

But one needs to understand that there is this distinction between the views hearers can hold.

As presented in the sessions on the tenets², Prasangikas are defined as those who do not accept true existence, even conventionally. Thus, those who have a belief in true or inherent existence are definitely those who do not hold the view of the Prasangika. Thus we can clearly say that those who hold the view of the Prasangika are the ones who gain the actual realisation of emptiness. The main point, as presented by Gyaltsab Je, is that those who forsake the Great Vehicle scriptures do so out of ignorance. He elaborates this point in his commentary.

Now we may feel that these subtler points about views and tenets are irrelevant to us. However, from a practical point of view, we need to understand the unsuitability of forsaking the Great Vehicle scriptures. What we need to understand from this presentation, is that we must be extremely careful not to deride or criticise the others, just because we don't see their qualities. There is real danger for us if we do that.

We must be very cautious about not immediately jumping to the wrong conclusion, assuming that someone lacks qualities, or that they are not worthy of certain qualities. For example, if we don't know anything about the Christian faith, but immediately assume that this tradition lacks suitable explanations of spiritual practices, then that would be a great fault. It would be quite absurd for someone who does not know anything about a particular tradition to immediately assume that it lacks certain qualities.

As Gyaltsab Je explains later on, it is very difficult to see someone's qualities from their external appearance. Whatever qualities they possess are inner qualities, which are not necessarily displayed outwardly. We may see some faults externally, but that doesn't mean that they don't possess inner qualities, which they may very well be concealing. Because we fail to see their inner qualities, there is a great danger in immediately criticising someone when we see some faults. So Gyaltsab Je really cautions us against creating negative karma in this way. In another text he explains this point very clearly with an analogy of how on the surface it is extremely hard for us to recognise a noble being. So we must be very cautious when criticising others lest we fall victim to creating the heavy negative karma of criticising a bodhisattva.

3.2.1.1.1.2. Reasons for the derision

This section has two verses the first of which is:

368. *Either through not knowing the good qualities
[of altruism] and the defects [of mere self-
concern],
Or identifying good qualities as defects,
Or through despising good qualities,
They deride the Great Vehicle.*

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary seems to fall into three main points:

[1] The causes for antagonism are: *either through not knowing the good qualities* of the altruism of a bodhisattva that forsakes one's own benefit and takes on the responsibility to solely benefit others...

In this case *antagonism* is caused by *not knowing the good qualities of the altruism of a bodhisattva*. As explained here, the altruism of a bodhisattva is that a noble being has completely forsaken working towards their *own benefit* or welfare, but *has taken on* the complete *responsibility solely to*

benefit others. Such are the qualities, in brief, of a noble being or bodhisattva. Not knowing those qualities could be one of the causes for antagonism.

The second point, as Gyaltsab Je indicates, is:

[2]...*and not knowing the defects* of exerting great effort for mere personal gain while harming others;

Those who adhere to the hearer vehicle may not have any intention of harming others, but they definitely exert themselves to achieve a personal goal. Their sole purpose in meditating and practising is to gain liberation for themselves. That being the case, a bodhisattva's way of life may seem quite ridiculous. What is the point of being so concerned about others when they could be working towards achieving liberation for themselves? That's how the antagonism may arise. Because of their own limitations, as a result of being obsessed with achieving their own personal goal of liberation, they may hold that sort of negative view.

A bodhisattva's intention is completely based on altruism, and they have no concern for themselves or for personal gain. Rather their concern is solely for the benefit of others. Their sole purpose for engaging in spiritual practice, meditation and gaining realisations, (i.e. practising the path), is so that they can benefit other sentient beings. A bodhisattva's primary concern is how best to benefit other sentient beings to free them from suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness.

Thinking about the altruism of a noble being or a bodhisattva should really inspire us to practise in a similar way, such as with the *tong len* meditation practice we did earlier. *Tong len* is the meditation of taking the suffering of others upon oneself and giving one's own happiness to others. Of course, when this practice is done properly with a good intention, it gives immense personal benefit as well as accumulating virtue. In order to familiarise ourselves with this altruistic mind, it is essential that we do the *tong len* meditation practice.

Most importantly, however, we need to try to apply the same attitude to our everyday life, in whatever situation we may find ourselves. When we see others who are disadvantaged or suffering in any way, we should try to be there to help them as best as we can. Rather than letting others experience the suffering by themselves, we can take upon ourselves some of their hardships or difficulties. That would be a practical way to apply the practice of giving and taking in our everyday lives. The main thing is to constantly hold in high esteem the altruism and deeds of the noble beings, whilst making constant attempts to practise in the same way.

When the commentary says *exerting great effort for mere personal gain while harming others*, it is not indicating that hearers have any intention to harm others. But we can relate this point to a hearers' self-cherishing mind, which is obsessed with obtaining self-liberation. That self-cherishing mind could be understood as harmful in that it prevents one from being fully committed to removing suffering and bringing happiness to all sentient beings. Understanding it in this way can give us a subtler understanding of what harming others means.

The final point is:

[3]... *identifying good qualities as defects, or through despising good qualities.*

These are also points that we can relate to our dealings with others in everyday life. Out of jealousy or envy we might feel antagonistic towards someone by *identifying their good*

² These were presented in 2001.

qualities as defects, rather than seeing them as good qualities. Rather than accepting and being joyful about their good qualities, we turn their good qualities into faults. Failing to acknowledge the good qualities of someone and finding fault in them, is a fault on one's own side. To counteract that, it is good to train our mind to always acknowledge the good qualities that others have, to be joyful about them, and be happy that they possess such qualities.

Thus the third point clarified in Gyalsab Je's commentary, is that when good qualities prevail, failing to acknowledge them and *despising good qualities*, is another cause for one to feel antagonism towards others.

We must definitely protect our minds against this fault of antagonism and train our minds to feel a sense of joy and happiness for others. On a practical level, we need to be really diligent about recognising the qualities of others and joyful about their qualities. However there is also a danger if we don't see faults as faults. If we see faults as qualities, then that is yet another fault! When we fail to acknowledge faults as faults, then there is a danger of being influenced by those faults.

Therefore we need to be very diligent, and use our analytical wisdom to acknowledge true qualities while at the same time recognising faults as being faults. Also, we should always try to associate with others who can help us to grow and develop further in gaining more qualities. I feel there is no greater joy than associating with others who uplift us. Such people are the supreme companions to associate with.

The second verse under this heading reads:

**369. Those who deride the Great Vehicle –
Knowing that to harm others is defective
And that to help others is a good quality –
Are said to despise good qualities.**

Having explained earlier that antagonism can arise from seeing good qualities and despising them Gyalsab Je asks this question:

If one asks why would they condemn the Great Vehicle and despise good qualities? It is feasible to say that *those who deride the Great Vehicle do so while knowing that to harm others is defective and that to help others is a good quality, ...*

Here Gyalsab Je is saying that despising good qualities arises from seeing some good qualities. Those of the Lesser Vehicle acknowledge *that helping others is a good quality and harming others is defective*; for without knowing good qualities there is no way to despise it.

This is, Gyalsab Je says:

...because the Great Vehicle presents the complete method for abandoning defects and acquiring all good qualities, while the Lesser Vehicle presents the methods only partially.

The Great Vehicle presents a very complete and thorough explanation on abandoning all defects and acquiring all good qualities in relation to benefitting others. As the Lesser Vehicle only presents these methods partially, a Lesser Vehicle being is unable to relate to the extent of the good qualities of the great beings of the Great Vehicle, and so develop antagonism towards them, and despise their good qualities.

3.2.1.1.3. Faults of deriding the Great Vehicle

The first verse that relates to this outline is:

**370. Those who despise the Great Vehicle,
Source of all good qualities in that [it teaches]
taking delight,**

***Solely in the aims of others due to not looking
to one's own,
Consequently burn themselves [in bad
transmigrations].***

As Gyalsab Je's commentary explains:

Because bodhisattvas do not look at their own welfare, they take delight solely in the aims of others. Thus, those who despise the bodhisattva's practice – *the Great Vehicle*, which is source of all good qualities – consequently burn themselves in bad transmigrations because they create heavy negative karma.

This is emphasising a point made earlier, which is that *bodhisattvas* are defined as those who do not have any concern for their own welfare, and that they take absolute delight solely in the aims of others. This means that their sole purpose for practising is for the benefit of other sentient beings. Those who despise the bodhisattvas' practice (which include the tenets or views of the Great Vehicle, the source of all good qualities), consequently burn themselves in bad transmigrations, which indicates that they will create the heavy negative karma to be re-born into unfortunate rebirths of the hell realms and so forth.

The point here is that because of what the bodhisattvas stand for, and the noble intentions they have, despising them, or the practices they engage in, and the treatises to which they adhere, will create heavy negative karma.

In another of Gyalsab Rinpoche's teachings, he gives the analogy of a pit of burning embers that is camouflaged with earth and leaves, so that it cannot be seen from the surface. There is always the great danger of stepping onto it, and falling down into the pit and being burnt. This analogy is used to show the great risk of criticising others, when we are not able to see whether or not they are a bodhisattva. When we lack the clairvoyance or insight to see the qualities in the minds of others, and then criticise them, we could very well be criticising and finding fault in a bodhisattva. If we do so, we will be in great danger of creating very heavy negative karma. These are all very important points about which we need to be mindful.

The next verse under the same heading reads:

**371. One type with faith [in emptiness forsakes it]
through misconception [of it as denying cause
and effect].
Others who are angry [forsake emptiness]
through despising it.
If even the faithful type is said [in sutra] to be
burned,
What can be said about those who turn their
backs on it through despising it!**

As will be explained in the commentary, the fault of despising emptiness comes about because in despising the Great Vehicle, one is also directly despising what the Great Vehicle presents. The path presented in the Great Vehicle can be summarised into the two collections of merit and wisdom. The way to accumulate merit is presented with the extensive deeds of the bodhisattva, and the wisdom realising emptiness in the perfection of wisdom presentation. Therefore when one despises the Great Vehicle, one is also directly despising emptiness as well.

As Gyalsab Je clearly explains in his commentary:

There are two types of beings who forsake emptiness: One type with faith in emptiness forsakes it through misconception of it as denying cause and effect. Others who are angry forsake emptiness through despising it. If even the faithful type, who misunderstand emptiness as

denying the existence of karma and its effects, *is said in sutra to be burned, what can be said of those through despising and turning away from emptiness, which is the perfection of wisdom. They will definitely burn. Thus, even if one does not have interest in emptiness, one should never deprecate it.*

The first type of person has *faith in emptiness* but, because of adhering to an incorrect or incomplete understanding of emptiness, they fall into the extreme of *denying* the very *existence of karma and its effects*. If *emptiness is misunderstood*, there is a danger of thinking that emptiness means that nothing exists, and therefore *cause and effect*, i.e. *karma and its consequences* do not exist.

When they develop that *misconception* of emptiness then, as explained in the sutra, they create heavy negative karma. It is not as if they don't have faith in emptiness, because they do have an appreciation of the explanation of emptiness. But due to the misfortune of not gaining the correct understanding of emptiness, they create the negative karma of denying the existence of cause and effect or the consequences of karma.

If the sutra explains that with the mistaken view of emptiness one creates negative karma, then there is no need to mention those who intentionally despise emptiness out of antagonism. They will definitely create negative karma and burn with sufferings of the unfortunate rebirths.

The conclusion, as Gyalsab Je states, is that *even if one does not have interest in emptiness, one should never deprecate it*. This implies that, at best, try to develop a keen interest, faith and a clear understanding of emptiness. Then a stronger appreciation and keen determination to develop one's understanding of the realisation of emptiness will arise. So try to develop a keen appreciation and admiration for emptiness, but if that is not possible, then at the very least don't deprecate or despise it.

We can apply this personal advice to our everyday lives, and those we relate to. At best, try to acknowledge the qualities in others. As emphasised in the mind training teachings again and again, one needs to develop a pure view where one does not look for faults in others, but rather only looks at their good qualities. Dealing with others in this way is the highest level of practice we can do. Even if one cannot avoid seeing faults, then at least try not to openly criticise others. This is really very practical advice in our daily lives.

We can consider ourselves as being extremely fortunate because we have access to the correct view of emptiness. I have reiterated many times in the past, in many sessions on emptiness, that in gaining an understanding of emptiness, there is a real danger of going to the extreme of denying all existence. Gaining the correct understanding of emptiness has to be free from such extremes, which may lead to denying the existence of karma and cause and effect. One should be aware of how dangerous and what a great fault that is.

By now, of course, most of us are not in any danger of denying the existence of karma and its effect. With our understanding of emptiness, we can safely abide by the law of karma. So we can rejoice in having a sound basis for showing a greater appreciation of emptiness, and for making strong aspirations to gain a further understanding of the realisation of emptiness. This is something which we can feel very fortunate about!

As the commentary states, by despising emptiness one will experience the consequences of burning with suffering in

bad transmigrations. From that we need to derive an understanding of how the opposite of that is also true. If despising emptiness is such a heavy, negative karma, then praising and showing appreciation of emptiness is very, very virtuous, and a cause for us to accumulate great merit. So we have the great good fortune to create such great merit by appreciating and praising the view of emptiness.

If one fails to gain the correct understanding of emptiness and has only a partial understanding based on the literal meaning of 'emptiness', then, for example, we would interpret the verses of the *Heart Sutra* literally. You would then think that if 'form is empty', then there must be no form at all. That is when we fall into the danger of completely denying the existence of something that does actually exist. Having such a misunderstanding leads us to denying the existence of the law of karma. Without a correct understanding, we are at risk of interpreting explanations literally, and then it is very easy for us to develop that misconception about emptiness.

As I mentioned previously, I once met someone in St Kilda who said to me: 'I've heard about emptiness and I have read about it, and now I'm meditating on emptiness. I go off in the yacht somewhere by myself and I just focus on nothing, and it really gives me a sense of joy'. I am in no way suggesting he was criticising or despising emptiness, but even from that partial understanding of emptiness it seems that he derived some benefit from thinking about nothing! For him, temporarily thinking of nothing, and that there is no good and bad, seemed to give him some sort of relief. So to that extent he gained some benefit. However that is not the correct understanding of emptiness.

Thinking about nothing, and stopping all conceptions and thoughts, good and bad, and preventing them from occurring, worked for this man, because most of our emotions are negative ones, and unease arises in our mind as a consequence to seeing external objects. When we view objects, some will be beautiful and others will be ugly, and different kinds of emotions arise in our mind which will make us uncomfortable and uneasy. So, temporarily, just thinking about nothing seems to give some kind of relief. Regardless of his misunderstanding of emptiness, he definitely gained some temporary benefit. One could say that there was some benefit for him in having an sense of absence in his mind, rather than getting upset about things and becoming carried away with external objects.

In the *Heart Sutra*, the very next point after 'form is empty' is that 'emptiness is form'. Thus with the correct understanding, one is able to derive the essence of that the meaning, which is that form is none other than a manifestation of emptiness. It is not that form doesn't exist at all, but that the appearance of an inherently existing form is empty. It is the true existence or inherent existence of form that is empty.

When we gain that understanding of how when form is presented as being empty, and that form is actually a manifestation of emptiness, then we can derive the correct understanding that form is empty of inherent existence, but not empty of existence altogether.

3.2.1.1.2. Therefore, the unsuitability of despising the Great Vehicle

This is comprised of five sub-divisions. Here we need to note these headings in themselves are extremely profound points of practice.

3.2.1.1.2.1. Elimination of great suffering through a little suffering

3.2.1.1.2.2. Though there is a little suffering in the deeds of the Great Vehicle, it is unsuitable to despise what completely eliminates suffering

3.2.1.1.2.3. Rightness of making effort for the sake of great bliss; wrongness of being attached to small pleasures

3.2.1.1.2.4. Suitability of liking the Great Vehicle

3.2.1.1.2.5. Summation

3.2.1.1.2.1. Elimination of great suffering through a little suffering

The verse relating to this reads:

372. *Just as it is explained in medicine
That poison can be removed by poison,
What contradiction is there in saying
That what is injurious [in the future] can be
removed by suffering?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins the explanation of the meaning of this verse with an assertion :

If you say: It is suitable to despise the Great Vehicle because asceticism such as giving away one's head is unbearable, and because the profound is difficult to realise.

This is a presentation of a doubt about whether it is suitable to despise the Great Vehicle, because great *asceticism such as giving away one's head is unbearable*. This relates to the bodhisattva's deeds of generosity where, at a high level of practice, bodhisattvas give away their body parts and limbs and so forth. So the argument is that because the Great Vehicle encompasses such great asceticism, and *because the profound, emptiness, is difficult to realise, it is suitable to despise the Great Vehicle*.

Then Gyaltsab Je responds to the doubt in this way:

[Response:] *Just as it is explained in medicine that an immediate suffering and death caused by poison can be removed by poison, what contradiction is there in saying that what is injurious in the future can be removed by a minor suffering in this life? It is totally appropriate.*

Here Gyaltsab Je is saying that it is reasonable to bear small suffering now if it prevents greater suffering in the future. Whatever practice we do involves some hardship and difficulty, because of our limited physical and mental condition. Let alone the higher levels of practice, such as giving away one's limbs and so forth, whatever level of practice we undertake will involve some difficulty and will require some effort. But we can willingly endure such hardships and difficulties, knowing that they can become a cause for removing long-term suffering in the future, and will bring about future happiness.

The analogy presented in the commentary is that when doctors prescribe a treatment that may be unpleasant, they encourage their patient by saying: 'Even though this treatment may be difficult and hard, if you don't follow it now, you could suffer much more later on when the disease has advanced'. That is how a doctor encourages a patient to accept treatment, in spite of the unease and difficulty it might temporarily cause.

The example given in the commentary is that even what is considered as *poison, can be removed* by an antidote of a similar kind. This means that whatever is considered as poisonous could help to relieve the greater disease, and thus be suitable medicine. If that is the case, then when great suffering in the future can be removed from experiencing minor suffering now, *it is reasonable and appropriate*.

Immunisation shots are uncomfortable, but the injections will prevent diseases in the future. It reminds me of a Sera monk at the time when we were in a hospital together in India. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis, so he required a lot of injections. He wasn't very comfortable when they brought in the needle, and when he saw the nurses coming he would say, 'Oh, here they come now, they are coming!!' [laughter] then he would cover himself up with his *zen* or upper robe. He would say 'Of course, I have no choice, I have to take these shots, but it is really uncomfortable!'

The main point here is that it is neither suitable nor appropriate to despise a bodhisattva's practice by thinking it is a meaningless asceticism, and difficult to bear. Whatever practice the bodhisattvas endure now, will remove greater suffering for themselves and others in the future. Understanding that will prevent one from criticising the bodhisattva practices.

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Edited Version
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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་བཀའ་བཀའ་ལྟོས་པའི་གསུང་རྒྱུ་ལོ་ལོ་།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

3 April 2012

Based on the motivation that we generated in the refuge and bodhicitta practice that we have just done, we can now engage in the meditation practice. [meditation]

It would be really beneficial to try to incorporate this meditation practice into our daily life. Then, when we have become quite familiar with the *tong len* practice, it can be naturally integrated into the act of breathing.

We should note the difference between the practice of developing single-pointed concentration based on focussing the breath, and the practice where one utilises the breath for the visualisation of the *tong len* practice.

The practice of developing single-pointed concentration by focussing on the breath involves focussing on the natural rhythm of breathing, allowing the mind to be completely absorbed into the natural inflow and outflow of the breath, focussing just on that and nothing else. This diverts the mind from a lot of discursive thoughts, and allows it to settle down. So it is a technique specifically tailored to temporarily settle the mind.

The *tong len* practice requires one to develop an association of a strong feeling of taking in the suffering of all sentient beings with the in-breath, and energetically extending one's body, health and merit when breathing out. It might be the case that there is a more forceful inhalation and exhalation so as to help the process of taking in the sufferings of others, and giving out one's happiness and so forth.

It is good to understand this significant difference between these two techniques:

- ∞ When focussing on the breath in order to develop single-pointed concentration, one should refrain from any effort. Every breath should be effortless, thereby bringing one's mind down to a very settled state.
- ∞ The *tong len* practice involves some level of effort, forcibly taking in the suffering of sentient beings, their imprints and so forth, and extending one's happiness to other sentient beings.

3.2.1.1. Reason for unsuitability of forsaking the Great Vehicle scriptures

3.2.1.1.2. THEREFORE, THE UNSUITABILITY OF DESPISING THE GREAT VEHICLE (CONT.)

3.2.1.1.2.2. Though there is a little suffering in the deeds of the Great Vehicle, it is unsuitable to despise what completely eliminates suffering

Practising the deeds, and sometimes austere, practices of the Great Vehicle involves some effort and hardship, but the intention of doing so is to overcome great suffering. Understanding that intention, one needs to refrain from despising the suffering that is endured through following the practices of the Great Vehicle.

This heading has two verses, the first of which reads:

373. It is renowned [in Great Vehicle scriptures] that
motivation determines practices
And that the mind is most important.

Hence how could even suffering not be helpful
For one who gives help with an altruistic
motivation?

The main point being emphasised here is that our motivation or state of our mind is most important in whatever we do. As explained here, and in other teachings, all bodhisattva deeds of the three doors of body speech and mind are virtuous, and hence ways to collect merit, because of their motivation. Thus, it is the motivation that determines whether or not an act is meritorious and virtuous.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je offers this explanation:

Even though Dharma is a cause for suffering, it is not appropriate to despise it. Because through minor suffering one can accomplish great benefit for others.

This is clearly explaining that enduring suffering with the proper understanding is a means to accomplish great benefits. This is a point I have emphasised in the past. One of the main points of overcoming the eight worldly dharmas is that our concern for our well-being is very much related to wanting to avoid suffering. Without proper training, the moment suffering occurs we will immediately feel disturbed by it, and our mind will always be unhappy. So training the mind involves not being daunted by suffering and intentionally and willingly taking upon suffering. This is really a crucial point to understand.

It is good for us to remember again and again that suffering is something that has to be endured and willingly accepted, and not avoided. Although this is being presented in the context of practising the Dharma, it is good for us to relate it to mundane examples. From a worldly perspective, we all know that if we wish to accomplish something, it requires hardship and difficulty. I think the equivalent saying in English is 'without pain there is no gain'.

The *tong len* practice is appropriate for someone who is willing to take suffering upon themselves, while giving away their happiness.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

This is so because when motivated by a virtuous mind, physical and verbal actions become virtuous as well, as it is renowned in the Great Vehicle scriptures that motivation determines practices and that the mind is most important. Hence how could even the suffering of a bodhisattva's austere practices not be helpful for one who gives help with an altruistic motivation? It is definitely helpful.

These are essential points for us to consider. The commentary is clearly explaining that it is our motivation that determines whether or not our practice is virtuous. So I regularly encourage students to adopt a kind attitude, and to try to maintain that attitude at all times. An attitude of kindness and consideration towards others will help to protect your own mind. Even if negativities arise, such a kind attitude and considered mind will help to override them, or reduce their strength and influence.

Familiarising our mind with a kind attitude is essential to ensure that we are free from the negative states of mind that would otherwise pollute our practice. For example, a sense of pride (i.e. feeling superior to others), attachment, competition or jealousy, or anger, will pollute any practice. So prior to engaging in any practice, we need to be mindful about generating the most positive motivation. Having an attitude of kindness is essential in order to secure our practice as an authentic practice.

The second verse that relates to this heading reads:

**374. *If even [in ordinary life] pain can bring future benefit,
What need is there to say that [accepting suffering]
Beneficial for one's own and others' happiness will help!
This practice is known as the policy of the ancients***

Gyaltsab Je's explanation of the meaning of this verse is:

If even in ordinary life *pain* such as cutting and burning, even though uncomfortable now, *can bring future benefit, what need is there to say that accepting minor suffering that is a cause for one's own and other's happiness will help! This practice is known as the policy of the ancient buddhas of the three times, or the excellent policy.*

Here again, these are essential points for our daily practice and our daily life. When we think about it, feeling daunted by any kind of practice is usually associated with some sort of hardship and difficulty, which causes us to feel discouraged about pursuing it any further. If we are not willing to endure some hardship and difficulty in our practice, then there is no possibility for us to maintain any practice in our daily life.

As Gyaltsab Je explains clearly, we are willing to endure some suffering now if we understand that it will relieve greater suffering later on. We are willing to undergo surgical methods such as *cutting and burning* to relieve greater suffering due to a disease. If smaller suffering for greater benefit later on is accepted at a mundane level, *then what need to mention the benefits of enduring minor suffering now for greater happiness in the future?*

What is being clearly explained here is that we need to adopt an attitude of willingly accepting austerity and hardship in order to achieve the goals of our practice. This is yet another presentation of the need to adopt patience in order to practice, particularly the patience of willingly enduring suffering. The definition of patience is a mind that is not disturbed in the event of suffering or harm. In order to engage in practice, we need to have patience so that our mind is undisturbed in the face of austere practices and hardship.

It is when we allow our mind to become disturbed that anger arises, which we can put down to a lack of endurance. If we are not able to endure hardship and difficulties, we easily become upset and angry. When anger arises our practice is disturbed, and we are unable to engage in it properly. So the main point here is that we need to practise patience, particularly the patience that willingly endures hardship and suffering.

As the teachings clearly explain, one of the main requirements for practising love and compassion is patience. Conversely, without developing patience it would be quite impossible to develop a true sense of love and compassion. If we have been nice and kind to someone, we know from experience that as soon as they start to become unappreciative, or if we feel they are taking advantage of us, we become less enthusiastic about helping them. In fact we may become upset and annoyed with that person. That is because without patience, it is very easy for us to become upset with the very person we intended to help!

3.2.1.1.2.3. Rightness of making effort for the sake of great bliss; wrongness of being attached to small pleasures

With this heading alone Gyaltsab Je, the author of the commentary, actually highlights two essential points:

- ∞ It is right and reasonable to make an effort to create a cause that brings about great personal bliss.
- ∞ It is wrong to become attached to small pleasures.

The rightness of making effort for the sake of great bliss relates to the bliss of liberation, or, best of all, the bliss of enlightenment. Whereas the *wrongness of being attached to small pleasures* refers to the fleeting pleasures of samsara, otherwise called the contaminated pleasures, which we experience with our five senses. In our normal mundane life, we place so much importance on these pleasures, and we put all our time and energy into striving to experience them, while totally neglecting the causes for greater pleasure in the future.

In fact, the very pursuit of the samsaric or worldly pleasures is merely a means to create negative karma. It is right for us to contemplate this, as we all have faith in karma. As explained in the teachings on karma, as well as by the Buddha himself in the sutras, we must be very cautious about not creating even the smallest negative karmas, while endeavouring to create even the smallest of virtues. The Buddha used the analogy of an ember thrown into a haystack to explain why we must be careful to avoid even the smallest negative karma, as it can bring about tremendous suffering and negative results in the future. If thrown into a huge haystack even a spark can cause a great fire. Likewise, creating even a small amount of merit can result in creating great positive results in the future. Here the analogy used is collecting small drops of water. Even though it is only one small drop at a time, the ultimate result is a big container full of water.

The essential point to derive from this explanation is that we definitely need to train our minds to embrace hardships and difficulties and not become too attached to fleeting worldly pleasures. Allowing ourselves to be influenced by the pursuit of worldly pleasures will be a cause for us to create tremendous negative karma, the results of which we do not wish to experience. On the other hand, willingly enduring hardships and difficulties is a cause for the experience of great bliss in the future. We need to remember that there are no accounts of masters who obtained great realisations through enjoying sensual pleasures, but there are many accounts of masters who have gained realisations through enduring hardships and difficulties.

We need to be really careful that our interest in the Dharma really does bear fruit. We may assume that we are Dharma students or practitioners, but if we shun any practice that involves hardship and difficulty, while willingly embracing the fleeting samsaric pleasures, we are distancing ourselves from the ultimate goals of liberation and enlightenment. Just considering ourselves or others as Dharma practitioners, doesn't mean that we automatically move closer to liberation and enlightenment, especially if we don't actually engage in the practices. Very simply, the advice here is not to give up something big for the sake of something small. Anyone can relate to that! In a worldly context, if you advise someone to be cautious, saying, 'If you do this, you might lose something really big for the sake of something small' then everyone would agree with this reasonable advice. Basically, the point here is not to give up on the end result, which is the bliss of liberation and enlightenment, for the sake of small fleeting worldly pleasures.

The first verse under this heading reads:

**375. *If through relinquishing small pleasures
There is extensive happiness later,***

*Seeing the greater happiness
The resolute should relinquish small pleasures.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

If through relinquishing small pleasures now, one can see that there is extensive happiness later, seeing greater happiness of liberation for oneself and others, the resolute bodhisattvas should relinquish small pleasures.

It is through *relinquishing small pleasures now*, that one can see greater *extensive happiness* in the future. The practice of *resolute bodhisattvas* is for the *greater happiness of liberation for oneself and others*. So the advice to those who wish to practise as a bodhisattva is to willingly relinquish small pleasures now. This implies that we need to endure the small hardships experienced in every day life. For example, we may feel 'Oh don't think I can do my commitments and prayers today, because I have a headache'. If we find it easy to give up our practice because of a small difficulty, then we need to question the integrity of our Dharma practice.

The next verse reads:

**376. *If such things cannot be borne,
Then doctors giving distasteful medicines
Would disappear. It is not [reasonable]
To forsake [great pleasure for the small].***

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

If such, relinquishing small pleasures now *cannot be borne* for the sake of greater happiness, *then doctors giving distasteful medicines would disappear*. Thus, it is not reasonable to dislike and forsake great pleasure for the small.

If one holds onto an attitude of not *relinquishing small pleasures* for the sake of greater happiness in the future, then in a worldly context *doctors* would be out of business, because they would not be asked to prescribe any treatment or *medicine*. For those of you who have not experienced it, some Tibetan medicine tastes very bitter, some is very sour and others seem to be very astringent. Despite being so *distasteful*, these *medicines* are willingly taken when prescribed, in the knowledge that they will help to relieve greater suffering from a more severe illness. We need to understand that this is also true with the practice of Dharma.

The next verse related to this heading reads:

**377. *Sometimes what is thought harmful
Is regarded as helpful by the wise.
General rules and their exceptions
Are commended in all treatises.***

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Furthermore, *sometimes what is thought harmful* by inferior beings, *is regarded by the wise as helpful* when engaging in bodhisattva deeds. Thus, don't forsake great pleasure for the sake of minor sufferings.

If you say: This goes against the quote from the sutras, 'because it is the nature of suffering, one must completely abandon it'.

[Response] In general this is true but with the exception of bodhisattvas whose reason for remaining in samsara is because it is the sole cause for the happiness of self and others. *General rules and their exceptions are commended in all treatises*, thus you must be wise in understanding the distinction between the two.

This explanation is quite clear, so we don't need to elaborate on it too much. One of the main points is that in many *treatises*, there are explanations of *general rules, and exceptions* when it is for a greater purpose. We need to understand that

we shouldn't take everything too literally, as there are times when something that is otherwise not permitted, will, under the proper conditions, serve a greater purpose.

3.2.1.1.2.4. Suitability of liking the Great Vehicle

Having earlier explained that it is not suitable to despise the Great Vehicle, the text now explains the suitability of actually liking the Great Vehicle.

The relevant verse reads:

**378. *Who with intelligence would deride
The explanation in the Great Vehicle
Of deeds motivated by compassion
And of stainless wisdom!***

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je further elaborates on the meaning of this verse:

The Great Vehicle's scriptures present the complete *deeds* of bodhisattvas, who are *motivated by compassion* wishing all living beings to be free from suffering, and the complete presentation of the *stainless wisdom* realising emptiness. Thus, *who with intelligence would deride the explanation in the Great Vehicle?* It is not appropriate to do so, for the complete method for obtaining unsurpassable enlightenment is presented in the Great Vehicle while it is not presented in the Lower Vehicle.

These points are elaborated later on, however as clearly explained here, *the Great Vehicle's scriptures* (the Mahayana teachings) *present the complete deeds* of the *bodhisattvas* who are *motivated by compassion* wishing all living beings to be free from suffering. Furthermore, the Great Vehicle is *the complete presentation of the stainless wisdom*, which is the wisdom *realising emptiness*. Thus, as explained here, how could someone who is wise and intelligent possibly *deride the explanation of the Great Vehicle?* *It is not appropriate to do so.*

3.2.1.1.2.5. Summation

The summary verse referring:

**379. *Feeling inadequate about its great extent and
profound depth
Untrained beings – foes of themselves and others –
Nowadays deride the Great Vehicle
Because of bewilderment.***

Gyaltsab Je's explanation reads:

Feeling inadequate or disheartened about the *great extent* of the bodhisattva deeds, and generating fear when merely hearing about the *profound depth* of emptiness, beings have, in the past, deprecated the Great Vehicle because they were *untrained*. This deprecation is the *greatest foe of themselves and others* who, even *nowadays, deride the Great Vehicle due to the bewilderment* of this foe.

As clearly explained here, it is definitely inappropriate to deride the bodhisattvas' deeds. Those who do so, do it out of feeling disheartened, and unable to imagine engaging in such deeds themselves. Deriding the Great Vehicle comes about as a result of feeling disheartened, because of the great extent of the bodhisattvas' deeds.

The bodhisattvas' deeds are all motivated by great compassion, wishing all beings to be free from suffering, so one can easily feel disheartened about the great extent of the bodhisattvas' deeds. Also, rather than being able to appreciate and understand the view of emptiness, some people feel fearful just hearing about the profound depth of emptiness, or even just hearing the word 'emptiness'. In the past, beings like this have despised or deprecated the Great

Vehicle, because of their untrained minds. So *this deprecation is the greatest foe of themselves and others.*

Those with an untrained mind, who deride the unimaginable and incredible qualities of the scriptures of the Great Vehicle as well as those who practise the Great Vehicle, create very heavy negative karma for themselves. So that deprecation, which is a cause for such negative karma to be created, is their ultimate foe or enemy. One may habitually retain that mind of deriding the Great Vehicle, *due to the bewilderment of this foe.* Thus, due to the foe of bewilderment or ignorance, one deprecates the Great Vehicle.

As I emphasised in our last session, it is extremely dangerous for us to assume that others have faults when we cannot see their inner qualities. As mentioned here, deprecation, whether it is part of the doctrine of others or enacted by individual beings, is the greatest and worst enemy of all. So we should be cautious about seeing faults in someone.

3.2.1.2. PROVING THAT THE GREAT VEHICLE SCRIPTURES ARE THE WORD OF BUDDHA

This has three sub-divisions:

3.2.1.2.1. Deeds of the six perfections

3.2.1.2.2. Necessity of knowing the complete path of great enlightenment from the Great Vehicle scriptures

3.2.1.2.3. Necessity of knowing the great nature of a Buddha from the Great Vehicle which therefore is the word of Buddha

3.2.1.2.1. Deeds of the six perfections

This section is further sub-divided into three:

3.2.1.2.1.1. Not the slightest bad explanation in the scriptures of the Great Vehicle

3.2.1.2.1.2. The aims of the Great Vehicle are taught in the Great Vehicle scriptures

3.2.1.2.1.3. Therefore, those scriptures are proved to be the word of Buddha

3.2.1.2.1.1. Not the slightest bad explanation in the scriptures of the Great Vehicle

This heading is directly derived from the root text, the words of Nagarjuna, an unequalled great master, who wrote with so much depth and wisdom. As we accept Nagarjuna's own words as the truth, we cannot doubt his proof of the validity of the Great Vehicle scriptures. It is hard for us to fathom the great practice and depth of wisdom of such great masters as Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti.

At this point it is good to note that another commentary on the Great Vehicle describes Nagarjuna as a trail-blazer, because he revived the teachings of the Great Vehicle. His teachings are clearly revisiting and proving the validity of the Great Vehicle teachings. In this text Nagarjuna is presenting the Great Vehicle to counter the hearers and others of the Lower Vehicle of that time, who denounced the Great Vehicle doctrine as a valid expression of the Buddha's teaching.

So in this text, Nagarjuna clearly establishes the Great Vehicle or the Mahayana teachings as being the Buddha's word. Masters of later generations revere Nagarjuna as having been extremely kind, because he so clearly presented the Buddha's ultimate intentions, as expressed in the Great Vehicle. Because they are so clearly presented, they are very accessible to us and easy to understand. So all later masters unanimously agree that Nagarjuna was not only a learned

and great master himself, but also extremely kind in working so hard to present these teachings so clearly.

The relevant verse is:

**380. *The Great Vehicle has a nature
Of giving, ethics, patience, effort,
Concentration, wisdom, and compassion.
Hence how could there be any bad explanations
in it?***

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of this verse thus:

If asked: *How could there be any bad explanation in the Great Vehicle's scriptures?*

[Response] There are none whatsoever, because *the Great Vehicle has a nature of giving, ethics, patience, effort, concentration, wisdom*, which are the six perfections; *and the basis of these great deeds, the awakening mind whose cause is compassion.* These were fully explained by the Buddha in the scriptures of the Great Vehicle.

The six perfections, listed here as *giving, ethics, patience, effort, concentration and wisdom* are the deeds of a bodhisattva, and *the basis of these great deeds is the awakening mind or bodhicitta.* As you will recall, *compassion is the substantial cause of the awakening mind.*

The deeds and the state of mind that prompts those deeds, which is the awakening mind, are *fully explained by the Buddha in the scriptures of the Great Vehicle.* Thus, as explained here there can be no *bad explanations* at all and so the explanations are perfectly acceptable. Again and again the teachings explain a bodhisattva as a noble being whose state of mind is that of an awakening mind, and whose deeds to benefit others are carried out in the form of the six perfections. So the deeds are the six perfections, and the attitude that motivates those deeds is the awakening mind or bodhicitta.

The results of those practices are presented in the following verses.

Geshe-la: Now, can you give a definition of the perfection of generosity?

Student: A mind wishing to give, motivated by bodhicitta combined with the Mahayana dedication.

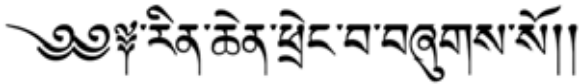
That is correct. So the basis of these practices of the six perfections is bodhicitta. An intention to give is not necessarily the perfection of giving, because it is not necessarily based upon the awakening mind or bodhicitta attitude. So, for giving or generosity to be a perfection, it has to be complemented with the bodhicitta motivation and dedication.

The six perfections are presented as causes for enlightenment, and in order for a deed to become a cause for enlightenment, it has to be based upon the awakening mind. Without the basis of an awakening mind, the aspiration for enlightenment will be missing. And if the aspiration for enlightenment is missing the deed cannot become a cause for enlightenment. That is how we need to understand it.

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Edited Version*

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Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga
Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

10 April 2011

With a motivation generated from the meaning of the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* that we have just recited, we can engage in the practice of meditation. [meditation]

Now we can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the sake of benefitting all sentient beings, to remove all suffering and bring them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose, I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

3.2.1.2. PROVING THAT THE GREAT VEHICLE SCRIPTURES ARE THE WORD OF BUDDHA

3.2.1.2.1. Deeds of the six perfections (cont.)

3.2.1.2.1.2. The aims of the Great Vehicle are taught in the Great Vehicle scriptures

The verse relating to this heading is:

381. *Others aims are [achieved] through giving and ethics.*

One's own are [achieved] through patience and effort.

Concentration and wisdom are causes of liberation.

These epitomise the sense of the Great Vehicle.

Here, the aim of practising each of the six perfections of the Great Vehicle is presented in terms of their accomplishments. Although the commentary will further explain the aims of the six perfections, you also need to have a general idea of how the six perfections assist a bodhisattva to complete their deed of benefitting other sentient beings.

It is said the bodhisattvas make the vow to remain in samsara to benefit other sentient beings. Thus, it is due to their aspirations and prayers that they intentionally remain in samsara, and not because of afflictions and delusions.

- ∞ In order to be able to practise the Dharma, generate the paths and benefit other sentient beings, one needs to have a life that is intact with the eight freedoms and ten endowments. These are obtained through the practice of morality, which is the first perfection.
- ∞ However, it is not sufficient just to have good physical conditions. One also needs to have adequate external conditions such as having sufficient means in order to sustain one's practice on the path. These are obtained through the practice of generosity.
- ∞ Furthermore, one needs to have a good retinue of followers in order to benefit others, and that is obtained through the practice of patience.
- ∞ Then, in order to engage in practice to accomplish the aims of oneself and others, one needs to have joyous effort.
- ∞ In order to ensure that the practice and accomplishments of the first four perfections do not become causes for delusions to be generated in one's mind, one needs to protect one's mind. This can be done by developing stable concentration on a virtuous

object. Thus the perfection of concentration helps one to not be overwhelmed by the delusions.

- ∞ Lastly, with the aid of the perfection of wisdom, one will be completely liberated and freed one from the grip of the delusions.

So the last two perfections ensure that the first four perfections are not corrupted or stained by delusions.

Earlier, the text advised us to use this life as means to further accumulate merit, rather than use up what we have already accumulated. The text that we studied during the recent Easter Retreat also indicated that now is the time for us to utilise our existing merit and virtue to accumulate even more virtue. It is not the time to use up all our good karma and thus completely waste it. What is being explained here is also in line with that advice. We need to utilise whatever merit and virtue we already have as a means to accumulate further virtue, in order to secure perfect conditions for our next life, which will enable us to continue practising the Dharma. That is how we need to understand this advice.

The way to accumulate sufficient virtue and merit to secure good physical conditions in a future life is the practice of **morality**.

We know, from our own experience, that without sufficient resources it is very difficult for us to maintain our practice, let alone benefitting others. Thus we need to have sufficient resources, thus the practice of **generosity**, will secure such resources in the next life.

We also need to have assistants, companions and so forth (described in the teachings as a retinue) for our study and practice, and for that we need **patience**. Other results achieved through the practice of patience include having a sound body, good features, a good complexion and so forth.

However just having those conditions alone are not sufficient, as we might fall victim to laziness. We know all too well how easy it is to fall victim to the laziness of procrastination, when we think, 'I'll do it later on', or when we feel overwhelmed, and think, 'Oh, I'm not able to do this practice, so why bother?'. Such laziness can consume us to a point where we do not actually engage in Dharma practice. So we need to apply **joyous effort** to ensure we are diligent with our practice of Dharma and meditation.

Yet when we accumulate all of those conditions, such as having a good sound body, sufficient wealth and a good retinue, it is all too easy for those very conditions to become a means for delusions to arise in the mind. Thus, through attachment we may waste those very good conditions. Here, **concentration** helps us to withdraw from the delusions by focusing on a virtuous object.

Finally, it is by developing **wisdom**, in particular, the wisdom of special insight based upon focussing on emptiness that we will be thoroughly released from the delusions. Here, we need to understand that developing calm abiding through concentration and developing special insight are equally important, as it is through the union of calm abiding and special insight that we will be completely released from the delusions.

It is really important to gain a personal understanding of how the six perfections help us to develop and transform ourselves. The six perfections serve as specific antidotes for overcoming specific delusions or faults in our mind. Morality helps to protect us from unethical and immoral behaviour; generosity protects us from the fault of miserliness; patience protects us from anger; joyous effort

protects us from laziness; concentration protects us from deluded distractions; and wisdom protects us from corrupt wisdom.

It is good for us to understand how all of the bodhisattva deeds are contained within the six perfections. Bodhisattvas' deeds can be categorised into two:

- ∞ The deeds that are done to fulfil the aims of others, also called the purpose of others.
- ∞ The deeds that are done in order to fulfil one's own aims, also called one's own purpose.

The first three of the six perfections, morality, generosity and patience, are deeds to accomplish others purpose. The last two, concentration and wisdom, are said to be primarily for fulfilling one's own purpose. The fourth, which is the perfection of joyous effort, is applied to serving both one's own purpose and the purpose of others.

It is quite clear that by practising morality and observing ethics, one is refraining from harming other beings, so that serves the purpose of others. Likewise, there is no question that generosity is a way to benefit others; as is practising patience by not retaliating when others inflict harm upon oneself.

However, when one is in deep concentration, i.e. meditating on emptiness, one may not be directly engaged in benefitting others. So in that sense, cultivating concentration and wisdom is for the purpose of further enhancing one's own practices and realisations.

And, lest we fall victim to laziness, we need to have joyous effort so we can serve the purpose of others, and accomplish one's own purpose.

This is how bodhisattvas engage in their deeds with the practices along the path leading to enlightenment. Another way to refer to the bodhisattvas deeds is that the practice of the six perfections is primarily a means to develop oneself, and enacting the four means of gathering disciples is a means to benefit others.

We need to further understand that these practices are a sequential step-by-step process, and are thus developed gradually—otherwise we might become overwhelmed. Whatever our level right now, observing just one aspect of morality at the beginning, will become a means to develop our mind further to observe two points of morality, and in that way our practice of morality will naturally increase. With respect to generosity, no teaching suggests we give away all our wealth and possessions right now. Rather, first we need to develop a mind wishing to give, and then based on the genuine wish to give, we gradually begin by giving away small material objects, which serves as the basis to engage in further great acts of generosity.

The teachings tell us that the great bodhisattvas who eventually become buddhas did not engage in these practices all at once! They all started with modest beginnings and gradually progressed. We need to relate this to whatever practice that we are engaged in. We all have a certain level of morality and observe ethical standards, which means that we already possess the virtues of ethics and morality. Another virtue that we already possess is generosity, and thus we practise generosity in accordance with our capacity. Furthermore, we all have a certain level of patience and joyous effort, as well as concentration. We may not have yet developed single-pointed concentration, however we are all making the attempt to meditate and practise, and it is the same with developing wisdom.

So we can encourage ourselves by acknowledging that we are already engaged in some level of these practices now. We also have the potential to further enhance our practice on the basis of what we already possess. Thus we need to further develop our practices so that they become perfections. We need to transform whatever level of morality or generosity that we have now into the perfection of morality and the perfection of generosity. In order to do that, we need to develop bodhicitta or the awakening mind.

It is this precious mind that ensures our practice becomes a perfection, and the awakening mind is based upon having developed an altruistic intention of personally taking responsibility to benefit other sentient beings. So that altruistic intention is the state of mind that immediately precedes bodhicitta or the awakening mind.

In order to develop an altruistic mind or special intention, we need to develop great compassion, which is dependent upon developing the heart-warming love or great love. That in turn is dependent on the wish to repay the kindness of sentient beings; which is based upon remembering the kindness of sentient beings; which is based upon recognising all mothers as having been one's mother; which is based upon developing an unbiased state of mind of equilibrium.

This sequence runs from the result to the cause. We can also think of it from the causal aspect, where causes lead on to the ultimate effects. Interchanging the causal sequences with the resultant sequence is very effective to further enhance our understanding and transform and develop our minds. Merely thinking about these points and reflecting on them makes our minds joyful and happy.

However we don't stop there, we go further into the causes for reaching the point of equilibrium of an unbiased state of mind. First of all, we develop a keen wish and interest in being free from suffering. In order to develop that uncontrived aspiration to be free from suffering, we need to develop renunciation. So we contemplate the importance of renunciation. Then, in order to develop renunciation, we need to clearly recognise the faults of samsara. We need to see how the worldly pleasures lack any essence, and that they will not last. Thinking about the faults of worldly pleasures will lead us to recognise the consequences of engaging and indulging in such pleasures, and to think about the karmic aspects. That is, in turn, based on recognising that one has a precious human rebirth now, which doesn't last, and shouldn't be wasted. So in this way we meditate on that precious rebirth. The understanding of all this depends on having a perfect teacher, who teaches us these unmistakable methods and how to develop them.

We need to rely on this progress from the resultant stage to the causes for our practice. Then, having progressed from the causal levels up to the effects, and developed bodhicitta or the awakening mind, we need to contemplate the process that leads us to enlightenment. We need to reflect on all of the stages of the paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, and meditation, culminating in the ten grounds of the bodhisattva on the path of no-more learning¹. In this way, one gains a glimpse of the path, which leaves a positive imprint on the mind, and reminds us of what our ultimate goal is. So this practice is a very meaningful one.

¹ A comprehensive account of these stages and paths is found in the teachings of 13 November 2011, and 20 November 2001, at the end of the teachings on tenets.

With respect to verse 381 Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

In relation to their resultant accomplishment, *giving and ethics* establishes the body and wealth of a high status; thus temporarily they are for the sake of *other's aims*. While temporarily, *one's own aim* is established through *patience and effort*. *Concentration and wisdom*, as stated in the *Samyak-samgraha Sutra*, 'when the mind is placed in meditative equipoise, all will be known just as it is', thus they are *causes of liberation*.

Here, *concentration and wisdom* are explained as ways to develop *one's own aims*. As mentioned previously, these two are based upon first developing calm abiding, and then, having developed calm abiding, focussing on emptiness. When, on the basis of sound concentration, one develops physical and mental pliancy and the physical and mental bliss associated with pliancy, one has developed calm abiding. The specific characteristic of calm abiding is when one develops physical and mental pliancy and the bliss that comes along with that. Then having developed calm abiding, special insight is used to further enhance one's understanding of emptiness. When one has developed the union of special insight and calm abiding then one has actually developed the perfections of concentration and wisdom. As explained earlier, it is on the basis of the union of calm abiding and wisdom that liberation is achieved.

Gyaltsab Je concludes his commentary on this verse with:

These six perfections epitomise the sense of the Great Vehicle. Thus, if you apprehend the meaning of this, you apprehend the meaning of the Great Vehicle and if you apprehend the words of this, you apprehend the words of the Great Vehicle.

The essence, in brief, is when that one understands *the words of the Great Vehicle*, one has understood the intent or *the meaning of the Great Vehicle*.

3.2.1.2.1.3. Therefore, those scriptures are proved to be the word of Buddha

Here, 'scriptures' refers to the Great Vehicle scriptures.

The relevant verse reads:

382. *The aims of benefiting oneself and others and the meaning of liberation
As briefly taught by the Buddha [in the hearers vehicle]
Are contained in the six perfections.
Therefore these [scriptures of the Great Vehicle]
are the word of Buddha.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

The temporary aims of benefiting oneself and others, as well as the meaning of liberation as briefly taught by the Buddha in the Hearers' Vehicle, are contained in the six perfections even more extensively. Therefore these scriptures of the Great Vehicle are the word of Buddha.

The teachings and practices that are presented in the Hearers Vehicle are also presented in the Great Vehicle—nothing is left out or missing. In fact, the Great Vehicle has more extensive explanations. So, in lay terms, the question is: For what reason do despise and denounce the Great Vehicle, when it is clear that is the word of the Buddha?

3.2.1.2.2. Necessity of knowing the complete path of great enlightenment from the Great Vehicle scriptures

This section explains the necessity of knowing the complete path to enlightenment, according to the scriptures of the Great Vehicle.

The relevant verse is:

383. *Those blind with ignorance cannot stand
This Great Vehicle where buddhas taught
The great path of enlightenment
Consisting of merit and wisdom.*

Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of this verse as follows:

Those who are blind with ignorance, not knowing the extensive nature of the two collections cannot stand this Great Vehicle where Buddha taught the great path, to obtain unsurpassable enlightenment, consisting of the two collections of merit and wisdom.

The Great Vehicle has an extensive presentation of the two collections, but *those who are blind with ignorance* fail to recognise that, and despise and denounce the Great Vehicle.

As explained in the commentary, the cause for *unsurpassable enlightenment* is the *two collections*—the collections of *merit and wisdom*. One needs to understand that the collection of merit is a cause for the form body of the Buddha, while the collection of wisdom is a cause for the wisdom body of the Buddha.

The six perfections are a more extensive way of understanding the two collections. The first four, morality, generosity, patience and joyous effort are the means to accumulate merit, and are thus the causes for developing the Buddha's form body. Concentration is an auxiliary cause that is sometimes categorised as belonging in the first four perfections are a cause for a form body. However it can be also understood as being the cause for developing the wisdom body of the Buddha. In this way we can understand the whole structure of the path to enlightenment, which is:

- ∞ The **basis** is the Two Truths.
- ∞ The **path** is condensed into the two collections of merit and wisdom.
- ∞ The **result** is the two bodies of the Buddha (the form body and the wisdom body).

As was explained extensively in the teachings on the *Four Hundred Verses*, the six perfections can be categorised in the context of the Two Truths; the paths of the first five perfections are based on conventional truth, and the perfection of wisdom is a path based upon the ultimate truth.

3.2.1.2.3. Necessity of knowing the great nature of a buddha from the Great Vehicle which therefore is the word of Buddha

This is sub-divided into three:

3.2.1.2.3.1. Limitless causes of the form body are explained in the Great Vehicle

3.2.1.2.3.2. Knowledge of extinction described in the Lesser Vehicle and extinction and no production described in the Great Vehicle have the same meaning of the realisation of emptiness

3.2.1.2.3.3. If the meaning of the Great Vehicle is not understood, it is right to be indifferent toward it but not to despise it

We can see from this the extremely profound nature of the advice that is being presented in this section of the text, which we can take as personal instruction for ourselves.

3.2.1.2.3.1. Limitless causes of the form body are explained in the Great Vehicle

There are two verses relating to this, the first of which is:

384. Conquerors are said to have inconceivable good qualities

Because the [causal] good qualities are inconceivable like the sky.

Therefore let this great nature of a Buddha Explained in the Great Vehicle be allowed.

We can relate this verse to the qualities of the Buddha, which were extensively explained earlier in the text. The thirty-two major marks were explained in detail, with a briefer explanation of the eighty-two minor marks.² The text itself says, 'Fearing it will take too much time, I will just explain briefly', so the eighty-two minor marks were covered in one verse!

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

At the time of achieving the optimum result, conquerors are said to have inconceivable good qualities because the casual good qualities are inconceivable like the sky.

At this point we should remember that, as mentioned earlier, we need to rely on whatever small qualities we have now as a basis to achieve the great qualities of enlightenment.

The qualities of the Buddha are amazing: the magnificence of his physical features, the magnificence of his speech and the magnificence of his mind are just *inconceivable*. The analogy is that the Buddha's qualities are as vast as *the sky*. However they didn't materialise just out of nothing and suddenly appear. Rather they were dependent on specific causes, which were accumulated before the Buddha became enlightened. He began the process of creating the causes for those qualities when he was an ordinary being.

We can apply the causes of the Buddha's achievement to our own level. When he started to accumulate the causes for the inconceivable qualities that he now possesses, the Buddha was just like us—an ordinary being. When we reflect upon the qualities of the Buddha in this way we see their relevance for our own practice.

The remainder of the commentary on this verse reads:

Therefore let this great nature of a Buddha explained by the Conqueror in the Great Vehicle be borne and allowed.

The next verse further explains the qualities of the Buddha:

385. Even [Buddha's] ethics were beyond

The scope of Shariputra.

So why is the inconceivable great nature Of a Buddha not accepted?

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse, which is very clear:

If asked: Why is it inconceivable?

[Response] When the Conqueror had asked Shariputra 'Do you know the extent of the Buddha's limitless qualities such as the component of moral discipline?', Arya *Shariputra* responded, 'Let alone knowing the extent of the limitless qualities of the Buddha, even the ethics are beyond my scope'. *So why is the inconceivable great nature of Buddha not accepted?* One can believe in Buddha's inconceivable qualities, for without previously creating limitless causes,

limitless results cannot arise. Thus, because the Buddha has limitless qualities, their causes, which are the two collections, are limitless, and these are presented in the Great Vehicle scriptures. Therefore these must definitely be accepted as the Buddha's word.

We can conclude here for this evening.

Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett

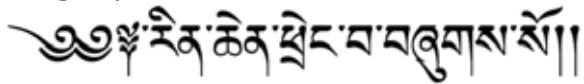
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

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² Teachings of 5 April 2011, 12 April 2011, 19 April 2011 and 10 May 2011.

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

17 April 2012

As usual we can do the meditation. From the depth of our heart we first generate our motivation, in accordance with the meaning of the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*. With this appropriate motivation intact we can now engage in the meditation practice. [meditation]

Let us now generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines: To benefit all sentient beings I need to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, and in order to do that I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

In relation to the meditation practice, as we recite the line 'And thus, O venerable compassionate gurus, we seek your blessings' the visualisation can be the one described in the guru yoga practice, i.e. to visualise Lama Tsong Khapa, Buddha Shakyamuni and Vajradhara combined into one. As the manifestation of one's own guru, we visualise Lama Tsong Khapa, and at his heart is Buddha Shakyamuni and at the heart of Buddha Shakyamuni is Vajradhara. Thus, we make requests and receive their blessings to be able to do the *tong len* practice of giving and taking. In a simpler form, we can visualise Buddha Shakyamuni, who is the supreme Guru embodying every aspect of the guru. As mentioned in the *Thirty-five Buddhas Confession Prayer*, the supreme Guru is more supreme than the supreme, and higher than the highest.

3.2.1.2.3.2. Knowledge of extinction described in the Lesser Vehicle and extinction and no production described in the Great Vehicle have the same meaning of the realisation of emptiness

Gyaltsab Je's begins his commentary on verse 386 with this introduction to the verse:

Because knowledge of extinction described in the Lesser Vehicle and extinction and no production described in the Great Vehicle have the same meaning of the realisation of emptiness,...

In the context of the *Lower Vehicle*, knowledge of extinction refers to the extinction of all delusions and causes of samsara, by reaching the state of nirvana. In the *Great Vehicle*, extinction, no production and so forth have the same meaning, in that they refer to understanding emptiness.

Next the commentary states:

...a commentary on *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning* quotes from a Mahayana sutra:...

The commentary on Nagarjuna's *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning* might have been composed by Nagarjuna himself. I'm not entirely sure about this, but amongst the works of Nagarjuna there is a self-commentary, which I

think is for the *Sixty Stanzas*. I may even have that text, but I haven't had time to read it on this occasion. The commentary on the *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning* quotes from a Mahayana sutra as follows:

This, which is complete abandonment of these sufferings, definite abandonment, purification, extinction, separation from desire, cessation, thorough pacification, disappearance, non-connection to other suffering, non-arising, and non-production is peace, is auspiciousness. It is like this: the definite abandonment of all aggregates, the extinction of cyclic existence, freedom from desire, cessation, nirvana.

Again, in another sutra it says:

All birth is extinguished, abiding in pure conduct, all activities have been performed, and no other existence is known.

When the meaning of the above is condensed, it is, as stated in the *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning*, 'what is extinction?' ...and so forth.

So the *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning* explains the meaning of these quotes and that explanation is presented by Gyaltsab Je in his commentary:

Thus, when a Lesser Vehicle trainee obtains the state of an arhat and thinks 'I have extinguished all rebirths', this has to be definitely understood in the context of the extinction of non-inherent rebirths.

When the Lesser Vehicle trainee obtains the state of an arhat indicates that having followed the path, and reached their ultimate goal of liberation and obtained the state of an arhat, the Lower Vehicle trainee thinks, 'I have extinguished all rebirths', which refers to achieving a state of cessation of suffering. However, as explained here, this definitely has to be understood in the context of the extinction of non-inherent rebirths. Thus the extinction of rebirths is understood as being the extinction of non-inherent rebirths i.e. rebirths that are free from inherent existence. So the meaning of emptiness is definitely applied to the Lower Vehicle scriptures as well.

Then Gyaltsab Je continues:

Otherwise it contradicts the meaning of the earlier quote of the sutra.

In other words, when the sutra says that it is definite abandonment, purification, extinction, cessation, thorough pacification and so forth, it is indicating the extinction of non-inherent rebirths.

Gyaltsab Je then goes on to explain:

It should not be understood as merely the extinction of rebirth between lives in cyclic existence,...

This indicates that while achieving the state of an arhat is indeed an extinction of rebirth, it should not be understood as being merely an extinction of rebirth, lacking the characteristic of being an extinction of an inherently existent rebirth. Such an interpretation does not carry the full meaning of the extinction of rebirth.

As the commentary continues:

... for even during the time as a remainder-arhat, the meaning of extinction of rebirth is to be applied.

With respect to the term *remainder-arhat* there is a distinction between the highest Prasangika School's explanation of what remainder and non-remainder mean, as opposed to the explanation of the lower schools.

According to the lower Buddhist schools, 'remainder' indicates a remainder of the contaminated aggregates, which are in the nature of suffering. So, achieving the state of a remainder-arhat means still having the remainder of the contaminated aggregates; whereas non-remainder refers to having completely abandoned the contaminated physical aggregate.

In the Prasangika presentation, a remainder-arhat refers to an arhat who is in the post-meditative state; whereas a non-remainder-arhat is an arhat who is in meditative equipoise. According to the Prasangika School, remainder refers to having the appearance of inherent existence. Thus, for an arhat who is in the post-meditative state, and not in meditative equipoise, there is still an appearance of true existence. However when that arhat goes into the meditative state, even the appearance of inherent existence completely ceases, and so they are a non-remainder arhat at that point.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Thus, in the sutra's quote *this* indicates a close proximity and *non-connection to other suffering* all the way up to *nirvana*, indicates the extinction of rebirth in samsara.

When the sutra says, *This, which is complete abandonment of these sufferings, these sufferings* relate to both remainder and non-remainder arhats, and thus to having extinguished future rebirths in samsara. This is a further indication that an extinction of rebirths has to be understood as a non-inherent extinction of rebirths, rather than the mere extinction of rebirths.

There is also a significant distinction between Prasangika presentation of how the state of remainder and non-remainder are obtained, and that of the lower schools. According to the Prasangika, the sequence is that a trainee on the path first obtains the state of a non-remainder-arhat, which is obtained in meditative equipoise. In a state of single-pointed meditative equipoise on emptiness, there is no dualistic appearance at all, thus no appearance of inherent existence and that is why they are called a non-remainder arhat. Whereas when they come out of that meditative equipoise, there will still be the appearance of true or inherent existence. So even though they are an arhat, they are referred to as a remainder-arhat, because they still have the remainder of the appearance of inherent or true existence.

According to the lower schools, remainder and non-remainder are, as mentioned earlier, understood in relation to the physical contaminated aggregates. When the trainee on the Lower Vehicle obtains arhatship, they first obtain the cessation of suffering while they are still in their physical body, meaning they still have the contaminated aggregates. So while they still have that

physical body they are called a remainder-arhat, and when they abandon that body, i.e. after passing away, they reach a state of being a non-remainder arhat in which all future rebirths in samsara have ceased.

Of the lower schools, the Vaibhashika assert that Buddha Shakyamuni's body is still a contaminated body which is in the nature of suffering, because it is a body that is propelled by previous karma and delusions. According to the Vaibhashika system, when the Buddha passed into nirvana he completely ceased taking rebirth in samsara. They consider that extinction a complete state of nirvana or peace, and that is why they adhere to the view that the Buddha does not return to this world.

As I have explained on many occasions in previous teachings, according to the Prasangika, cessation refers to the ultimate nature of the mind, which is the emptiness of the mind. When, through meditation, one gains an understanding of the ultimate nature of the mind, one obtains a certain degree of cessation at first. As one gains a more profound understanding and realisation of the emptiness of mind, one obtains higher levels of cessation, leading all the way up to ultimate cessation. That is how cessation is to be understood according to the Prasangika system.

Then Gyaltsab Je raises a query:

If you say: 'This *suffering*' which is a specific term, is applied here to the general, and thus implies the extinction and non-arising of all delusions.

[Response] Although it is necessary to apply the meaning of a general term to a specific meaning if it does not fit into the context of the general meaning. In this case however, there is no contradiction in applying the meaning to the general.

This refers to the cessation of suffering, as was explained earlier.

Now we come to verse 386 which reads:

*386. The absence of production taught in the
Great Vehicle
And the extinction of the others are in fact
the same emptiness
[Since they indicate] the non-existence of
[inherently existent] production and the
extinction [of inherent]
Therefore let [the Great Vehicle] be allowed
[as Buddha's word].*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verse:

Thus, *the absence of inherent production taught in the Great Vehicle and the extinction presented in the other sutras* that you hearers accept as Lesser Vehicle scriptures, *are in fact the same emptiness*, for they both indicate *the non-existence of inherently existent production and the extinction of inherent existence*. Since the meaning of knowledge of extinction is the same, *therefore let the Great Vehicle be allowed as Buddha's words and bear it in mind.*

We can see from the presentation how tactfully Nagarjuna establishes the Great Vehicle as the Buddha's authentic doctrine. He does not impose his presentation on others, demanding that they have to accept it because

it is the Buddha's words. Rather, Nagarjuna skilfully shows that the essential points that are presented in the Mahayana or Great Vehicle do not contradict that which is presented in the Hinayana or Lesser Vehicle scriptures.

When the lack of any contradiction is presented, then, by default, the Great Vehicle also has to be accepted as the Buddha's words. Nagarjuna says that if you adhere to what you believe to be the Buddha's words, as explained in the Lower Vehicle scriptures, then, since the views on emptiness are exactly the same, this proves that the Great Vehicle is the word of the Buddha as well. So, by using profound logic, Nagarjuna proves the validity of the Great Vehicle.

We can see the very tactful way in which Nagarjuna presents his thesis by reasoning, rather than requiring a dogmatic acceptance by the other. His use of systematic reasoning and logic is very useful for us as well. For when we study this text we can get a real understanding of it through its use of reasoning and logic, and we don't have to accept it out of mere faith.

The next verse under this heading reads:

**387. *If emptiness and the great nature of a Buddha
Are viewed in this way with reason,
How could what is taught in the Great
Vehicle and the other
Be unequal for the wise?***

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

If emptiness, which is perceived on the path, and the great nature of a Buddha, which is the embodiment of dharmakaya, are viewed in this way with logical reason, then how could what is taught in the Great Vehicle and the other taught in the Lesser Vehicle be unequal for the wise? There is no reason for it to be unequal but in fact many reasons for them to be the same.

In addition to the earlier logical explanation, this further emphasises that the Great Vehicle and the Lower Vehicle are to be seen as having the same meaning. Both knowledge of extinction as explained in the Lower Vehicle and extinction as explained in the Great Vehicle refer to the same extinction of inherent existence. Because they come to the same point there is every reason to see them as being equal, and no reason to see them as unequal. This presentation very clearly shows that because there would be no logical basis for differentiating the views, it would be an act of absurdity if the Great Vehicle view is not accepted by the other. Not accepting it would, in effect, be a flat declaration, 'I just don't want to accept it'.

3.2.1.2.3.3. If the meaning of the Great Vehicle is not understood, it is right to be indifferent toward it but not to despise it

Having explained that there is no reason to despise the Great Vehicle, the next verse says, 'If you can't accept it, at the very least you should not despise it'.

Here, verse 388 reads:

**388. *What the One Gone Thus taught with a
special intention
Is not easy to understand.
Therefore since he taught one as well as three
vehicles,***

***You should protect yourself through
neutrality***

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Because of the fact that *what the One Gone Thus taught with a special intention is not easy to understand. Therefore he taught one as well as three vehicles.* Since the three were taught with a special intention, you should not deprecate the one. If you don't comprehend the meaning, then it is best to *protect yourself through neutrality.*

On occasions the Buddha would teach *with a special intention*, which indicates that one should not take all his teachings literally, as there can be an implicit meaning in what was presented. For example, in the *Heart Sutra*, when we read the words 'There is no form' we know that the words 'no form' imply that there is no inherently existing form.

Thus, this verse is referring specifically to the Buddha's special intention when *he taught one as well as three vehicles.* It is to be understood that the Buddha's special intention was to lead all beings to the ultimate one goal of the Great Vehicle i.e. full enlightenment or buddhahood. It was with that special intention that the Buddha presented three vehicles. Thus, as the commentary explains *since the three were taught with a special intention, you should not deprecate the one.* This means that one should not deprecate the Great Vehicle, which leads to the ultimate goal. While the Buddha did teach the three vehicles, it was with a special intention leading onto the ultimate goal of one. This is how the Buddha gradually guided his disciples in a very skilful way. As indicated here, it was with these very skilful means that the Buddha gave these teachings as a gradual process leading to the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

From this we can also gain an understanding how, as the teachings mention, developing clairvoyance is one of the means to be able to skilfully help other beings. This is a clear indication that when you have clairvoyance you will know the mental dispositions of others. Thus, you will know how to present something in a way that will help to guide an individual towards a deeper understanding further down the line. So although some method or teaching may seem inappropriate, the clairvoyant will know how to present something in a manner that is most beneficial for particular individuals. Through this the presenter will gradually lead them in the right direction, towards an understanding of the ultimate meaning.

The Lam Rim commentaries use the analogy that just as a bird without wings will not be able to soar into the sky, likewise without clairvoyance, one will not be able to skilfully guide a student or a disciple to enlightenment. Also, in both the *Mandala Offering* and the *Hundreds of Deities of the Land of Joy* prayers we recite the lines, 'Please release a rain of vast and profound Dharma precisely in accordance with the needs of those to be trained'. So even in our prayers we regularly relate to this significant point.

I regularly remind the presenters of the Monday evening meditation sessions to be really mindful of how they present the teachings. They need to be careful not to overload those who attend, lest it further confuses them. You need to take into consideration how those who

attend are coming along with a lot of questions and doubts. You need to remember that when you first began studying the Dharma, your mind was very fragile and not able to cope with too much information at that time. We must always bear that in mind when we present the Dharma to others, and ensure that it is a gradual process.

The second verse in this section is:

**389. *There is no fault with neutrality, but there is fault
From despising it. How could there be virtue?
Therefore those who seek good for themselves
Should not despise the Great Vehicle.***

Even though the verse does not specifically present a query, in effect it is asking: Is there any advantage in remaining neutral? Would there any fault if one despises the Great Vehicle? This verse resolves that sort of doubt or question.

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

There is no fault or negativity with remaining neutral by not doubting, but there is fault or negativity from despising it. How could there be virtue? There is no virtue in fact by despising it! Therefore those who seek good for themselves should be extremely careful, and not despise the Great Vehicle.

As the meaning of the verse is quite clear, Gyaltsab Je emphasises this point as a way of reminding us that we should be extremely careful, because of the gravity of the negativities that one would incur if one were to despise the Great Vehicle. We often find that element of caution about creating great misdeeds in Gyaltsab Je's works.

As Gyaltsab Je states, *There is no virtue in fact by despising it! Therefore those who seek good for themselves should be extremely careful, and not despise the Great Vehicle.* When we decide whether or not to adopt an action, we need to check whether there is any virtue in it. If there is virtue in engaging in the action, then by all means adopt it, but if there is non-virtue and negativity in the action, one who wishes to have goodness will avoid such an action. That is the essential meaning that we need to derive at a personal level.

3.2.1.3. INCOMPLETENESS OF THE PATHS AND FRUITS OF THE GREAT VEHICLE AS EXPLAINED IN THE LESSER VEHICLE SCRIPTURES

The following presentation, as clarified by the subdivisions, is a very significant one. It follows on from the earlier explanation which established that there is no contradiction in the essential meaning of both the Great and Lesser Vehicles. As they are both words of the Buddha, what difference is there between the Lesser and Great Vehicles? The verses in this section of the text are presented in order to resolve that question.

This outline is divided into three sub-divisions:

3.2.1.3.1. The deeds of bodhisattvas are not completely explained in the Lesser Vehicle scriptures

3.2.1.3.2. Buddhahood cannot be achieved through practising just the four noble truths and the auxiliaries to enlightenment

3.2.1.3.3. The Great Vehicle scriptures are suitable to be considered by the wise as the word of Buddha

3.2.1.3.1. The deeds of bodhisattvas are not completely explained in the Lesser Vehicle scriptures

The verse relating to this heading reads:

**390. *Bodhisattvas' aspirational wishes, deeds,
and dedications [of merit]
Were not described in the Hearers' Vehicle.
Therefore how could one become
A bodhisattva through it?***

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of the verse very clearly:

In the Lesser Vehicle scriptures, which describe *the Hearer's Vehicle*, the *bodhisattvas' aspirational wishes, deeds, and dedications of merit* as well as their great compassion, the grounds and the perfections such as generosity, and the extensive collections, *were not described*. They were described in the Great Vehicle scriptures, which are beyond the scope of ordinary beings and hearers and solitary realisers. As these extensive practices are accomplished over three countless eons in order to become a buddha, they were not described in their scriptures, *therefore how could one become a bodhisattva through it?* One cannot do so, since the bodhisattva path is incomplete.

As explained quite clearly, even though there is some explanation of the bodhisattva's deeds presented in the Hearer's Vehicle, the extensive deeds are not described in detail. In the Great Vehicle there is an incredible amount of detail about the grounds and the path of the bodhisattvas; the deeds and the realisations that are obtained at each of the bodhisattva levels are explained in great profundity and detail. So the conclusion is, *how could one become a bodhisattva through it? One cannot do so, since the bodhisattva path is incomplete.* As the presentation in the Hearer Vehicle is incomplete, one could not possibly rely upon that to become a Buddha.

Then, as a link to the next verse, Gyaltsab Je poses a question:

If you say: Since the paths of all three vehicles are presented in the Lesser Vehicle's scriptures, why wouldn't the Great Vehicle not be intact?

The response to this question is found in the next verse.

**391. [In the Hearers Vehicle] Buddha did not explain
The foundations for a bodhisattva's enlightenment.
What greater authority for this subject
Is there other than the Victor?**

As the commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

[Response] In the Hearer Vehicle's scriptures *Buddha did not explain the foundations for a bodhisattva's enlightenment*, because temporarily the Buddha didn't present it to the hearers. It was rather intended for the bodhisattvas' enlightenment, and as a blessing that the Conqueror bestowed the Great Vehicle teaching. *What greater authority for this subject is there other than the Victor?* There isn't. Thus one should not forsake the Great Vehicle's scriptures.

We can derive some significant points from this explanation. First of all, it was not as if *the Buddha didn't present* those explanations in order to deprive the hearers

of that explanation! He didn't give that explanation because they were not yet ready for it. So *temporarily*, it was not presented to them.

Another significant point is that *it was rather intended for the bodhisattvas' enlightenment, and as a blessing the Conqueror bestowed the Great Vehicle teaching*. Where the bodhisattva's path is mentioned in the Lesser Vehicle, is in a form of a blessing for the hearers. Lest explaining it too much will confuse their minds because they are not yet ready for it, the Buddha mentioned the bodhisattva's path in the Lower Vehicle as a form of a blessing, which can also be understood as leaving an imprint on their mind. He did not explain it extensively, because they were not ready for it. That is the full context.

Another significant point from the explanation here is *what greater authority for this subject is there other than the Victor, which is Buddha Shakyamuni?* Since Buddha Shakyamuni presented both the Lesser and Great Vehicles who could have more authority than the presenter, which implies that no one could.

The conclusion is that since there isn't anyone who would know the Buddha's intentions better than the Buddha himself, *thus one should not forsake the Great Vehicle's Scriptures*.

None of this is too obscure; if we just pay a little bit more attention and read the text, we can get the gist of what is being explained. We are really very fortunate to have access to such clear explanations from the text, which is way to further develop our own understanding.

Right now, when we have a bit of merit, is the time to use that merit to try to understand this text, rather than just using our store of merit up! The fact that everything is going quite well is an indication that one has some good merit. Thinking one has sufficient merit and being idle doesn't seem to be the right way to go about it! Rather we should try to gain an understanding about how to collect more merit.

As everyone knows, the next session is the discussion session. It would be really beneficial to engage in the discussion well in the spirit of understanding, and sharing with a good attitude. Following that is the exam, so if there has been a good discussion, then the exam will go well too!

Having the proper intention to share whatever knowledge or understanding one has gained with others, who may be still struggling to understand, is really wondrous and a great act of giving, which is in line with the bodhisattva vows. As we have taken the bodhisattvas vows to assist and to benefit others, this is one way of upholding those vows. As those who are familiar with the bodhisattva vows would know, a breach of those vows would be to praise oneself and to despise others, and furthermore, not to give one's wealth and Dharma to others when they ask for it. This implies that if someone were to ask for something, even if it is just a bit, if we could give something it will protect us from breaching that vow. So giving even a little can still be significant practice.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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Discussion (24.04.2012)

Week: 1 (27 March 2012)

1. Why must we be very cautious about criticising others? [2]

PTO

2. In the *Heart Sutra*, the very next point after 'form is empty' is that 'emptiness is form'. Explain. [4]

Week: 2 (3 April 2012)

3. How is enduring suffering with the proper understanding a means to accomplish great benefits? [4]

4. How does an attitude of kindness and consideration towards others help protect your own mind? [2]

5. a) What is the definition of patience? [2]

b) Why do we need patience in relation to our practice? [2]

6. a) Give the definition of the perfection of generosity. [4]

b) Explain how the six perfections are causes for enlightenment. [4]

Week: 3 (10 April 2012)

7. Explain the purpose of practicing each of the six perfections. [6]

8. Thus we need to further develop our practices so that they become perfections. We need to transform whatever level of morality or generosity that we have now into the perfection of morality and the perfection of generosity. In order to do that, we need to develop bodhicitta or the awakening mind.

What is the awakening mind based upon and how do we develop it? [4]

9. a) Explain the structure of the path to Enlightenment. [3]

b) How can the six perfections be categorised in the context of the Two Truths? [2]

Week: 4 (17 April 2012)

10. With respect to the term *remainder-arhat* there is a distinction between the highest Prasangika School's explanation of what remainder and non-remainder mean, as opposed to the explanation of the lower schools. Explain this distinction. [4]
[Page 2, first column]

Not in the test

11. There is also a significant distinction between Prasangika presentation of how the state of remainder and non-remainder are obtained, and that of the lower schools. Explain the Vaibashika assertion vs. The Prasangika.

[Page 2, second column]

Exam

Name: _____

Mark: _____

Block 2

Week 6: (01.05.2012)

1. Why must we be very cautious about criticising others? [2]

2. In the *Heart Sutra*, the very next point after 'form is empty' is that 'emptiness is form'. Explain. [4]

3. How is enduring suffering with the proper understanding a means to accomplish great benefits? [4]

4. How does an attitude of kindness and consideration towards others help protect your own mind? [2]

5. a) What is the definition of patience? [2]

b) Why do we need patience in relation to our practice? [2]

6. a) Give the definition of the perfection of generosity. [4]

b) Explain how the six perfections are causes for enlightenment. [4]

7. Explain the purpose of practicing each of the six perfections. [6]

8. Thus we need to further develop our practices so that they become perfections. We need to transform whatever level of morality or generosity that we have now into the perfection of morality and the perfection of generosity. In order to do that, we need to develop bodhicitta or the awakening mind.

What is the awakening mind based upon and how do we develop it? [4]

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