forms the basis for the development of that superior intention. Having developed superior intention, one can then easily generate bodhicitta. Initially however, generating bodhicitta still requires some effort, and so it is called contrived bodhicitta. Whereas when one reaches the stage where the altruistic mind of aspiring to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings is generated spontaneously, effortlessly and continuously, one has generated actual, uncontrived bodhicitta.

2.2.1.2.1. The power of belief

2.2.1.2.1.1. The object of belief (cont.)

Earlier the text explained how aspiring to achieve enlightenment involves abandoning faults, and next it goes on to explain how to acquire the qualities necessary to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment. Again these very significant points are being presented in a very precise, sequential manner. The Lam Rim teachings mention that the attainment of enlightenment is based on abandoning each and every negativity, and acquiring each and every quality from the very outset of one's practice. More specifically, what is being mentioned is that every attempt to abandon even one negativity, and acquire even one quality, is the basis for proceeding on the path leading to the ultimate state of enlightenment.

This is a really significant point for us to consider. The state of enlightenment attained by the buddhas, who we revere, did not arise spontaneously or miraculously from nothing. Rather, that state of enlightenment is attained as a result of having abandoned each and every negativity, and acquired each and every quality at the time of being a trainee on the path, which eventually and gradually led to that state of enlightenment. This very significant point is very encouraging, because it shows us that we have the same potential. Each negativity that we abandon now, and each quality that we acquire now, is an essential part of the cause to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment. This is the way to relate to this point.

It is, of course, not sufficient to attempt to acquire qualities if one maintains faults. Indeed, the very process of acquiring qualities entails overcoming certain faults. When each and every fault is abandoned, the quality of abandoning negativities is also acquired. So we need to understand that abandoning faults and acquiring qualities are mutually dependent upon each other. We need to understand that inter-relationship, and thus realise that we cannot hope to acquire qualities while not thinking too much about the necessity of abandoning faults. It is essential that we see that our progress is dependent upon abandoning faults. If we attempt to acquire qualities while holding fast onto our faults, then we will fall short of making any progress in the

Dharma. So from the very outset we need to make a strong attempt to abandon and overcome the faults of attachment, anger and ignorance, from which all other faults stem.

As the Lam Rim teachings clearly explain, the signs that one's practice is coming to fruition is when one sees that the delusions have started to reduce, that one's mind has become more subdued, that one has stronger faith in the teachings and the teacher, and that one has more inclination to engage in the practice. When we notice that our mind has become more and more acquainted with the Dharma in these ways, then that is a clear sign that one has made progress in the practice.

The more we become familiar with the qualities, and the greater the effort we put into overcoming faults, the more rapidly we will obtain qualities and overcome faults. The strong imprint that comes from becoming familiar with the Dharma now will ensure that our Dharma practice will be much easier in our future life.

To abandon delusions we need to first identify them clearly. Then we need to meditate and contemplate their disadvantages. When we clearly see those disadvantages, the strong wish to abandon them will arise, and then whatever attempts one makes to overcome the delusions will be fruitful. If we miss that point, then, although we might be exerting ourselves in the practice of Dharma, our mind will feel weighed down, and we may even feel depressed. That is a sign that the practice has not really taken root yet. Even though it may seem impossible to abandon all negativities and subdue all delusions in this life, the attempts we make now will not be in vain. In the next life, we will be much more able to spontaneously and rapidly apply the antidote to overcome the delusions and acquire qualities. So we definitely benefit from this practice. Conversely, if we resort into thinking, 'Oh, well, since I am not able to abandon the delusions now, I might as well just give up, and not do anything about it', then any progress is definitely limited.

The purpose of sharing this with you is to remind you that the real purpose of your efforts to study and practice is to overcome the delusions. If we make a genuine attempt we will definitely reap a significant result. While I cannot claim that I have abandoned negativities to any great degree, I can safely say that I have made some progress. In my teenage years I was influenced by strong emotions such as anger. However, by seeing the great disadvantages of anger, and making genuine attempts to overcome it, I can safely say that I have progressed to the point where the mind of anger hardly ever occurs now. I am not claiming that I have abandoned the delusions, but in comparison to the state of my mind when I was young, I feel that my mind is genuinely calmer now, and not really affected by strong delusions. So to that extent I have benefitted from my attempts to apply the antidotes earlier in my life.

We really need to think again and again about the disadvantages of negative states of mind such as anger, attachment and so forth. Also think again and again about the advantages of overcoming those delusions. When our mind is not dominated and controlled by anger, it is calmer and much more peaceful. Then, not only will we have achieved some personal transformation, but it will bring benefit to others, because of the contribution that our happy mind makes to our immediate surroundings.

We can clearly see that when anyone is affected by delusions such as anger or attachment, they do not have a happy or peaceful mind. For however long the influence of the

delusion lasts, their mind is in turmoil and unhappy. This is true for every one. No-one is exempted from mental turmoil when they experience anger. Delusions can arise in anyone, regardless of their status, whether they are well-known or respected, whether they are rich and famous, or impoverished. For as long as delusions are present they affect the mind negatively, bringing about unrest and turmoil, and there will be no mental peace.

When the mind is not affected by strong delusions, then for however long that state lasts, one will have a peaceful, joyful, contented and happy state of mind. This is true for everyone, regardless of their status. Even those without many worldly possessions will feel contented, happy and satisfied when their mind is not affected by strong delusions. Conversely, those with fame, possessions, wealth and so forth will not have a happy life if their mind is affected by strong delusions. For as long as their mind is affected by strong delusions, they will not be happy. These are the points we really need consider again and again, as a way of reaffirming our commitment to our practice, where the main focus is on subduing our mind and overcoming the delusions.

Of course all of this relates directly to the text that we are studying, where Shantideva presents the delusions and their antidotes in great detail. The fifth chapter identifies many of the delusions, and the sixth chapter specifically deals with one of the strongest delusions, anger, explaining how to apply the antidote by cultivating patience. In this seventh chapter he is again presenting delusions as faults, and showing how to overcome them by applying enthusiasm or joyful effort.

I personally find studying this text incredibly beneficial. I recall how much I benefitted when I received teachings on the entire text from His Holiness Dalai Lama. Now I have to read it again as preparation for presenting it to you. Familiarising myself with it again, reading it and studying it has, once again, brought me tremendous benefit. So it is quite appropriate to thank you for giving me the opportunity to further familiarise myself with the text. It gives me that opportunity to once more relate to this incredibly powerful practice and teaching, which I find really beneficial.

2.2.1.2.1.2. Taking qualities

Now we come to acquiring the qualities for the achievement of the ultimate state of enlightenment. The two verses relating to this read:

35. *One should establish many qualities
Of self and others.
If one meditates for an ocean of eons
For each individual quality,*
36. *One has not generated meditation
On even a part of one's qualities.
This birth that one has somehow found now,
It is strange that I make it meaningless.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on these verses reads:

One should establish the many qualities of one's own and others' liberation and enlightenment because one has promised to do so.

Not to mention all the qualities, if it is necessary to familiarise oneself for an ocean of eons even for one individual quality of the marks and signs, then one has not started to even partially meditate on those qualities. It is strange that I make meaningless this birth, with its freedoms and endowments, for this and

future rebirths, now when somehow I have found it after such a long time. This is an expression of despair.

As the commentary explains, *One should establish the many qualities of one's own and others' liberation and enlightenment because one has promised to do so.* The third chapter of the text explains the benefits of bodhicitta, and shows how to make that promise to develop bodhicitta. Having made that promise to work for the welfare of other sentient beings, one definitely needs to strive to obtain all the qualities that are the cause for obtaining liberation and enlightenment both for one's own sake, and for the sake of other sentient beings.

In order to establish others in the state of liberation and enlightenment one first needs to have obtained liberation and enlightenment oneself. Without that, one could not possibly establish other sentient beings in that state. Here again we need to reflect upon what liberation means. What does a state of liberation mean, and what does a state of enlightenment mean? At this point, we need to recall all of the explanations on liberation and enlightenment that we have studied. As soon as we hear the word *liberation* we need to immediately recall what that actually entails, and when we hear about *enlightenment* we need to recall what that actually means. We need to go beyond just hearing the words, and contemplate what they actually mean. This understanding, in itself, is said to be a means to purify a lot of negative karma and accumulate a lot of merit. We are aiming at an incredible goal, so whenever these words are mentioned, we need to recall our understanding of them.

As further presented in the commentary, *Not to mention all the qualities, if it is necessary to familiarise oneself for an ocean of eons even for one individual quality of the marks and signs.* The text *Precious Garland*, which we studied in the past, gave an extensive explanation of the marks and signs of the Buddha, obtaining each of which takes many eons of accumulation of merit. So each of the signs and marks of the Buddha has taken tremendous effort, and the accumulation of enormous merit over eons of time.

Yet *one has not started to even partially familiarise oneself with those qualities.* Despite the fact that obtaining just one mark of a buddha requires familiarising oneself with its causes and accumulating merit over many eons, the reality is that one has not yet even started to familiarise oneself, let alone exert oneself, even partially, to accumulate the merits needed to obtain these qualities.

Based on the promise that one has made, and the need to establish those qualities then *it is strange that I make meaningless my rebirth now with these freedoms and endowments for this and future lives.* Not only are we making this life meaningless, but we are also making our future life meaningless by wasting the precious human rebirth we have somehow found after such a long time. This is implying that it is like a miracle that we have obtained the condition of having the freedoms and endowments, and that wasting this very rare opportunity that we have found now is quite absurd.

This is an expression of despair implies that when the enlightened being, the Buddha, who we revere now as a supreme being, was a trainee, he used the opportunity provided by the freedoms and endowments to engage in practices to acquire qualities and abandon faults. Over many previous lifetimes, the Buddha as a trainee, and then as a bodhisattva, engaged in acquiring the causes and conditions leading to enlightenment, thus making his life highly meaningful. As we have the same freedoms and

endowments now, it would be a great pity and a loss if we were to waste it. So this statement is one of words of encouragement to exhort us to actually make the precious human rebirth we have now, with its freedoms and endowments, purposeful and meaningful, by putting it into use in acquiring the causes for obtaining those enlightened qualities.

2.2.1.2.1.3. *Analysing what one has done and what one has not done*

In this section we think about and analyse what virtues we have engaged in, and what we have not done. This is explained in these two verses:

37. *I did not make offerings to the tathagatas
Nor did I offer the happiness of great
celebrations.
I did not do anything for the teachings
And I did not meet the needs of the destitute.*
38. *I did not offer fearlessness to those in danger.
Nor did I give happiness to the wretched.
Hence, I have only given pain and suffering
While in the mother's womb.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je explains:

Previously I did not make offerings to the Three Jewels, such as the Bhagavan, Lord Buddha, nor did I offer the happiness of great celebrations that serve sentient beings and the Tathagata. I did nothing for the teachings since I did not practise accordingly to the presentation of the objects of abandonment that have to be abandoned, and antidotes that have to be adopted. I also did not accomplish the wishes of the sentient beings who are destitute. I did not offer protection to those in danger from enemies or sicknesses. I also did not offer satisfaction to those that are wretched due to suffering, and hence I have not practised the holy Dharma at all and have only caused pain and suffering while being in the mother's womb.

As the commentary explains, *previously I did not make offerings to the Three Jewels, such as the Bhagavan Lord Buddha.* Here, making offerings to the Buddha includes direct offerings and indirect offerings. Direct offerings are those actually made by oneself, rather than having someone else do it. It is said that one gains more merit by presenting the offering oneself, rather than asking someone else to present it. In the monastery, sponsors making offerings to the Sangha, such as money, attempt to physically make the offering themselves. I recall one ex-abbot of Sera Monastery, who, even though he was very old, would go and make his offering to each monk personally, despite his feeble state.

Then the commentary explains that, *nor did I offer the happiness of great celebrations that serve sentient beings and the Tathagata.* Here, *not offering the happiness of celebrations* refers to not making offerings to others, not just Sangha but also enlightened beings and other sentient beings. This implies, of course, that making offerings to the buddhas and sentient beings is a very meritorious practice. For example, on the recent occasion of His Holiness' birthday, I suggested offering lunch to everyone because I thought that it would be a great way for you to accumulate merit.

Furthermore *I did nothing for the teachings* means that I have done nothing to propagate or practise the Dharma. Here we need to understand that the teachings are the Buddha's doctrine. Doing a service for the teachings means engaging in propagating the oral teachings such as the three baskets, and propagating the realisations. The Buddha's doctrine is

subsumed into these two categories: the transmission of oral teachings and the transmission of insights.

Doing service in relation to the oral teachings means that, having studied the three baskets, and gained an understanding of them, one then explains it to others. If one were to engage in that, then that would be doing **service to the Buddha's oral teachings**.

Doing **service for the transmission of insights** of the Buddha's teachings means engaging in the practice according to *the presentation of the objects of abandonment that have to be abandoned, and the antidotes that have to be adopted*. In order to gain the realisations of the Buddha's doctrine one needs to apply the practice of abandoning the faults to be abandoned, and adopting qualities that one has to adopt. If one has failed to either propagate the Buddha's oral teachings, or made no effort to gain the realisations of the Buddha's doctrine, then one has not done service to the Buddha's doctrine.

One also needs to understand that this presentation is meant to encourage one to actually engage in the practice, and, if one has not engaged in these practices extensively, to more actively adopt them. Next the commentary states, *I also did not accomplish the wishes of the sentient beings who are destitute*. This relates to beings who are really impoverished being very poor and lacking the basic necessities. Offering such beings any kind of assistance such as food or clothing would make them feel a bit more comfortable, and so it is a really beneficial and virtuous practice. So this part of the commentary is referring to the practices that involve providing immediate care for those in need, to whatever extent one can. When we come across people who are destitute, it is extremely good to offer them help.

Furthermore, *I did not offer protection to those in danger from enemies or sicknesses*, this refers to the practice of helping those who are in danger. You will recall that one of the practices of generosity is giving fearlessness to those who are in fear of losing their life. One engages in this practice when one extends help to those whose life is in immediate danger.

This also applies to animals. For example, there are those who engage in the practice of buying animals that are about to be slaughtered—liberating an animal from the fear of death is an incredibly meaningful practice. As I have mentioned previously, when you are walking around the park for example, and you see an insect struggling in the water and about to drown, it is very easy to lift it out and put it onto dry land. That is said to be an incredible act of generosity, which is of great benefit to that particular insect. The commentary reminds us, if one has not engaged in these practices then one should reprimand oneself saying, 'I have not engaged in this practice of offering protection'.

With respect to, *I did not offer satisfaction to those who are wretched due to suffering*, some commentaries explain that this point also refers to the generosity of giving the Dharma. Here, *wretched* indicates experiencing suffering as a result of lacking the knowledge of how the Dharma prevents one from creating the causes of suffering. If one has not engaged in sharing one's understanding of the Dharma with such people, then one has not engaged in this practice. Conversely, practising giving the Dharma is very meaningful and beneficial. *I also did not offer satisfaction to those that are wretched due to suffering*, also means not showing that which has to be adopted and how to discard or abandon that which has to be abandoned. The implication is that when one engages in doing that then it is a very meritorious

way of creating the causes for the achievement of enlightenment.

Hence I have not practised the holy Dharma at all. The Tibetan word *dampa*, which is translated here as *holy Dharma* can also refer to the actions of holy beings who are perpetually engaged in virtue and abandoning negativities. Thus practising the holy Dharma refers to engaging in the practices of adopting virtue and shunning all non-virtues.

Of course what is being presented here is that one may have engaged in the practices to a certain extent, but if one has not utilised one's full capacity to engage in these practices then it is as if the *only* purpose in taking rebirth is to *cause pain and suffering while being in the mother's womb*. This is a reference to the suffering experienced by the mother (and the child) as she gives birth. If one has not engaged in any purposeful way to make one's life meaningful, then it is as if one has been reborn just to cause suffering to the mother. So this is another way of exhorting us to actually engage in meaningful and purposeful practices.

Then the commentary concludes with, *not having done anything for others* one feels *regret*.

We can finish here for the evening.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

༄༅། །བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བརྟུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

28 July 2015

While maintaining the motivation generated during the prayers, we can now engage in our meditation practice. *[meditation]*

As usual, let us generate a positive motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the Mahayana teachings and put them into practice well.

As mentioned last week, the *tong-len* practice we meditate on is the very core of Mahayana practice, so the more we familiarise ourselves with it the more it reveals to us the whole purpose of listening to the teachings and practising them.

As mentioned previously, in the seven-step cause and effect sequence of developing bodhicitta, the immediate state of mind preceding bodhicitta is called superior intention. This is the mind where one personally takes complete responsibility to free all beings from all suffering, and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness. Having developed this strong personal commitment, one looks deeper into whether one has the ability to do so right now, and realises one does not, but the Buddha does. So one sees that achieving enlightenment is paramount to fulfilling this key purpose. This becomes the immediate cause for developing bodhicitta, which is an essential point to recognise. Once one has developed bodhicitta, the actions that follow are the practises of a bodhisattva.

In relation to the technique of equalising and exchanging oneself with others, while superior intention is not explicitly mentioned, it is implicitly included in the practice. In understanding how the *tong-len* practice works, where one voluntarily takes upon the suffering of all sentient beings and gives one's happiness to them, one sees that it involves taking personal responsibility. Thus the superior intention is definitely included in the technique. Prior to developing superior intention one needs to first develop great love and great compassion, where one has the spontaneous strong wish that all beings be endowed in happiness, and be free from all suffering.

When one develops superior intention it is no longer a mere wish, rather it is an actual commitment to take on that as a personal responsibility. With that understanding, engaging in the *tong-len* practice provides a supreme method for one to free beings from suffering by taking their suffering upon oneself, and place them in happiness by giving one's own happiness to them. Hence the *tong-len* practice is putting the superior intention into practice.

Engaging in regular *tong-len* meditation and incorporating it into our daily lives is a highly meaningful core practice, and it is of paramount importance in the development of love and compassion in our hearts.

As much as we can, we should familiarise our mind with love and compassion as these are the most essential qualities one can develop. The reason we need to take it more seriously and use our time now to regularly acquaint ourselves with love and compassion, is because day by day we are getting closer and closer to the end of our life. If we ensure that we familiarise ourselves with love and compassion then, at the same time as we get closer to the end of this life, we'll also be getting closer to having a good rebirth.

It is essential to act now, while one has the opportunity, because if one doesn't seize this opportunity it is like losing a precious jewel. If we had a precious jewel and we were to lose it before we got a chance to use it, we'd consider that a great loss. The cultivation of love and compassion is like a precious jewel: we have it as a potential within us right now and it is up to us to actually use it by further developing it.

In the refuge teachings, we can understand why the actual refuge within the three jewels is the Dharma jewel. That is because the Dharma jewel is the actual means to protect one from an unfortunate rebirth in the next life, as well as all other fears and sufferings. The very essence of Dharma is none other than the cultivation of love and compassion. Therefore, the more we develop love and compassion, the closer we get to a higher rebirth in our next life, and thus closer to attaining enlightenment.

If one wonders whether one is getting closer to enlightenment or not, observe whether love and compassion is developing in one's heart. When one finds that love and compassion is developing more and more strongly in one's heart, then there's no doubt that one is getting closer and closer to enlightenment. Love and compassion are the basis for developing bodhicitta, and as we develop bodhicitta we are getting closer to enlightenment.

I'm sharing this advice as an essential practice. Just knowing about Dharma topics is not sufficient; one needs to engage in practise. A mere intellectual understanding of the Dharma doesn't seem to move one's mind. But by putting it into practise, meditating and familiarising ourselves with the feeling of love and compassion in our hearts again and again, one will actually begin to have the real taste of Dharma. As it moves our mind we will begin to see a real transformation taking place within ourselves.

If one gains more knowledge of the Dharma, if one doesn't put it into practise, then there is a danger that one generates more pride. We need to protect ourselves from this pitfall. The more we integrate the Dharma within our minds, the more it will overcome the delusions rather than strengthening them. When we put the Dharma into practise then it becomes the means to actually overcome pride, jealousy, anger, attachment and so forth. Every piece of advice the Buddha gave in all his teachings serves as antidotes for overcoming the delusions. When

we integrate the Dharma within our minds, and put it into practise, we will find that transformation does take place. While I don't claim to have any realisations myself, it is with a genuine belief in the Dharma that I present these points for consideration. I spend a lot of time thinking about these points myself and strongly feel that putting the Dharma into practise is a definite way to achieve positive effects. So with this intention in mind I share these points with you again and again.

2.2.1.2.1.1. The object of belief

2.2.1.2.1.1.3. *Analysing what one has done and what one has not (cont.)*

As mentioned in verse 38, which we covered in our last session, we need to ensure that our purpose is not merely to have caused suffering while in the mother's womb.

Again, the verses read:

37. *I did not make offerings to the tathagatas
Nor did I offer the happiness of great
celebrations.
I did not do anything for the teachings
And I did not meet the needs of the destitute.*
38. *I did not offer fearlessness to those in danger.
Nor did I give happiness to the wretched.
Hence, I have only given pain and suffering
While in the mother's womb.*

The verses indicate that if one has not put any effort into the practice of Dharma, then it is as if the only thing we've really done in our lives is bring suffering to our mother. They contain profound advice if we pay attention.

2.2.1.2.1.2. The result of belief

This section of the outline is divided into two:

2.2.1.2.1.2.1. It is unsuitable to give up the belief in the Dharma

2.2.1.2.1.2.2. The reason for this

Here we can reflect on how meticulously Gyalsab Rinpoche presents outlines to explain the meaning of the verses.

He presents that it is unsuitable to give up belief in the Dharma. Naturally, when it explains that one shouldn't give up the belief in the Dharma, one may wonder what the reason may be. So, the next verses provide the reason for not giving up belief in the Dharma.

If belief is important then what are its causes? That is presented next and the sequence itself is very profound.

2.2.1.2.1.2.1. *It is unsuitable to give up the belief in the Dharma*

The verse reads:

39. *Through being separated from belief in Dharma,
Previously and in the present,
I have received this destitution.
Who would give up the wish for the Dharma?*

The commentary explains:

Through having been separated from belief in the holy Dharma, both by way of ascertaining and faith¹,

in the present and in the past, I am experiencing the destitution of being held by the degenerations of cyclic existence. Who that is proficient would give up the belief for the Dharma? Those that wish to be liberated from degeneration should generate belief for the Dharma.

The commentary first presents the shortcomings of not believing in the Dharma, *Through having been separated from belief in the holy Dharma, both by way of ascertaining and faith*, i.e. by lacking ascertainment and faith in the Dharma, *in the present and in the past*, as the result of that what one is *experiencing* now is the *destitution* - the state of *being held by the degenerations* or the sufferings of *cyclic existence*. This essentially points out that the various types of suffering and turmoil one is now experiencing physically and mentally are due to a lack of belief in the Dharma. When one lacks belief in the Dharma, the aspiration to practise Dharma will not arise, therefore aspiration is very much related to belief or faith in the Dharma. So when one has faith then the aspiration to incorporate it and practise it will arise. What is being presented here is that one's present destitute situation in cyclic existence is the result of a lack of faith in the Dharma in the past.

The commentary continues, *who that is proficient would give up the belief for the Dharma?* Those who are proficient refers to those with a profound understanding of the law of cause and effect i.e. karma. The rhetorical question implies that when one has a deep understanding of karma, and an analytical wisdom knowing the cause and effect sequence of karma, then such a skilled, proficient person would not give up a belief in Dharma, as they would value it.

The commentary continues with, *those that wish to be liberated from degeneration*, and here *degeneration* refers to a state of perpetual suffering in cyclic existence. The conclusion is that those wishing to be liberated from that state *should generate belief for the Dharma*.

Gyalsab Rinpoche himself presents a concluding remark on the meaning of the verse: *those that wish to be liberated from degeneration, should definitely generate belief in the Dharma*, because no-one wants to experience these sufferings of cyclic existence. Understanding what causes the sufferings of cyclic existence helps to free one from them. That is the Dharma. Understanding this, one would definitely generate belief in the Dharma.

2.2.1.2.1.2.2. *The reason for this*

The outline next provides the reason for not giving up the belief in the Dharma.

The first two lines of the verse read:

40ab. *The Able One taught that the root
Of every class of virtue is belief.*

The commentary then explains:

The Able One taught that the root of every class of virtue is the belief that has trust in the virtuous objects the way they have been ascertained. It is taught like this in the *Sutra of the Moon Lamp*.

As presented here, *the Able One*, being Shakyamuni, has *taught that the root of every class of virtue is the belief that has trust in the virtuous objects*. Every class of virtue here refers to the virtues which serve as a cause to obtain high

¹ Belief of those of sharp-faculty and belief of those of dull-faculty. Although in Buddhism there is faith based on reason, here faith refers to faith without analysis.

status and definite goodness. High status refers to a rebirth in the higher realms in the next life, as well as the causes for definite goodness, which is liberation and enlightenment.

Every class of virtue subsumes all of the virtues, and the root of acquiring all virtues is the *belief that has trust in the virtuous objects*. Here, *the root*, means that without belief one cannot possibly ascertain virtuous objects, and so one would not aspire to engage in the virtues that are the cause for all the positive results. This also implies that the way virtuous objects have been ascertained brings about virtuous results, while negative causes bring about negative results. Ascertaining this understanding helps one engage in the virtues and actually accomplish those goals.

It explicitly says that the root (or basis) of every class of virtue is belief, which means that it is not the case that for some virtues you need to have belief as a basis while for others you don't. This means that all virtues, from the most basic up to the ultimate, are based on belief. The commentary mentions *the Sutra of the Moon Lamp* in which the Buddha states this.

2.2.1.2.1.3. The cause for belief

This is subdivided into two:

2.2.1.2.1.3.1. Showing the cause for belief

2.2.1.2.1.3.2. Explaining the cause of belief

2.2.1.2.1.3.1. Showing the cause for belief

What I explained earlier is presented in the next two lines of the verse.

The verse reads:

*40cd. Its root is continual meditation
On the ripening results.*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse as follows:

The root of belief in turn is to meditate on belief in the virtuous and non-virtuous karmas and their ripening results. If one has not ascertained karmic cause and effect well, then one has not found a realisation of the Dharma that will please the buddhas. Therefore one should strive in it.

The fact that some who say they have ascertained emptiness, but disregard karmic cause and effect, invalidates their understanding of emptiness.

Here the commentary specifically presents that *the root of belief in turn is to meditate* or to familiarise oneself with *belief in the virtuous and non-virtuous karmas and their ripening results*. The way to develop belief or faith is to meditate, and to familiarise oneself again and again with *the virtuous and non-virtuous karmas and their ripening results*. This means that the more one contemplates it, the more one develops a conviction in the cause and effect sequence of how non-virtuous actions (non-virtuous karma) definitely bring about unwanted results such as suffering, and that virtuous karmas definitely bring about happiness as their result.

The deeper one's conviction in this, the more inclined one would be to avoid non-virtuous actions (non-virtuous karma) as a way to prevent experiencing the effect of suffering, and the more inclined one will be to engage in virtues as a way to gain the results of happiness for

oneself. If one has a weak conviction about this fact, then one would not hesitate to create non-virtues and may not be keen on developing virtuous actions. Therefore the very root of belief is developing that conviction.

Gyalsab Rinpoche further emphasises this point when stating that *if one has not ascertained karmic cause and effect well, then one has not found a realisation of the Dharma, one has not actualised the Dharma that will please the buddhas. Therefore one should strive in it*. Here, the commentary specifically gives the advice that for as long as one has not developed a strong conviction on the karmic cause and effect sequence, then, no matter what understanding one may have gained, one has actually not actualised the Dharma in a way that would please the buddhas.

The core advice of the Buddha's teachings, its very basis, is to avoid harming other sentient beings, and on top of that, to engage in ways to benefit and help other beings. On that basis one then goes for refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. So the core of the Buddha's teachings is non-harmfulness or non-violence towards other beings.

Without a conviction in the cause and effect of karma, there is nothing to stop one from engaging in harmful actions that actually harm sentient beings. Then, if one harms sentient beings, there is no way one can please the buddhas because the sentient beings are the very object which the buddhas hold most dear. So when we harm sentient beings we will naturally be displeasing the buddhas by going against their advice. Therefore the more one abides by the law of karma and refrains from engaging in non-virtuous deeds that harm other beings, the more we engage in practices that please the buddhas. Hence, the commentary emphasises, *one should strive in it*.

To be considered a Buddhist practitioner, the basic practice is observing morality. In this sense morality refers to specific practices which refrain from harming other sentient beings. Then, based on practising morality, one engages in further practices that are presented in the teachings. As such, the morality of refraining from harming other beings is the very basis of Buddhism, so if one is practising that one can safely assume that one is a practising Buddhist. We need to understand that the essence of the Buddha's teaching is based on morality, and that all of the other practices ensue from that.

Gyalsab Je further mentions, *the fact that some who say they have ascertained emptiness, but disregard karmic cause and effect, invalidates their understanding of emptiness*, which is a point we touched on earlier. The danger here is that without a correct understanding of emptiness one may easily misinterpret emptiness to mean that nothing exists, and therefore karmic cause and effect also doesn't exist. One could easily come to this wrong conclusion and then think one could do anything one wishes, as cause and effect doesn't apply to oneself. However, when one gains the correct understanding of emptiness it should in fact validate and strengthen one's understanding of the cause and effect of karma. This should be the case, as understanding emptiness involves understanding that things are empty of inherent existence i.e. that things are empty of existing independently, and thus of not relying on any causes and conditions. When that is ascertained,

one understands that everything arises in dependence on its causes and conditions i.e. dependent arising.

When things are presented as being empty, if one does not understand that this means being empty of inherent existence, one falls short of the real meaning of emptiness and faces the danger of negating actual existence, and thus holding a wrong view of karma by thinking that cause and effect does not apply. When one understands that emptiness means things are empty of independent existence, then that actually establishes that they exist interdependently. I've explained this point before with the passage from the *Heart Sutra* that says, *form is empty, emptiness is form*, which is exactly the point made here. When one understands how form is empty of inherent existence then that understanding validates what emptiness is. This phrase explains how all existence, forms, and all other phenomena, are actually manifestations of emptiness. Because form is empty of inherent existence it is possible to establish form conventionally; if form were to exist inherently then it would not be possible for form to function on a conventional level. To restate the point, because form is empty of inherent existence it is possible for form to function and exist as form. Thus, form and all other phenomena arise as manifestations of emptiness.

I've explained these points in detail in previous teachings. So whenever there's mention of emptiness you need to incorporate those explanations to reinforce the proper understanding. In this way you will be able to periodically bring the correct understating of emptiness to mind, and familiarising yourselves with it again and again. Every moment we think about the meaning of emptiness, and apply that understanding in our practice, it becomes a powerful means to gain an incredible amount of merit as it is a highly virtuous activity. At the same time it also becomes the most powerful means to purify extensive negative karmas, by removing subtle imprints of misconceptions. And at the same time it also implants very positive imprints in our mind.

So, when thinking simply about how form is empty, and incorporating that understanding right away, you will come to see that it doesn't mean that form does not exist, rather that it doesn't exist inherently and independently. While it does *not* exist inherently and independently, it does exist, but there is no other way for it to exist either than by depending on causes and conditions. When that understanding develops in our mind we are moving in the right direction towards gaining the unmistakable and correct understanding of emptiness.

2.2.1.2.1.3.2. Explaining the cause of belief

This is subdivided into three:

2.2.1.2.1.3.2.1. Contemplating mixed karmic cause and effect

2.2.1.2.1.3.2.2. Contemplating singular white karmic cause and effect

2.2.1.2.1.3.2.3. Contemplating black karmic cause and effect

This heading presents the various types of karmas as the cause for belief. The first, *mixed karmic cause and effect*, implies there are certain karmas that we create which are not entirely virtuous or not entirely non-virtuous, but a

mixture of both. Then there is *singular white karmic cause and effect*, meaning that certain karmas are completely virtuous and thus their effect is also completely virtuous. Then contemplating the black karma is where the karma in its entirety is negative.

2.2.1.2.1.3.2.1. Contemplating mixed karmic cause and effect

Contemplating and understanding this is a very practical way for one to get a good understanding of the basis of the Dharma. So it is very relevant to us.

The verse reads:

41. *Sufferings and mental unhappiness,
The many different horrors,
And being separated from one's wishes
Arise from negative behaviour.*

The commentary reads as follows:

Because the physical sufferings of migrators, their mental feelings of unhappiness, the different horrors of human and non-human existences and separation from the objects of one's wishes such as friends, relatives, wealth and so forth all arise from the cause of negative behaviour, one should strive in abandoning negativity.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the sufferings of certain migrators, even in the human realms. *The physical sufferings of migrators* as well as *their mental feelings of unhappiness*, plus *the different horrors of human and non-human existences*, refers to the harms we may experience from other human or non-human existences. Furthermore, there's suffering arising from *separation from the objects of one's wishes such as friends, relatives, wealth and so forth*. All of the experiences we have, even with good conditions as a human, *arise from negative behaviour* and negative actions. Understanding this one should resolve to *strive in abandoning negativity*.

To understand this on a personal level, recognise that whenever we experience a mishap, it is not others who have caused us this mishap. We are experiencing the results of our own negative karma. Practising the opposite of this creates the opposite effect, which is presented in the next two verses where the *singular karmic cause and effect* is explained.

The next two verses read:

42. *By creating the virtue intended in one's mind,
Wherever one migrates to
There one will, through these merits,
Be honoured by the resulting qualities.*
43. *Although those creating negativity wish for
happiness
Wherever they migrate to,
There they will, through this negativity,
Be destroyed by the weapons of suffering.*

The commentary explains the meaning of these verses whose essence I have explained already:

Having created the virtue one intended to do in one's mind, motivated by the mind of abandoning, whichever birthplace one then migrates to, there one will, through these merits, be honoured by the resulting qualities of the ripening result.

The effects however do not follow merely the wish for happiness or suffering. Although the person acting non-virtuously wishes for happiness, by nature, wherever they migrate to, there they will,

through that negativity, be destroyed by the weapons of suffering. Therefore one should strive in abandoning negativity. The qualities of the result are the mode of the nature of the result.

It says that, *having created the virtue one intended to do in one's mind, motivated by the mind of abandoning as a result, whichever birthplace one then migrates to, there one will, through these merits, be honoured by the resulting qualities of the ripening result.* This explains that when one's mind is motivated with the intention of abandoning negativity, it creates virtue, which then becomes the ripened result experienced in whatever place to which one migrates. Wherever one may happen to be reborn, the merits will ripen in that place.

On the point that, *whichever birthplace one then migrates to, there one will, through these merits, be honoured by the resulting qualities of the ripening result,* the commentary specifically explains the infallibility of karma. In other words, if one has created virtues, then that virtuous result will definitely be experienced wherever one may take rebirth.

This also holds true for the non-virtuous karmas one has created. For example, while being reborn in an unfortunate realm such as an animal, which is a result of a previous negative karma, some good conditions can be experienced. We know some pets are very well fed and well groomed with a seemingly nice, free life and fully taken care of. These good conditions are the result of positive karma, created previously by that being. So even if one is reborn in an unfortunate rebirth, one still carries the positive imprints of previously-created good karma.

In contrast, a being might have a higher rebirth such as in the human realm, but the conditions are very poor. The means for basic survival are scarce, and many hardships, difficulties and sufferings are experienced. This is an example of how, while a previous good karma brings them into a good rebirth, what they then experience as bad conditions are the results of previously created negative karma. This again shows the infallibility of karma; even when one is born in a good migration, in a higher rebirth, the ripening results of previously-created negative karma catch up with oneself.

Many examples are presented in the Lam Rim, specifically where the causal karma can be virtuous, but the completing karma can be negative. The main point is that the results of karma will definitely be experienced. When one creates a positive karma, positive effects will definitely be experienced wherever one takes rebirth. And if one has created negative karmas, those will definitely ripen in whatever rebirth one may take.

The second verse says that *the effects however do not follow merely the wish for happiness or suffering.* I regularly emphasise this point. If one wishes to be happy, one cannot just sit around and think that happiness will somehow come by some day. One actually has to create the causes to be happy. Even when wanting to achieve certain worldly goals, we need to actually exert ourselves to create the conditions to achieve that goal. Likewise if one doesn't wish to experience problems, just sitting around and wishing for them to go away won't work, we actually have to engage in specific causes to remove those conditions.

The commentary further explains, *although the person acting non-virtuously wishes for happiness, by nature, wherever they migrate to, there they will, through that negativity, be destroyed by the weapons of suffering.*

The text went into quite a bit of detail about that previously. There's no-one who wouldn't wish to be happy, and there's no-one who would wish to experience suffering. But while wishing for happiness, many destroy the causes for their happiness. And while not wishing for suffering, they actually unintentionally create the causes for suffering. The problem is ignorance—not knowing how to apply the causes for happiness and how to avoid the causes that lead one to experience the unwanted suffering results. An earlier verse mentions that whilst wishing to not experience any kind of suffering, migrators run to the very cause of suffering. And whilst wishing to experience happiness they destroy their own causes for happiness. The point is that there's no-one who doesn't wish for happiness, but if one destroys the very causes of one's happiness one cannot achieve that state of happiness. Similarly, while one does not wish any kind of suffering, if one actually creates the causes for it, even if one does not wish for it, sufferings will fall on oneself.

2.2.1.2.1.3.2.2. Contemplating singular white karmic cause and effect

This explains actions that are entirely white or virtuous karma. The verse is preceded by the statement:

Through having meditated on virtuous dharmas the children of the conquerors take rebirth in the Land of Great Bliss and the like.

This means that having familiarised oneself with virtuous dharmas, the children of the conquerors (the bodhisattvas), *actually take rebirth in the Land of Great Bliss and the like.*

The verse reads:

44. *In the centre of an expansive fragrant fresh lotus flower
Splendour is born from the nourishing melodious teachings of the conqueror
Possessing a supreme body born from a lotus unfolded by the Able One's luminosity,
Abiding before the conquerors, they become the Tathagata's children by virtue.*

The commentary explains:

They abide in the centre of a lotus that is the characteristic of birthplace, a beautiful, fresh, vast and expansive fragrant lotus that generates bliss just by touching it.

Instead of living off worldly foods they listen to the more distinguished melodious teachings of the Buddha that possess the sixty qualities of enlightened speech and generate splendour and complexion through the food of the realisation of its subject, emptiness.

To arise from a lotus opened and unfolded by the luminosity of the Able One, the Tathagata, is the characteristic of birth. They possess the characteristic of body, a supreme body with the marks and signs. As the characteristic of teacher, they abide in front of Amitabha Buddha and the like and are carried by their dharmas.

By way of these characteristics the children of the tathagatas come about solely through white virtuous karma.

The first part of the commentary examines the characteristic of their birthplace which is, *they abide in the centre of a lotus that is the characteristic of birthplace, a beautiful, fresh, vast and expansive fragrant lotus that generates bliss just by touching it.* This is a description of the miraculous birth of a bodhisattva in the pure lands, born from a lotus with very pleasant conditions.

Next it presents the characteristics that nourish bodhisattvas in the pure lands, *instead of living off worldly foods, like the gross kinds of foods that we consume, they listen to the more distinguished melodious teachings of the Buddha that possess the sixty qualities of enlightened speech.* Their time is spent listening to the teachings of the Buddhas and then they *generate splendour and complexion through the food of the realisation of its subject, emptiness.* What nourishes the bodhisattvas' bodies in the pure lands is the splendour they generate, and their complexion is nourished with the food of the realisation of emptiness, which is the subject of those teachings.

The characteristic of the birth itself is, *to arise from a lotus opened and unfolded by the luminosity of the Able One, the luminosity or the light rays of the Able One (Buddha) the Tathagata, is the characteristic of birth.* Initially the lotus bud is closed, then the light rays that come forth from the buddhas serve as a condition for it to open, and it is within that lotus that a bodhisattva takes birth. The characteristic of the body is that, *they possess the characteristic of body, a supreme body with the marks and signs.*

As the characteristic of teacher, they abide in front of Amitabha Buddha and are carried (meaning transformed or further developed by) the dharmas of the buddhas such as *Amitabha Buddha* and other buddhas. What is being explained here is that they have actual buddhas such as *Amitabha Buddha* and others, giving direct teachings to them in their actual forms. They have the merit to be able to see the buddhas and receive teachings directly, so their mind develops rapidly.

The commentary concludes that, *by way of these characteristics,* which are the five characteristics just mentioned:

1. the characteristic of the birthplace;
2. the characteristic of the nourishment or food;
3. the characteristic of the actual birth;
4. the characteristic of the physical body; and
5. the characteristic of teacher

... the children of the tathagatas, (the bodhisattvas), come about solely through white virtuous karma. So these characteristics with which the bodhisattvas are endowed in the pure lands, *come about solely through white virtuous karma,* meaning they are completely the results of white virtuous karma.

We can reflect upon how wondrous and pleasant that sounds: the very birth is pleasant, no suffering is involved, just being born miraculously from a lotus, with the lotus opened by the light of the buddhas. The body is not a gross body, but a very pure body, which is not nourished by gross food, but rather by the realisations of

the teachings themselves. Then they have the marks and signs on their bodies, and receive teachings directly from the buddhas. This is a wondrous thing we can aspire to, which is why it is appropriate to make aspirations to be born in the blissful pure lands. There are many who take Amitabha as their main practice, and make strong prayers to be born in the pure lands. This is a significant point.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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Edited Version

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

4 August 2015

The prayers that we have just recited encompass both the Mahayana refuge and bodhicitta, which suffices for the altruistic Mahayana motivation. With this motivation intact we can now engage in our meditation practice.

In accordance with the sequence of the practice, we first take refuge and then generate bodhicitta. When taking refuge is combined with the bodhicitta motivation, such as 'I go for refuge for the sake of all mother sentient beings in order to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness', or 'I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and engage in practices so that I obtain Buddhahood', then this is called generating *exceptional refuge*.

Now we can begin our meditation practice. *[meditation]*

It is good to generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings, in order to liberate them from all suffering, and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings, and put them into practise well.

2.2.1.2.1. The power of belief

2.2.1.2.1.3. The cause for belief

2.2.1.2.1.3.2. Explaining the cause of belief (cont.)

2.2.1.2.1.3.2.3. Contemplating black karmic cause and effect

This is presented in the following verse:

45. *Extremely tormented as one is fully skinned by the minions of Yama
Copper molten by extreme heat is poured onto one's body,
Pierced by flaming swords and daggers the flesh is carved up in hundreds of pieces,
Fallen on the blazing iron ground, comes about due to the many non-virtuous karmas.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Due to the karma of killing and so forth, one will be extremely tormented by suffering as all one's skin is being pulled off by the minions of the lord of death. The characteristic of engagement, which is that copper, molten by extreme heat is poured over one's body, is difficult to bear. Not only this, but one will be pierced by flaming swords and daggers and one's flesh will be carved up into many hundreds of pieces.

The experience of being tormented by the characteristic of place, which means that one falls onto the blazing iron grounds, comes about through the many non-virtuous karmas such as the karmas of immediate retribution, the karma of abandoning Dharma and the like.

We have already covered some of the types of sufferings that are explained here. The main point is that these sufferings are experienced in the realms into which one is reborn, and

that they are the result of the negative karma that one has previously created. As presented here, we need to pay attention to the karmas of immediate retribution, also known as heinous crimes, the karma of abandoning the Dharma and so forth. It is really worthwhile to pay attention to abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions, for one will then naturally avoid engaging in many misdeeds. For example, three of the five karmas of immediate retribution i.e. killing one's mother, killing one's father and killing an arhat, are all included in the misdeed of killing. So when one makes the commitment to refrain from killing, one is naturally protected from creating these extremely heavy negative karmas.

Indeed, contemplating abandoning the ten non-virtuous karmas is a high level of practice. In order to abandon the ten non-virtuous karmas you need to practise the ten white karmas, or the ten virtuous actions. Just as there are negative consequences from committing the non-virtuous karmas, as has just been explained, one will experience positive effects from observing the ten virtuous karmas. This is explained in great detail in the teachings.

When we make the commitment to avoid the ten non-virtuous karmas then that forms the basis for practicing morality. It is explained in the teachings that when one makes an active commitment to avoid the ten non-virtuous actions, then that serves as the basis for one to take the self-liberation, bodhisattva and tantric vows. It also serves as the basis for keeping the commitments of these vows. So practising the ten non-virtuous actions is the basis for observing all of the commitments that one may have.

As explained earlier, if one doesn't observe the karmic law of cause and effect, and abide in its practice, then one is not able to please the buddhas. This emphasises the essentiality of abandoning the ten non-virtues, and adopting the ten virtues.

2.2.1.2.1.4. Concluding summary

*46ab. Therefore one should practise belief in virtue
And meditate on it with great respect.*

The commentary reads:

Therefore, having contemplated the way of karmic cause and effect, one should practise belief in virtue and meditate on it with great respect by way of having conviction.

Having extensively identified the virtues and the non-virtues, and the effects of their white karma and negative karma respectively, one then puts that understanding into practice. By meditating on and familiarising oneself with virtue one understands that the positive effect of virtue is something that one wishes for, and so one engages in virtue. Likewise, by realising that one does not wish to experience the effects of negative karma, or non-virtue, one takes the initiative and makes a strong determination to avoid non-virtue.

We find that whenever we put some effort and energy into accumulating virtues we develop a strong sense of joy. So we rejoice in having accumulated virtue, and compliment ourselves: 'It is incredibly fortunate that I have had opportunity to engage in this virtue today'. Rejoicing in the virtue that one has accumulated actually increases the positive effects of that virtue. Thus, rejoicing in virtue is the optimum means to increase the positive effects of one's virtue.

Of course, we may try our best to avoid creating negative karma. However, due to strong habituation with the

delusions in our mind we might find that we still engage in some non-virtuous actions. But by contemplating and acknowledging the consequences of those negative deeds, we can develop regret, thinking, 'It has been unfortunate that I have engaged in such negativities'.

It is essential to acknowledge the effects of positive karma and negative karma. When one experiences pleasant situations and good things happening in one's life, then one can immediately rejoice and think, 'These are the positive effects of my previous karma'. When one experiences difficulties and unwanted suffering in life, one can immediately reflect, 'These are none other than the effects of my own doing, the negative karma that I have created in the past'. One understands that whatever one experiences, whether it is positive or negative, is the result of one's own karma. There is no other cause of suffering and misery than one's own negative karma. In this way, one takes the initiative to immediately relate whatever one experiences as effects of karma that one had created in the past.

That then generates the initiative to avoid creating more negativity, and to develop strong regret (which is said to be the most powerful of the four opponent powers) and engage in purification practices for negativity that one has already created. With this awareness in mind, one will then be able to lead a life abiding in karma. When one takes the initiative to develop this keen awareness of karma, one will take every opportunity to accumulate virtue, and to avoid engaging in negativity. If, and when, one finds oneself engaging in negativity, one will immediately be able to develop regret and purify it.

When one puts this into practice on a daily basis, then at the end of each day, as one reflects on the actions created during the day, when one finds that one has accumulated more virtue, that then becomes a great source of joy and one rejoices in one's good deeds. If one finds that one has created more negativity, then one develops strong regret, engages in some form of purification practice, and finally makes a commitment to avoid engaging in that negativity again.

When we take the initiative to integrate the Dharma into our mind, then eventually that becomes a positive habit, and we become inclined to engage in virtue. We will find that our mind spontaneously and joyfully wishes to engage in virtue. When that takes place, then that is the positive outcome of contemplating karma. While it is important for us to know the categories and divisions of karma, that in itself will not benefit one. We will only benefit from that understanding and knowledge when we actually put it into practice.

When we engage in a daily practice like this, contemplating the karmic cause and effect in detail, engaging in virtue, and avoiding or purifying negative karmas, then we become more and more acquainted with engaging in virtuous deeds, and less and less inclined to engage in negativity. When that transformation takes place, one naturally and spontaneously wants to engage in virtuous deeds, and naturally wants to avoid negative deeds. That is the hallmark that our practice of karma has taken effect. You might already have a belief in karma, but it is only by abiding in karma, which means putting it into practice, that we reap positive results from that belief.

When the commentary states *one should practise belief in faith and virtue, and meditate on it with great respect by way of having conviction* it is explaining that when one has developed a conviction in karma based on a profound understanding of it, then one will be able to engage in developing familiarity with virtue. By developing a strong conviction in the

importance of virtue, one will naturally be inclined to adopt virtue as one's practice, while at the same time abandoning negativities.

That will enable us to confidently face the next life. When we reach the time when we have to discard this body and go on to the next life, there will be no hesitation. That is because we will have the conviction that having engaged in virtue, we have created the causes to obtain all the good conditions necessary to continue to practise Dharma in the next life. In fact, when one reaches a significant age, or if one's body is really weakened due to some disease, then one will be quite glad to leave this old and weak body behind, and get a fresh new body, with all the good conditions intact. With that conviction there will be no hesitation about the prospect of death and going onto the next life, instead there will be joy. These are the practical and positive effects of having belief in, and abiding in karma.

If there is strong regret at the time of death, then the mind will be quite disturbed and it won't be a very pleasant death. Apparently, all the negativities and non-virtuous actions that one has committed in one's life come vividly to mind, bringing real remorse and regret at that time. That brings a mind of fear, sadness and anxiety at the prospect of facing death. In contrast, if one has a virtuous mind, and thus a joyful state of mind, then the death will be a positive experience which will then establish the immediate conditions for a good existence in the future life. This, in fact, seems to be one practical benefit of practising the Dharma. It is this immediately practical, personal goal that gives us the impetus to practise Dharma.

As the Lam Rim teachings explain, the state of mind at the time of death will be the one with which one is most familiar. If one has strong familiarity with virtue, then it will be a virtuous state of mind that will naturally arise. If one has a strong familiarity with non-virtue, then the state of mind at the time of death will most likely be a non-virtuous mind. As the Lam Rim further explains, if one has virtue and non-virtue in equal strength, then whatever one is engaged in first will arise as the prominent state of mind. So Lama Tsong Khapa is presenting us with some very significant and crucial points as a means to encourage us to actually engage in the practice of Dharma by abiding in the law of karma and so forth.

2.2.1.2.2. The power of stability

This has two subdivisions:

2.2.1.2.2.1. Striving steadfastly

2.2.1.2.2.2. Abiding steadfastly after having started

2.2.1.2.2.1. Striving steadfastly

This has two further subdivisions:

2.2.1.2.2.1.1. Starting upon having investigated well

2.2.1.2.2.1.2. The fault of giving up after having started

Here we can see how the outlines themselves present the material of the text in a very systematic, logical way. Not only that, but they are also, in themselves, instructions on how to engage properly in the practices and so forth. As presented here, one needs to have a strong commitment to do what one wants to do, and then develop a strong commitment to complete what one has started.

Starting upon having investigated well is a really crucial instruction. Before one engages in an activity one needs to first investigate what the benefits are and so forth. Then, having completed that thorough investigation, one will not create *the fault of giving up after having started*.

2.2.1.2.2.1.1. Starting upon having investigated well

The first two lines of verse related to this heading read:

*46cd. Having started through the ritual of
Vajradhvaja
One should meditate on pride.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The sixth dedication of the *Arya Vajradhvaja Sutra* says:

Lha'ibu, just as the rising sun, without being stopped by blindness or uneven mountains, illuminates the objects that are suitable, bodhisattvas who arise for the purpose of others, ripen and liberate those suitable to be subdued, without being stopped by the various faults of sentient beings.

The citation from this ritual explains that having started a virtuous action, one should meditate on the pride of bringing it to completion.

First there is the citation from the sixth chapter of the *Arya Vajradhvaja Sutra*, which is the dedication: *Lha'ibu*, (son of the gods) *just as the rising sun, without being stopped by blindness or uneven mountains, illuminates the objects that are suitable...*

The analogy presented here is that when the sun rises there is nothing that stops the sun's rays from illuminating earth—it illuminates the whole surface. Uneven mountains and so forth are not obstacles for the sun's rays to reach earth, likewise blindness doesn't prevent the light of the sun from illuminating the ground.

Similarly, *bodhisattvas who arise for the purpose of others, ripen and liberate those suitable to be subdued, without being stopped by the various faults of sentient beings.* As explained here, when bodhisattvas resolve to help sentient beings, those who are suitable to be subdued will naturally be subdued, and the faults and negativities of other sentient beings will not be an obstacle for bodhisattvas to continuously benefit them.

We can relate this to ourselves. We might be helping someone for a while but then start complaining, 'Oh, they get upset very easily', or 'They don't really appreciate what I do for them', and in this manner we find many reasons not to continue helping them. So the faults of the person we are helping become an obstacle for us to actually benefit them. The main point being explained with this citation is that once a bodhisattva resolves to benefit sentient beings, they will not give up that commitment, even the faults and negativities of sentient beings are not an obstacle to their commitment to benefit sentient beings.

Having cited the sutra, the commentary goes on to explain, *The citation from this ritual explains that having started a virtuous action, one should meditate on the pride of bringing it to completion.* If one starts a virtuous action, one continues with that action until it comes to completion, and does not give up part way through.

Both the root verse and the commentary state that *one should meditate on pride.* In this context pride should be understood as a mind of great strength, courage and self-confidence. This form of pride is not deluded pride.

The next verse under this heading is:

*47. One should first investigate the action
And then start or not start.
To not start is supreme
But having started one should not stop.*

The commentary on this verse explains:

Before engaging in an action one needs to analyse with one's mind whether or not one has the capacity for this action. If one is able, then one starts the action; if one is not able, then one does not. To not start the action is supreme, but once one has started then one should not stop until it is completed.

As the commentary clearly explains, *Before engaging in an action one needs to analyse with one's mind whether or not one has the capacity for this action.* Here, *capacity* can refer to internal capacity as well as external capacity. Internal capacity means investigating whether one has the inner strength or commitment to be able to see the action through and so forth, and as well as seeing the benefits of that action. External capacity relates to external means and conditions.

Although this advice is explicitly related to virtuous actions and engaging in bodhisattva's deeds, it is, as I regularly emphasise, also crucial advice for everyday life. Whatever the situation, whether it be study or work, and whatever the activity, we need to first investigate to see whether we have the ability to complete that task.

Sometimes we might understate our abilities, and sometimes we might be over-zealous, so we need to really look into our own situation. This is really profound advice. We need to use our wisdom and intelligence lest we fall victim to being wrongly influenced or manipulated by others. If we are too gullible, we can be deceived or misled by others, even if they have the best intentions. If someone says, 'You should do it like this' and we don't really think much about it and say, 'OK, I will do as you say', then we might find later that we have taken on much more than we can manage.

Also, before making a promise to others we should really check and make sure that it is something we are able to do. Once we find that it is within our capacity, then we can safely make the commitment. These are really safety measures that we need to put in place before we engage in any activity.

As further mentioned in the commentary, *if one is able then one starts the action, but if one is not able then one does not.* Again, this is very practical advice. Having done a thorough analysis as to whether one has the capacity to complete an activity, one can then make proper assessment as to whether to engage in it or not.

The next part of the explanation, *to not start the action is supreme*, relates to investigating an action and realising that one doesn't have the full capacity to complete it, or that the necessary conditions are not intact. If one finds that the conditions are not intact, then it is best not to start that action.

But *once one has started* an action or activity then *one should not stop until it is completed.* If one has found that there is some benefit in completing the action and has already started the action, then one needs to complete it. The conditions may not be quite right, but because one has understood the benefit, one should complete the action. People often say things like, 'Oh, I'll give it a try, and if I can't manage then I can just leave it'. However as explained here, this can be a fault.

2.2.1.2.2.1.2. The fault of giving up after having started

The next part of the text explains the faults of giving up after having started an action. Many consider these few verses as very sound advice, and it is often cited.

The commentary begins with a query:

Query: What is the fault of stopping something one has started?

48. *One will be habituated to it in other lives
And negativity and suffering will increase.
One is diminished at other times and at
The time of the result; one will not achieve.*

Then Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verse:

Answer: Through the concordant cause of having acted like this before one will in other lives also be habituated to giving up. The action similar to the cause of a person that breaks a promise is that their negativity increases, and the ripening result is that their suffering increases.

Further, one will be diminished later at different times, when starting other actions or at the time of the result of this action, which has become greatly prolonged. The other actions one will also not achieve as well.

The commentary states very clearly, *through the concordant cause of having acted like this before, one will in other lives also be habituated to giving up.* Here we can see that even in contemporary activities there are certain individuals who are quite keen about starting something, but after a while they put it aside. Then they start something else, and after a while they put that aside too. That becomes a pattern, where they keep starting something new, but never really see it through to completion.

If one is habituated to doing that now, then that is a concordant result of having previously engaged in actions and not seeing them through to completion. As explained here, the consequence of not completing an action that one has started will be a concordant cause for acting in the same way in future lives, where one will be habituated to giving up easily. We have all seen people who never really see anything through, and that is due to habituation.

The concordant cause and effect is also understood in relation to non-virtuous actions such as killing. The concordant effect of the cause of killing in a past life would be very readily and gladly taking the life of others, animals and the like, in this life. Similarly with positive actions: if one engages in positive actions in this life, then the concordant effect will be that one will be naturally inclined to engage in positive actions and virtuous deeds in the next life.

As the commentary further explains, *the action similar to the cause of a person that breaks a promise is that their negativity increases.* The negativity of breaking a promise increases, and the ripening result is that the suffering increases. This particularly relates to the pledges and vows that are part of a bodhisattva's practice. If one breaks those virtuous promises, then naturally the negativities increase, and thus future suffering increases.

Further, one will be diminished later at different times, when starting other actions or at the time of the result of this action, means that a further negative consequence of starting an action, and not seeing it through to completion is that due to that earlier habituation, when one starts a similar action again one will again not see that through. In this way it becomes *greatly prolonged*, meaning that whatever action one does will take a long time to reach any kind of completion, because one keeps having to restart that action again and again.

The other actions one will also not achieve as well, means that the result will not be achieved.

2.2.1.2.2.2. Abiding steadfastly after having started

This is a presentation of the ways and means of abiding steadfastly, or abiding by the commitments one makes.

There are two subdivisions:

2.2.1.2.2.2.1. Explaining it condensed

2.2.1.2.2.2.2. Explaining it individually

2.2.1.2.2.2.1. *Explaining it condensed*

The relevant lines of the root text are:

*49ab. Action, affliction and ability,
Practise pride regarding those three.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Practise pride in the three, which counteracts discouragement and increases strength: pride in action after having commenced the action, pride in afflictions being an object of abandonment, and pride in the ability to engage and abandon.

As explained here in the commentary, one *practises pride in the three, which counteracts discouragement and strength.* As mentioned previously, in this context pride refers to a mind of great strength, courage and self-confidence. There are three types of this form of pride: *pride in action after having commenced an action, pride in afflictions being an object of abandonment, and pride in the ability to engage and abandon.*

2.2.1.2.2.2.2. *Explaining it individually*

Here there are three subdivisions:

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.1. Pride in taking action

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.1.2. Pride in ability

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.3. Pride against the afflictions, or applying the antidote to the afflictions

Here again, we need to understand that the term pride in this context implies a mind of courage, strength, and self-confidence. As the Lam Rim teaching also mentions, pride is a term that can be used to describe a positive state of mind.

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.1. *Pride in taking action*

Pride of action is subdivided into three:

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.1.1. Identifying the pride of taking action

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.1.2. The reason for doing this

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.1.3. Practising pride that also carries the burden of the inferior actions of others

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.1.1. *Identifying the pride of taking action*

Again, the pride of action is not the normal deluded pride. It is explained in these two lines of verse:

*49cd. Saying 'I will do the action alone',
Is the very pride of action.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

If one sees that others could do the action as well, one thinks, 'I shall do this alone'. The strength of mind generated here is the pride in action.

If one sees the benefit of an action, one takes the initiative to take on a responsibility, even when there are others capable of doing it. As the Lam Rim teaching explains clearly, one resolves, 'I will do that action. I will not rely upon others to do it, but I will personally take responsibility for that action'. Therefore it is a personal resolution. This is particularly the case with activities that fulfil the purposes of oneself and others, as one cannot rely upon others to fulfil purposes that benefit oneself and others. One has to do it oneself. This is the point of resolving 'I will do this alone'.

When identifying pride of action, the Lam Rim teachings explain clearly that having identified the positive results of fulfilling the purpose of oneself others, one then resolves, 'I,

myself, will take on responsibility for achieving that'. That is pride in action.

The Lam Rim then quotes from Nagarjuna's *Letter to the King*, where the Buddha says, 'I have shown you the path to liberation, now obtaining liberation is entirely in your own hands'. It also quotes from another text along similar lines. Once one has been shown the way and the methods to achieve liberation, then it is up to oneself to engage in acquiring the causes and conditions to actually obtain liberation. As mentioned previously, the Dharma is the actual refuge, which is the same point being made here. Achieving the results that are explained in the teachings has to be initiated and implemented by none other than oneself.

As explained in the teachings, the Dharma is the actual refuge. That would have to be the case because if the actual refuge or protector were to be the Buddha jewel or the Sangha jewel, then we would have already been liberated by now. They wouldn't be idly sitting around, they would have already liberated us! So the fact that the Buddha Jewel and the Sangha Jewel are not the actual refuge, and that the Dharma Jewel is the actual refuge is clear indication that we are not yet liberated because we have not fully relied on actualizing the Dharma refuge. These are the main points.

As I have mentioned previously, the explanations of the six perfections in the Lam Rim teachings are very clear. I have read the text myself again, but I don't know if any one of you have taken heed of that suggestion and actually checked the Lam Rim for yourselves. The actual presentation of the six perfections is found just prior to the presentation of special insight. These points are the very core of the Mahayana practice. If we don't have a good understanding of that, and if we don't try to apply it to our practice, then claiming to be a Mahayana practitioner would be just words, as we won't actually have the necessary qualification.

Reading the Lam Rim text is paramount for establishing a good basis for one's practice. Moreover, without the basis of a good understanding of the Lam Rim, there is really no way that one can adequately practice tantra. As we know, the sadhana practices begin with OM SVABHAVA SHUDDAH SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA SHUDDHO HANG meaning *all existence transforms into emptiness*. It is presented on the assumption that we know what emptiness means. There are no details about renunciation, bodhicitta and so forth. The manner of presentation clearly indicates that it is a practice given to those whose minds are already ripened with the understanding of the earlier practices of renunciation and bodhicitta and so forth.

The teachings explain that in terms of the view there is no difference between the view of emptiness presented in the *prajnaparamita* teachings, and the view that is presented in the tantric teachings. Of course, in terms of profundity, the highest yoga tantra is more profound, but in terms of actual view there is no difference. In the *prajnaparamita* teachings, the foundations of renunciation, bodhicitta and so forth are explained in great detail as a way of developing a strong familiarity with them so that they serve as a good foundation. Then, when the tantric teachings are presented, one's mind is already ripened, and ready to receive those teachings.

I mentioned earlier that the tantric teachings are presented to trainees whose mind is already ripened with a sound understanding of the teachings on sutra. If you were to initially go straight into tantric sadhanas and so forth, then when you hear *everything becomes empty* you might have this vague notion that everything is just empty like space and

that there is nothing around us. In fact, there are some who claim, 'Oh, it is very nice to meditate on emptiness, because there is nothing there'.

Lama Tsong Khapa states in his *Foundation of All Good Qualities*, which you would all be familiar with, that 'having developed a profound understanding on the common path may I be able to engage in the practice of the uncommon path'¹. What he is saying is that without a good understanding of the common path, which includes renunciation, bodhicitta and an understanding of emptiness - i.e. the three principles of the path - there is no way that one can obtain liberation. Likewise, without understanding and practising bodhicitta, there is no way that one can obtain full enlightenment. According to the common path, one cannot overcome the delusions without the understanding of emptiness. When it comes to the practice of tantra, the very basis on which one generates oneself as a deity and develops that divine pride is the understanding of emptiness. Without a good understanding of emptiness, it is not even possible to establish the divine pride of the deity. These are crucial points that one needs to understand.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
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¹ Having become a pure vessel by training in the general path
Please bless me to enter
The holy gateway of the fortunate ones
The supreme vajra vehicle.

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

༄༅། །བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤོང་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

11 August 2015

Based on the motivation that we have just generated we can now engage in our meditation practice. [meditation]

Let us now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the profound teachings and put them into practice.

If we generate such a positive motivation prior to engaging in the practice of listening to the teachings, and then dedicate it at the end, then we have engaged in a positive practice. Any practice that begins with a positive motivation, a positive engagement in the middle and a positive dedication at the end, is a most meaningful practice.

2.2.1.2.2.2.1. Pride in taking action

2.2.1.2.2.2.1.1. Identifying the pride of taking action (cont.)

In our last session we left off at the point of identifying the pride of taking action. The pride referred to here is, as mentioned previously, not a deluded pride but a mind of great courage and strength. When the commentary explains, if one sees *that others could do the action as well, one thinks 'I shall do this alone'*, the action referred to here is a virtuous action; one shouldn't, of course, engage in non-virtuous actions. Virtuous actions can also be described as virtuous karmas, and this will be presented more elaborately later on.

The pride that is being presented here is a way to encourage the development of great strength of mind. Without that strength of mind, it is very easy to give up whenever there are difficulties or challenges. If we are to maintain our stamina in order to follow a practice through, we need to develop that strength of mind. That is what is being encouraged here.

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2. The reason for practising it now¹

Having identified the pride of action, the next verse presents the reason for thinking, 'I shall do this alone'. Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary with this statement:

One needs to achieve the works of sentient beings by oneself, independently from others

The relevant verse is:

50. *These worldly beings with no control due to afflictions
Cannot achieve their own purpose.
Hence migrators cannot act like oneself
And therefore one needs to do this.*

Then Gyaltsab Je explains:

That is because these worldly beings, which have no control due to their afflictions, cannot achieve even their own purpose.

Hence migrators cannot strive in virtue for the purpose of others like one can, and even if one were to rely on them it would be useless. Therefore think, 'I have to do the actions for the benefit of others all by myself'.

When the commentary states *That is because these worldly beings, which have no control due to their afflictions, cannot achieve even their own purpose*, it is referring to the condition of worldly beings. As presented in an earlier verse, although wishing to overcome suffering, they run towards suffering itself, and though wishing for happiness, out of ignorance they destroy their own happiness like an enemy.² This is the situation of samsaric beings: while not wanting to experience any kind of suffering, they uncontrollably engage in the very causes of suffering due to the delusions, and whilst wishing to experience happiness, they destroy the very causes of that happiness, again due to ignorance. For as long as one is under the influence of delusions then, let alone the ultimate source of happiness, such as liberation and enlightenment, even temporary happiness is very difficult to obtain.

In order to feel the full impact of these words we need to relate them to ourselves, as they reflect our own situation. As I have mentioned previously, if one relates these lines only to other poor suffering sentient beings, then these passages will not really help to move one's mind and bring about a personal transformation. Thus, one needs to relate it to oneself by thinking, 'For as long as I am under the influence of the three poisons I will have no control over what I am doing. Even though I wish for happiness, I destroy the causes of my own happiness. Even though I don't wish to experience suffering, I have already created the cause of so much suffering'. Relating these lines directly to ourselves can really encourage us to find the means to overcome such a situation.

Worldly or samsaric beings who have no control over the afflictions cannot achieve even their own purpose. Let alone being able to achieve their ultimate purpose of liberation and enlightenment, it is very difficult for them to create even the causes for obtaining the conditions for a good rebirth in the next lifetime. For as long as living beings are under the control of the afflictions, this is their reality. As the commentary further explains, *Hence migrators cannot strive in virtue for the purpose of others like one can*. We need to understand that the *one* here refers to a bodhisattva, i.e. one who has all the right conditions to be able to strive for the purpose of others.

The commentary further explains that, *even if one were to rely on them it will be meaningless*. Therefore think, 'I have to do the actions for the benefit of others all by myself'. While this is a bodhisattva's resolve, we can relate this to our own personal practice. As mentioned previously, even generating a positive motivation for whatever one does, such as listening to the teachings, and engaging in and

¹ Last week it was listed as The Reason for Doing This
Chapter 7

² See the teaching of 28 May 2013

practising them, becomes a means to resolve to engage in positive actions for the benefit of others.

2.2.1.2.2.2.1.3. Practise the pride that also carries the burden of the inferior actions of others

It is good to note that in a worldly context many would say, 'Oh, you need to have pride in order to achieve things'. Yet even though there may be no distinction between deluded pride and virtuous pride in that worldly context, some forms of pride are considered as not being suitable, while pride in a courageous mind that can accomplish things is talked about in a positive way. So we can see that, even conventionally, there is a reason why the pride that is mentioned here refers to a noble pride, and is not a deluded pride, which is an abandonment. The two types of pride have a similar strength of mind, but one is based on ignorance and the other on wisdom.

The verse under this heading reads:

**51. When others engage in inferior actions
How can one remain?
Acting without pride,
Not to have pride one is supreme.**

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning as follows:

When others engage in inferior actions such as fieldwork, how can one, who has accepted to carry the great burden of sentient beings on one's head, remain with leisure? One should work.

When others engage in inferior work one may think, 'I should act with pride and engage in purer actions'. Do not engage in these actions with such pride, as it is supreme not to have afflicted pride. It should be abandoned because through it one will go to the lower realms.

When the commentary says that *when others engage in inferior actions such as fieldwork, how can one, who has accepted to carry the great burden of sentient beings on one's head, remain with leisure?* There are two different ways to interpret this.

One way to understand this is that worldly beings engage in inferior actions, which are worldly actions that are associated merely with obtaining food, clothing and fame. In other words, their actions are focussed only on worldly concerns; day and night, samsaric beings are constantly striving to achieve worldly gains. Seeing that, and having taken on one's head, the pledge to benefit sentient beings, meaning having made that pledge oneself, how can one remain with leisure without engaging in work? Here *one should work* refers to engaging in the actions of a bodhisattva—engaging in virtuous actions, such as the six perfections and so forth.

Another way of interpreting *remain with leisure* is not to remain idle when others are engaging in inferior work, thinking, 'That doesn't really concern me'. To understand this fully, one needs to make a distinction between general worldly actions and actions that, by their very nature, create negative karma. One should avoid engaging in negative actions and if others engage in them, one should not help them to do so. Other worldly actions, such as carrying a load, are not, by their very nature, negative. So when one notices that someone is struggling to carry a load and helps them to carry it, that

then becomes a virtuous action. Thus, considering such actions as being lowly and inferior, and not engaging in them would be a fault. One should help others to engage in such actions if one can do so. This is how we need to make the distinction.

The next part of the explanation identifies deluded pride. The commentary states, *When others engage in inferior work one may think, 'I should act with pride and engage in purer actions'*. If one thinks, 'Oh, this kind of inferior work doesn't apply to me. I need to be engaging in purer actions' then, as explained here, that is a deluded pride. As the commentary explains, *do not engage in these actions with such pride as it is supreme not to have afflicted pride*. If one engages in any kind of action with an attitude of feeling superior, looking down on menial work and thinking, 'I only engage in pure activities', then that is deluded pride.

Even in a worldly context, people who are proud are scorned. No-one appreciates people who act as if they are superior, and who look down upon others, considering that certain jobs do not apply to them and are only for the lowly. That kind of attitude is definitely recognised as being unsuitable, even in a worldly context. As explained in the commentary, one should avoid this deluded pride, as it only creates negativity for oneself. Indeed, anyone who feels superior and who looks down upon others, is definitely not appreciated and is not a welcome guest anywhere. Such pride makes others feel uncomfortable around you. We often hear comments like, 'Oh, so and so looks down on me and treats me like dirt'. Such an experience makes people feel as if they are inferior.

Harbouring this sort of deluded pride is also a cause for disharmony. Others don't appreciate such pride, and it leads to disunity within groups of people. The virtuous pride that expresses the strength of mind that resolves, 'I will take on the responsibility of benefitting others' is completely different to deluded pride. Instead of looking down upon others it makes one cherish others and wish to benefit them.

Previously I shared a story as an example of how, when one is free from such deluded pride, one can benefit others. I was once in a bank and saw a new teller having difficulty in opening a drawer. One of the senior staff came over and said, 'Oh, I used to struggle with that', and then he showed her how to open it. In this case, the senior staff member acknowledged the difficulty of the new teller and helped her, rather than looking down on her. Someone with a lot of pride might have ridiculed her saying, 'Oh, don't you even know how to open a drawer?', but here the senior staff member helped her by saying that he used to have the same problem himself.

We need to keep in mind that, when we see others struggling, extending a helping hand is of real benefit to them. Whatever the environment, in the workplace or wherever, whenever someone else is struggling with something about which one has knowledge, then the greatest benefit one can offer is to give them a helping hand. When we resolve to practise Dharma, we need to keep that in mind that, when we free ourselves from pride, there are many practical ways to benefit others.

Here at Tara Institute, many have said that when they first came here there were some who were really helpful, taking the time to explain things well, and made them feel very comfortable and welcome. They were really touched and moved to receive such help, when they were new and a bit nervous. That also might imply that there might have been others who were a bit pompous, or who didn't really pay attention or offer a helping hand, even when they saw someone who was new to Tara Institute. So here we need to apply Shantideva's advice.

The Buddha's teachings are said to be all means to overcome pride. Those of us who are following the Buddha's teachings need to ensure that we don't allow whatever study and practice we do to become a cause to further increase pride. Although we might not be able to completely overcome pride just yet, at the very least we need to ensure that, whatever we do, we are not increasing our pride. Pride is of no use whatsoever in Dharma practice.

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2. Pride in ability

Here again we are talking about virtuous pride. Having explained that there is pride in action, next comes taking pride in one's own ability. This has five subdivisions:

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.1. The fault of not having pride in one's abilities

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.2. The benefits of being proud

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.3. Abiding in the pride that is the antidote

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.4. It is unsuitable to generate afflicted pride

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.5. The benefits of the pride that is the antidote

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.1. The fault of not having pride in one's abilities

This again refers to strength of mind. Pride in this context is the fault of not having belief in one's ability to overcome the despondent mind that feels, 'Oh, I am not able to do this'. In order to overcome that feeling of being discouraged by the task at hand, or other challenges that have to be faced, we need to have a courageous mind of great strength.

The verses under this heading indicate that if one doesn't have pride in one's ability, then one will be discouraged in the face of even the slightest of difficulties or challenges.

52. *When they meet a dead snake
Even crows act like garudas.
If one is humble
Even small downfalls will harm.*

53ab. *The discouraged who have given up striving
How can they be liberated from destitution?*

The commentary explains:

One should generate the force of the antidote to destroy the afflictions, because even crows act like garudas when they meet with a dead snake. Similarly, if one's antidotes are weak, then even small downfalls will harm the path with obstruction. When one is destitute due to having given up the striving for the purpose of self and others due to discouragement, then how can one be liberated? Being destroyed by laziness, one's actions of body and mind degenerate.

As the commentary explains, *one should generate the force of the antidote to destroy the afflictions*. In order to destroy the afflictions, one needs to generate the strong force of

the antidote, one can then combat and overcome the afflictions. This is explained with the analogy of *crows that act like garudas when they meet with a dead snake*. A garuda has the courage to face a live snake with a great majesty, while crows do the same thing when they come upon a dead snake, behaving as if it was a live snake. Crows act like that with a dead snake, because there is no threat. They act as if they are mighty, when in fact they are afraid of live snakes.

The point of the analogy is to illustrate that if the *antidotes* are *weak*, then even a small downfall will harm the path with obstruction. If one's antidote is weak, one will immediately feel daunted and discouraged by even small afflictions, which will become an obstruction on the path.

The commentary asks, *When one is destitute due to having given up the striving for the purpose of self and others, due to discouragement, then how can one be liberated?* If one were to easily fall victim to even small afflictions and thus become discouraged, then, as explained in the commentary, *how can one fulfil the purpose of self and others, and how can one be liberated? Being destroyed by laziness, one's actions of body and mind degenerate*. We can relate this to our own experience where we feel a bit daunted by some task. That's when we are most likely to think, 'Oh, I don't think I can manage that' and then start to become despondent. The laziness of despondency actually arises when one feels a bit discouraged. Therefore, as explained here, one needs to develop that courageous mind.

From this presentation we can see how we need to refrain from even small negative karmas, and not neglect to recall their severity by thinking, 'Oh, it is not all that grave, so it is OK if I engage in that action', because as explained by the Buddha, a spark can cause a great raging fire. Conversely one should not neglect even the smallest of virtues, thinking, 'Oh, I need not bother with small virtues', because, as the Buddha explained with another analogy, even small drops of water can fill a large container. So one accumulates great virtue by combining many small virtues. We need to pay heed to this advice and adopt it. By reflecting on these analogies, one needs to resolve on abandoning even small negativities, and adopt even small virtues as a way to further develop and progress along the path to enlightenment.

Otherwise, if one resorts to thinking, 'Oh, that's too hard and too difficult, and I had better not engage in it', then one is actually resorting to laziness. As explained in the commentary, one will be *destroyed by laziness* and *one's actions of body and mind will degenerate*. This means that when one becomes lazy one feels weighed down mentally, and is physically lethargic, not wanting to engage in any kind of activity. That is how both mental and physical degeneration occur.

The conclusion is that one needs to abandon this kind of laziness, and engage in positive actions.

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.2.2. The benefits of being proud

This relates to the benefits of applying one's strength of mind. The lines of verse relating to this are:

53cd. *Through generating the effort of pride
It will be difficult to be overcome even by
something great.*

54cd. *Therefore, with a steadfast mind*

*One should destroy all downfalls.
If one is conquered by a downfall
The wish to conquer the three realms is
laughable.*

Here, the commentary reads:

Through the pride that generates a forceful antidote and the generation of striving through application it will be difficult to overcome even the great objects of abandonment. Therefore, with a steadfast mind one should destroy the downfalls, because if one is overcome by the downfalls then the wish to conquer the three realms will make one a laughing stock.

As explained in the commentary, the pride that one needs to develop is *the pride that generates a forceful antidote, and the generation of striving through application*. Generating and applying a forceful antidote is the means to overcome the delusions, and *it will be difficult to be overcome, even by great objects of abandonment*. When one applies this forceful antidote and generates striving through application, one will not be overpowered by strong and powerful delusions.

Therefore with a steadfast mind one should destroy the downfalls, because if one is overcome by the downfalls then the wish to conquer the three realms will make one a laughing stock, clearly explains that one needs to generate a strong antidote and overcome the downfalls from one's own side. If one allows downfalls to overpower oneself, and says that one has pledged, 'I will overcome the downfalls, and I will conquer the three realms', one will become a laughing stock, and an object of ridicule.

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.3. Abiding on the pride that is the antidote

The relevant verse reads:

55. *I should conquer everything
And nothing should conquer me.
I, the child of the lion king,
Shall abide in this pride.*

Here, the commentary states:

Thus, one should abide in the supreme pride that thinks, 'I should conquer all my faults but I should not be conquered even by one of the objects of abandonment of the three realms.'

If it is asked: Who is doing this? It is oneself, the child of the lion king, who frightens the animals that are demons³ and forders⁴.

The commentary clearly explains that having shown the disadvantages of not having virtuous pride, one needs to resolve to abide in the supreme pride that thinks, '*I should conquer all my faults, but I should not be conquered even by one of the objects of abandonment of the three realms*'. As previously explained, one generates the strength of mind and courage that resolves, 'I will be the one who conquers faults, and the faults of the three realms will not conquer me'. That is the kind of pride that needs to be generated here. Such a resolve comes from understanding the response to the rhetorical question, *Who is doing this?* which is that *it is oneself, the child of the lion king*. Here *lion king* is actually a reference to the Buddha, the Conqueror. A lion king is feared by all other creatures, who, on merely seeing the lion king, are afraid and then slink

away. Likewise the Conqueror, the Buddha, *frightens the demons and all forders*.

As a child of the Conqueror, the Buddha, one resolves to abide in the supreme pride that conquers all faults of the three realms. Rather than allowing the faults to conquer oneself, one resolves, 'I, a child of the Buddha, will develop this supreme pride'.

2.2.1.2.2.2.2.4. It is unsuitable to generate afflicted pride

We will continue with this in our next session.

As you are aware next Tuesday is the discussion night. As I have mentioned previously, it is good to come with a positive mind of wanting to share and learn from each other. The following week will, as usual be the exam, and it is also good to complete that in a good manner.

As I reminded you last week, the seminar is on Sunday week. It is good for you to develop a virtuous mind of wanting to share whatever understanding you have with others. Likewise, you can benefit from the understanding of others. With that attitude, the time spent together will be really meaningful. Having an attitude of, 'Oh, I might be able to impress others with my knowledge', is the wrong sort of attitude.

As we have seen, Shantideva gives profound advice and many instructions on how to practise. So it is good to really pay attention to them, and try to think about these points, familiarising yourself with them and becoming really acquainted with them. It would be really meaningful to resolve that that this is a good way to practise, and dedicate oneself towards that end. While we may not be able to see the immediate benefit now, through familiarity with these teachings, and by following as much as possible the personal advice they offer, the time will definitely come where we will find that we can apply what we have learnt and put it into practice. But if we don't pay much attention now and just skim over these presentations, then when the time comes where we need to resort to these practices, we will not have any material with which to practise. Therefore it is important to really pay attention to Shantideva's advice now, and put it into practice as much as possible.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
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³ Maras

⁴ Non-Buddhists holding extremist views

Discussion

Block:2 Week: 10

Assigned: 18/08/15

-----Week: 1 (16 June 2015)

1. 'One should not be lazy as one is under the control of the lord of death'. What personal instruction did Geshe Doga advise us to take from this heading, its verse and commentary?

Week: 2 (23 June 2015)

2. How can the practice of Tong Len assist one for a future good rebirth?

3. Explain the analogy: one should *strive in virtue just like one's head is on fire*.

Week: 3 (30/06/2015)

4. Discuss what Geshe Doga describes as "the two most essential tools for securing one's practice".

Week: 4 (7/07/2015)

5. Why is it important to be able to distinguish clearly between heavy and light suffering?

6. What method does the supreme physician, the Buddha, employ while one is working to achieve enlightenment?

Week: 5 (14/07/2015)

7. Describe the four powers and why they are important?

Week: 6 (21/7/2015)

8. What point should encourage us that we have the same potential to reach enlightenment as the buddhas?

Week: 7 (28/7/2015)

9. Describe how "superior intention" relates to the tong-len practice.

10. "Form is empty, emptiness is form". Explain

Week: 8 (4/8/2015)

11. What does Geshe Doga explain as the basis for practising tantra and why?

Week 9 (11/07/2015)

12. **52. When they meet with dead snake**

Even crows act like Garudas

If one is humble

Even small downfalls will harm

53ab. The discouraged who have given up striving

How can they be liberated from destitution?

Explain the analogy regarding crows.

Exam

Block: 2

Week: 11

Name: -----

Assigned: 25/08/15

1. 'One should not be lazy as one is under the control of the lord of death'. What personal instruction did Geshe Doga advise us to take from this heading, its verse and commentary?

2. How can the practice of Tong Len assist one for a future good rebirth?

3. Explain the analogy: one should *strive in virtue just like one's head is on fire*.

4. Discuss what Geshe Doga describes as “the two most essential tools for securing one’s practice”.

5. Why is it important to be able to distinguish clearly between heavy and light suffering?

6. What method does the supreme physician, the Buddha, employ while one is working to achieve enlightenment?

7. Describe the four powers and why they are important?

8. What point should encourage us that we have the same potential to reach enlightenment as the buddhas?

9. Describe how “superior intention” relates to the tong-len practice.

10. “Form is empty, emptiness is form”. Explain

11. What does Geshe Doga explain as the basis for practising tantra and why?

12. **52. When they meet with dead snake**
 Even crows act like Garuda
 If one is humble
 Even small downfalls will harm
 53ab. The discouraged who have given up striving
 How can they be liberated from destitution?

Explain the analogy regarding crows.