
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

21 March 2017

Based on the motivation we generated during the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in our regular meditation practice. [meditation]

It would be good for us to incorporate this meditation into our daily practice, as we just attempted in that short session. We need to particularly check that our mental focus is stabilised: making an effort to stabilise a mind which is not yet stable and further stabilising it once it is settled.

Many obvious faults arise because of an unstable mind. When our mind is distracted externally, that brings both physical and psychological problems. If we could maintain our focus inwardly and allow the mind to abide peacefully, then that that would benefit us in whatever we do.

Once we acquire some control over our mind and subdue it to certain degree, we will have begun to establish the foundation for genuine peace in our mind.

Of course, the students here are already aware of these points. Nevertheless, we need to attend to them, because, if we don't use the instructions presented here to subdue our mind, then there will be nothing else that can help subdue it. We all know from our own experience that the unsubdued and crazed mind brings a lot of unwanted difficulties and problems in one's life.

2.3.2.3. STATING THE REASONS THAT ESTABLISH THE LACK OF TRUE EXISTENCE

2.3.2.3.1. The vajra sliver reason (cont.)

2.3.2.3.1.3. Refuting generation from a permanent principal

The **Samkhyas** assert what is called the *principal*, which is the primal cause of all subsequent manifestations or expressions.

This section is subdivided into two:

2.3.2.3.1.3.1. Stating the position

2.3.2.3.1.3.2. Repudiating it

First, we need to understand what the Samkhyas' position is, then we can repudiate it.

2.3.2.3.1.3.1. Stating the position

126cd. *That a permanent principal is the cause
Of migrators is asserted by the Samkhya.*

127. *The equilibrium of the qualities of
Courage, particle, and darkness
Is strongly asserted as principal
And their imbalances are the migrators.*

The commentary explains:

Enumerators (or *Samkhyas*): From nature comes the great, from which in turn pride arises. Pride leads to the collection of sixteen, which are expressions (manifestations) while the person is neither nature nor expression.

The Enumerators posit that out of the twenty-five classes of objects of knowledge, the principal has the five characteristics of being permanent, unitary and so forth and is the cause for the various expressions and the migrators. Courage, particle and darkness are other words or other terms for happiness, suffering and equanimity. When these three characteristics are in equilibrium, they are strongly asserted as the principal, and when they are in disharmony, they are the migrators i.e. the expressions.

The **Enumerators' (Samkhyas')** position is that *from nature* or the principal, the great one arises, followed by pride. Then *pride leads to the collection of the sixteen, which are expressions while the person is neither nature nor expression*. The Samkhyas are asserting that the principal or nature is a primary source of all existence as manifestations. According to them, when a person wishes to experience any enjoyments of the five senses, the principal will manifest those objects, such as sound and so forth.

To summarise the Samkhyas' viewpoint, from the principal (1), the great one (2) arises, and from the great one arises pride (3). Then there is the person (4). This accounts for four of the twenty-five classes of objects of knowledge. Pride leads to the collection of sixteen, which includes the five sense objects – form, sound, odour, taste and tangible objects (9). In addition to these five sense objects, the collection of sixteen includes the eleven faculties: the five mental faculties of the eye, the ears, the nose, the tongue and the skin; the five physical faculties of speech, arms, legs, anus and genitalia; and the intellectual faculty (20). The final five of the twenty-five classes are the elements: earth, water, fire, wind and space (25).

The Samkhyas assert the principal as the great one, which is both cause and effect. The collection of the sixteen – the five sense objects and the eleven faculties – are said to be only effects. The person is neither cause nor effect. As mentioned here, the specific characteristic of the person is that it is *neither nature nor the principal of expression*.

The commentary continues: *The Enumerators posit that out of the twenty-five classes of objects of knowledge the principal has the five characteristic qualities of being permanent, unitary and so forth... – it is permanent because, the Samkhyas assert, it does not change.*

There are actually six characteristics of the principal: it is a permanent entity for it doesn't change (1); it is unitary as it is partless (2); it is all-pervasive (3); it is the origin of all manifestations (4); it is merely an object and not awareness (5); and it is the equilibrium of the qualities of courage, particle and darkness (6).

You can look up these classifications, which I have presented previously.¹

The commentary continues: *...is the cause for the various expressions and migrators. Courage, particle and darkness are other words or terms for happiness, suffering and equanimity. Other terms also used in the texts are 'lightness' (instead of courage) and 'motility' (instead of particle). When*

¹ Tenets were taught in 1986-7, and 2001. References include: Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness*, pp.321-327 and Sopa and Hopkins, *Cutting Through Appearances*, pp. 158-165.

these three characteristics – courage, particle and darkness – are in equilibrium, this is what the Samkhyas strongly assert as the principal. When they are in disharmony, they are migrators or expressions or manifestations of the principal.

2.3.2.3.1.3.2. Repudiating it

Having presented the Samkhyas' position, the **Madhyamika** go on to repudiate it. This has two subdivisions:

2.3.2.3.1.3.2.1. Actual

2.3.2.3.1.3.2.2. The fault does not apply to the Madhyamika

2.3.2.3.1.3.2.1. Actual

This is further subdivided into three:

2.3.2.3.1.3.2.1.1. Refuting that a partless permanent can be the nature of the expressions

2.3.2.3.1.3.2.1.2. Refuting it to be permanent

2.3.2.3.1.3.2.1.3. Refuting that it would be impossible for something to first not exist and then to generate newly

2.3.2.3.1.3.2.1.1. Refuting that a partless permanent can be the nature of the expressions

128. *For one to have three natures
Is invalid. Hence it does not exist.
Likewise, qualities do not exist
Because they each have three aspects.*

129ab. *If there are no qualities, then also the existence
Of sound becomes not tenable.*

The commentary reads:

Take the subject 'object of knowledge' – it follows it is unsuitable for forms and so forth, and for a singular partless principal to have three natures of happiness and so forth – because it becomes impossible for them to be one. If that is impossible, it is also impossible for them to be many, and thus they are completely non-existent.

For that reason, a partless principal in the nature of three qualities does not exist. Likewise, the qualities themselves are not truly existent one, because each of these has again three qualities. If upon this analysis the principal with three equal qualities does not exist, then also the existence of the five objects of forms and so forth becomes far-fetched (not tenable), as the five mere objects are accepted as expressions of the primary principal.

The **Madhyamikas'** logic here is this: if the principal can be said to be three separate qualities, how can you (i.e. the Samkhyas) assert the principal as unitary or singular? This assertion is untenable. Furthermore, the Madhyamikas argue that while the principal cannot be singular, it also is impossible for it to be many. All three qualities could not be the single partless entity you assert, so it couldn't be many either. For anything to exist, it has to be either singular or many. If it is neither, then the conclusion has to be that it does not exist.

The commentary continues: *For that reason, a partless principal in the nature of three qualities does not exist.* So, having refuted the Samkhyas' assertion, with the argument that if such a principal is neither one nor many, it becomes completely non-existent – *a partless principal in the nature of three qualities cannot exist.* It is quite clear if you follow the logic.

Likewise, the mere qualities themselves are not truly existent one, because each of these has again three qualities. The Madhyamikas point out the absurdity in the Samkhyas' assertion – *each of them has a further three qualities, so they cannot be a truly existent one. If upon this analysis, the principal with three equal qualities does not exist, then also the existence of the five objects of forms and so forth becomes far-fetched or not tenable, meaning that it is impossible for them to exist ...as the five mere objects are accepted as expressions of the primary principal.*

The logic repudiating the Samkhyas' position is that the *qualities themselves are not truly existent.* This means that the qualities themselves would have to have further qualities, meaning they cannot truly exist as a unitary quality. Therefore, the principal with three qualities cannot exist, and if that does not exist, then even the five objects, which the Samkhyas exert as being expressions of the principal, also become untenable.

The next four lines of verse are:

129cd. *It also becomes impossible for non-sentient,
Clothes and so forth to have happiness etc.*

130ab. *If functionalities exist in the nature of the
cause,
Haven't functionalities already been analysed?*

As the commentary explains:

Because they are inanimate matter, it follows it is impossible for the subject of the clothes and so forth to be of one simultaneously established substance with happiness, suffering and equanimity.

If the functionalities that are expressions, such as clothes, exist truly in the nature of happiness, suffering and equanimity, which is their cause, then haven't the true existence of functionalities already been analysed, that is they have already been refuted as true.

It is quite clearly explained here that *the subject of the clothes and so forth cannot possibly be happiness, suffering and equanimity.* So, *if the functionalities that are expressions, such as clothes, exist truly in the nature of happiness, suffering and equanimity, which is their cause, then haven't the true existence of functionalities already been analysed,* implies that they have indeed already been analysed and *refuted as true existence.*

The next lines of verse are:

130cd. *Your cause is happiness and the like,
From that, clothes and the like do not arise.*

131ab. *Happiness and the like arise from clothes and
the like,
Because it does not exist, happiness and the like
do not exist.*

The commentary explains:

If, as according to you, the cause of clothes and the like is the principal in which the three parts of happiness, suffering and equanimity are in equilibrium, then clothes and the like cannot arise from the principal because this principal is impossible.

If happiness and the other qualities are generated from clothes and the like then, because clothes and other objects do not subsequently exist, also the principal that contains the three equal parts of happiness and so forth becomes non-existent, because a result without a cause is impossible. It is unsuitable

for you to accept this because you accept the principal to be a permanent functionality.

What is being refuted here is that the clothes and so forth are produced by the principal: if its *three parts of happiness, suffering and equanimity are in equilibrium, then clothes and the like cannot arise from the principal because this principal is impossible*. This principal was refuted earlier, and this argument follows that earlier reasoning.

2.3.2.3.1.3.2.1.2. Refuting it to be permanent

131cd. Happiness and so forth

Are never observed as permanent.

132. If the particulars of happiness exist,

Why is the experience not apprehended?

If it becomes subtle,

How can it be coarse or subtle?

133ab. Since it stops being coarse and becomes subtle

The coarse and subtle are impermanent.

The commentary explains:

It follows that the nature of happiness and so forth never exists as permanent – because it is not observed as such by prime cognition. In case the particulars of happiness exist as permanent functionalities, then why is the experience of happiness not apprehended at the time of experiencing suffering? It follows that one does apprehend it.

If that very happiness becomes subtle at that time, how can it be coarse and then abandon that status and be subtle? It follows it cannot do that – because it is permanent. Because happiness and the like stop being subtle and become coarse, and stop being coarse and become subtle, therefore this subtle and coarse phenomena become impermanent.

The first part here is quite clear. *It follows that the nature of happiness and so forth never exists as permanent – because it is not observed as such by prime cognition*. This follows the earlier Madhyamika presentation that it is not possible for it to be permanent.

In case the particulars of happiness exist as permanent functionalities, then why is the experience of happiness not apprehended at the time of experiencing suffering? The Samkhyas assert that, at the time of the cause, the effect is there but is not yet manifested; in other words, the effect or result is there at the time of the cause. That is what the Madhyamikas are refuting here.

As mentioned earlier, if happiness had the quality of suffering as well, then when one experiences happiness, one would also have to experience suffering as well. *In case the particulars of happiness exist as permanent functionalities, then why is the experience of happiness not apprehended at the time of experiencing suffering?* So, why doesn't one experience happiness if it is also part of the quality? This is a rhetorical question.

The Samkhya then say: *If that very happiness becomes subtle at that time...* They assert that when we are experiencing suffering, there is happiness, but because it is subtle, it is not experienced. This is refuted by the Madhyamika, who say, *how can it be coarse and then abandon that status and become subtle? It follows it cannot do that – because it is permanent*. Since

the Samkhyas said earlier that it is a permanent functionality, which means it cannot change. So if it is coarse, how could it change to subtle? That is the absurdity being pointed out to the Samkhyas.

Because happiness and the like stop being subtle and become coarse, and stop being coarse and become subtle, therefore this subtle and coarse phenomena become impermanent. The Madhyamikas prove there is a change, therefore the subtle and coarse phenomena becomes impermanent, which nullifies the Samkhyas' assertion of happiness and so on as being permanent.

133ab. Similarly, why do you not assert

All functionalities to be impermanent?

134ab. If the coarse is not distinct from happiness,

Then happiness is clearly impermanent.

The commentary explains:

Likewise, why do you not posit the subject of all functionalities as impermanent? It follows that is suitable – because they change in their nature from one to the other.

Is the coarse cause of different substantial establishment from happiness or not? In case of the first, because one still experiences happiness although the coarse cause stops, one has a clear experience of happiness, and it is not a coarse cause. If it is not of different substance, then happiness clearly becomes impermanent because when the coarse cause stops, happiness also stops. If that is accepted, then the permanent nature of happiness and the other qualities wanes.

Here the Madhyamikas ask, *likewise why do you not posit the subject of all functionalities as impermanent? It follows that it suitable – because they change in their nature from one to the other*. If the characteristic of impermanence is that something changes in nature from one moment to the next, then if they change, they have to be impermanent.

Next, the Madhyamikas ask: *Is the coarse cause of different substantial establishment from happiness or not? In the first case, because one still experiences happiness although the coarse cause stops, one has a clear experience of happiness, and it is not a coarse cause*.

In the second instance, *if it is not of different substance, then happiness clearly becomes impermanent because when the coarse cause stops, happiness also stops. If that is accepted, then the permanent nature of happiness and the other qualities wanes*. Thus, the Samkhyas' assertion is untenable.

2.3.2.3.1.3.2.1.3. Refuting that it would be impossible for something to first not exist and then to generate newly

I will go through this section quickly, as it is quite clear when you read it. There are four lines of verse:

134cd. In case you say whatever is non-existent
Cannot generate because of not existing,

135ab. Then although not asserting it,
You abide on the generation of the unclear.

The commentary explains:

If your assertion is that for something to generate it has to exist at the time of the cause, then something that does not exist at the time of the cause cannot generate, because it does not exist in the nature of the cause. So what is your meaning of 'generate'?

Samkhyas: The nature that, although existing earlier, did not appear as object to the awareness at that time, is now clearly revealed.

Madhyamaka: Because you accept the clearly revealed that does not exist as generated at the time of the cause, then although you do not posit the new generation of something that did not exist earlier, you abide on that view. You accept the meaning, and merely do not accept the name.

Or: Although you do not posit the new generation of a previously non-existent particular, i.e. expression, you need to accept that you abide in this view.

If your assertion is that for something to generate it has to exist at the time of the cause... refers to the uncommon way in which the Samkhyas assert or posit cause and effect. They assert that because the effect has the same nature as the cause, it has to exist as a cause. If it does not exist at the time of the cause, they argue, how can something of the same nature be revealed as its effect?

However, asserting that the effect exists at the time of the cause is an absurd position. That is what the **Madhyamikas** are refuting in the commentary when they say: *...then something that does not exist at the time of the cause cannot generate, because it does not exist in the nature of the cause.* So what is your meaning of 'generate' or 'produce'? This is the question being put to the Samkhyas.

The **Samkhya** respond: *The nature that, although existing earlier, did not appear as object to the awareness at that time, is now clearly revealed.* They are saying that, at the time of the cause, the fact is invisible. When the cause generates or produces it becomes visible. For example, the sprout exists at the time of the seed, but it is invisible at that time. When the actual sprout becomes visible to the naked eye of ordinary beings, then that is when we would refer to being generated or produced.

The **Madhyamika** refute that with the following lines:

*135cd. If the effect abides in the cause, then
One would eat faeces while eating food.*

*136ab. One would have to include the price
Of the cotton seeds when buying cotton.*

Then the commentary explains:

In the case where the result abides in the cause without being of different nature, then it follows one would eat faeces when eating food – because the nature of the food and the nature of the faeces are partlessly one. This is because you accept the principal as the nature of phenomena, mode of abiding, ultimate and as a partless permanent, as well as accepting that the nature of food and the nature of faeces as one.

Further, one would have to put the price of cotton onto the cotton seeds when buying cotton. It follows they would be suitable to be worn – because the nature of the cotton cloth and the nature of the cotton seed are partlessly one.

The reasoning here is that, because faeces are the effect or result of eating food, then if the effect exists at the time of the cause, this implies that faeces would exist at the time of the food. So when you consumed food, you would be consuming faeces!

This line of reasoning follows the Samkhya's earlier assertion that the nature of the cause (food) and the effect

(faeces) are partlessly one. *This is because you accept the principal as the nature of phenomena, mode of abiding, ultimate and as a partless permanent, as well as accepting that the nature of food and the nature of faeces as one.*

Further, one would have to put the price of cotton onto the cotton seeds when buying cotton. So, if one were to buy cottonseed, one would have to pay the same amount that one would pay for the clothing produced from the cottonseed, *because the nature of the cotton cloth and the nature of the cotton seed are partlessly one.*

Again, according to the Samkhyas' assertion, the clothing would already exist in the cottonseed. Therefore, one could just wear cottonseed as clothing, as the clothing already exists! These are the logical fallacies brought about by the Samkhyas' position.

The next lines present the **Samkhyas'** answer:

*136ab. If worldly beings do not see it due to delusion,
This reality is determined through knowledge.*

*137. Because also worldly beings have this
knowledge
Why should they not see?
If the worldly are not valid,
Then also the perception of the particulars is
untrue.*

The commentary explains:

Samkhyas: What about if, even though the two are of one nature, worldly beings cannot see the result at the time of the cause because of being deluded, and therefore do not wear the seeds.

Madhyamika: Well then, as you the Enumerators accept your teacher Rishi Lingkye and others to be omniscient, and that you know that the result exists at the time of the cause because they have determined this reality with their knowledge, then you eat faeces when eating food. Because in your system also worldly beings can understand reality, why should they not see that the result exists at the time of the cause? It follows they see it - because they know that the Enumerator has determined that the result exists at the time of the cause.

Or: That the teacher referred to in the earlier line who is accepted to know reality, is seen insisting on wearing cotton clothes and not cotton seeds, makes it clear that the result does not exist at the time of the cause.

Thus, the **Samkhyas** assert that *even though the effect and cause are of one nature, worldly beings cannot see the result at the time of the cause because of being deluded, and therefore do not wear the cotton seeds.*

The **Madhyamikas** refute that by saying: *Well then, as you the Enumerators accept your teacher Rishi Lingkye and others to be omniscient, and that you know that the result exists at the time of the cause because they have determined this reality with their knowledge, then you eat faeces when eating food.* So they are saying that, since this is what is being asserted by your teacher, who you consider as omniscient, then the fallacy would have to follow. What is being refuted here is the Samkhyas' earlier assertion that the effect exists at the time of the cause because they are of the same nature. Yet worldly beings don't see this. So *...because in your system also worldly beings can understand reality, why should they not see the result exists at the time of the cause?*

It follows they see it – because they know that the Enumerator has determined that the result exists at the time of the cause. So since worldly beings know that the principal has determined that the result exists at the time of the cause, then that means you are able to understand or see that.

Another way to present the Madhyamikas' argument is: *That the teacher referred to in the earlier line who is accepted to know reality, is seen insisting on wearing cotton clothes and not cotton seeds, makes it clear that the result does not exist at the time of the cause. So your teacher himself wears clothes and not cottonseed. That in itself shows you cannot possibly see the effect at the time of the cause.*

Samkhyas: Because the perception of worldly beings is not a prime cognition they do not realise it.

Madhyamika: Well then, it also follows that their perception of the particular expression that became a manifest entity is also untrue - because the perception of worldly beings is not a prime cognition.

2.3.2.3.1.3.2.2. The fault does not apply to the Madhyamaka

We can leave this for our next session. Although we have covered quite a lot of material this evening, it is not too incomprehensible or difficult to understand if you go through the text and read it slowly. So you can go over the text and make an attempt to understand the meaning.

The assertions presented in these teachings are those of the Samkhya scholars of the past. I am not sure whether there are still scholars or followers of this system in this day and age.

Again, if you are interested in these different schools of tenets, what their assertions are and how they have been refuted, then it is good to get an understanding as explained here in the text. You can also refer to other texts that explain these systems of thought.

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

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Edited Version*

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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As usual let us engage in our meditation practice.

[*tong len meditation*]

We can now generate our motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: for the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and then put them into practice well.

Setting this motivation and then listening to the teachings will ensure positive imprints are left on our mindstream.

2.3.2.3.1.3.2.2. The fault does not apply to the Madhyamika

The first verse under this heading is:

138. *In case prime cognition is not valid
Doesn't what it comprehends become false?
For that very reason your
Meditation on emptiness is invalid.*

The **Realists** present this argument:

Realist: If, according to you, prime cognition is not ultimately prime cognition, then it is a false prime cognition, and in this case does not its comprehended object also become a false distorted object not existing in the way it is comprehended? It follows that it becomes that – this is the case because the comprehending prime cognition is false. For that very reason, because the comprehending prime cognition is false, that which you posit as meditation on emptiness becomes distorted and invalid.

Then **Madhyamika** respond as follows:

Madhyamika: Take the subject 'object of knowledge' – for us it is very valid that the prime cognition that comprehends emptiness, and the emptiness posited by it are false. To ascertain the negation of the functionality true for conception depends on the appearance of the object of negation arising in the mind. It follows it is like this – because ...

The **Realists'** objection to the Prasangika position is that *if prime cognition is not ultimately prime cognition as you say, then it is a false prime cognition*. In that case isn't the comprehended object also a false distorted object that does not exist in the way it is comprehended? According to the Realists, both prime cognition and that which is apprehended exist truly. The Realists are saying to the Prasangika that if prime cognition is false, then what it apprehends should also be false. That is the main point being raised here.

The Realists continue with *it follows that it has to be that, because the comprehending prime cognition is false*. They are saying that if the comprehending prime cognition is false, then the apprehended object that it perceives should also be false.

For that very reason, they say, what *you posit as meditation on emptiness is distorted and invalid*, or not tenable.

The **Madhyamikas** say: *Take the subject 'object of knowledge' – it is valid to say that the prime cognition that comprehends emptiness, and the emptiness posited by it are false*. The **Realists**

have said: "How can you claim a valid cognition perceiving an ultimate reality if the cognition itself is false?"

They are in fact using logical reasoning to point out that a false cognition could not perceive a true object. In response the **Madhyamika** say: "We accept that the prime cognition is false, and what is being apprehended is also false, i.e. emptiness is also false in so far as it lacks true existence".

We need to be careful not to misunderstand this. By saying that emptiness is false because it doesn't exist truly, the **Madhyamika** are, of course, not saying that emptiness is not an ultimate reality. What will be explained later in the text is that while the **Realists** are not able to conceive of a false cognition perceiving an ultimate object, the **Madhyamika** explain how, through perceiving a false object, a false cognition contributes to comprehending the ultimate.

The main point of the debate here is that the Realists posit all existence as being truly existent, while the Madhyamika say that things actually lack true existence, i.e. that things are not truly existent.

The Madhyamikas' essential point is that *ascertaining the negation of the functionality true for conception depends on the appearance of the object of negation arising in the mind*. The next verse explains the reasoning, which is the essential point.

139. *Without contact with the analysed object
One will not apprehend its non-existence.
Therefore the non-existence of any
False object is clearly false.*

The commentary explains:

... without the conceptual thought making contact with the analysed object of true existence, i.e. if the aspect of true existence does not appear to the mind, then the investigating thought will not apprehend the object of being empty of true existence, which is the lack of true existence. Therefore, because the falsity that is the object of negation is impossible, therefore the negation that is the non-object is clearly also false.

The example of the earlier is: Without the aspect of the child of a barren woman appearing to the conceptual mind, the aspect of a dying child of a barren woman does not appear.

If the emptiness of true existence that lacks the object of negation exists truly, then the appearance of the lack of true existence to the knowing inferential cognition also needs to exist truly.

The explanation in the commentary begins with *without contact with the analysed object* one will not apprehend its non-existence. This is the main point to be understood. *The conceptual thought making contact with the analysed object of true existence* refers to *the aspect of true existence not appearing to the mind*. The commentary says that the absence of the object of negation will not be understood unless the conceptual thought has clearly identified, and really understood, what the object of negation is.

To make this clearer, the *analysed object* refers to true existence, and *will not apprehend its non-existence* refers to emptiness. What is being explained is that the non-existence or lack of true existence, i.e. emptiness, cannot be understood without first having a clear understanding of how the conceptual mind apprehends things as being truly existent. That is the main point.

If you understand this point then the meaning of this passage is clear. The commentary clarifies *without the conceptual thought making contact with the analysed object of true existence...* by adding... *if the aspect of true existence does not*

appear to the mind, then the investigating thought will not apprehend the object as being empty of true existence, i.e. lacking true existence.

This explains the meaning of the first two lines of verse 139.

The commentary then explains the remaining two lines of the verse beginning with: *Therefore, because the falsity that is the object of negation is impossible, the negation that is the non-object is clearly also false.*

Then an example is given: *Without the aspect of the child of a barren woman appearing to the conceptual mind, the aspect of a dying child of a barren woman does not appear.* This example is a good illustration of the point that was made earlier, which is that without a clear understanding of what true existence is, the lack of true existence cannot be understood. Although a barren woman's child does not exist, without knowing what a barren woman's child means, one cannot even conceive of the impossibility of the death of a child of a barren woman.

The commentary continues: *If the emptiness of true existence that lacks the object of negation exists truly, then the appearance of the lack of true existence to the knowing inferential cognition also needs to exist truly.* The *knowing inferential cognition* mentioned here refers to the inferential cognition that apprehends emptiness. As explained in other texts, emptiness exists as it appears to the meditative equipoise of an arya being, but doesn't exist as it appears to the knowing inferential cognition, because to this cognition emptiness appears as truly existent. What is being explained in the commentary is that if emptiness were to exist truly then it would have to exist as it appears to the *knowing inferential cognition*, but that is not the case.

The reason why emptiness doesn't exist as it appears to the knowing inferential cognition is because it is a mistaken consciousness. As I have explained in previous teachings, except for the meditative equipoise of arya beings in which there is no true appearance at all, consciousnesses of all other sentient beings are necessarily mistaken. That is because when a sentient being's consciousness apprehends objects, it perceives them as being truly existent due to the imprints of true grasping in their mind. It is only an enlightened mind that doesn't have any true appearance at all. That is the point being made here: while the *knowing inferential cognition* apprehends emptiness, it still has the appearance of emptiness as truly existent.

Then the commentary further explains:

If one looks at this, a collection with only one part negated is impossible, and because the object of negation appears truly to it, the true appearance needs to also exist truly. In this case, true existence should be an existent, which it is not. The emptiness of true existence that has abandoned it, is also false and not truly established.

The point being explained is that *while emptiness* appears as being truly existent, it actually lacks true existence.

The commentary further explains:

This point is shown in the *Root Wisdom*, 'In case something slightly non-empty exists'. Without the meaning generality of the lack of true existence appearing to the mind, one does not properly ascertain the lack of true existence, and therefore one needs to be proficient in identifying the object of negation.

This is another succinct point. *Without the meaning generality of the lack of true existence appearing to the mind* refers back to the necessity for having a good understanding of the way true existence appears to the mind. Without having a proper

understanding of that, one cannot properly ascertain the lack of true existence and therefore one needs to be proficient in identifying the object of negation. So it is very important to have a clear understanding of what is being refuted, which is the object of negation.

In simple terms this means that one should have a clear understanding about how things and events would have to exist if they were to exist truly. One has to have a very clear understanding of this point. This emphasises the point that it is crucial to identify the object of negation.

The next verse under this heading is:

140. *Thus, the thought thinking,
'The dream child has passed away'
Cancels the thought thinking that it
Exists, and it is false.*

The commentary explains:

For this reason: When e.g., in a dream one observes the child dying and thinks, 'Now it does not exist anymore', this thought cancels out the thought thinking that it does exist.

Just as these two, the dream object of abandonment and the dream antidote are false, so it is not contradictory for the false antidote to destroy the false object of abandonment, and for the false prime cognition to comprehend the false object of comprehension.

It is not the same for you because the Enumerators accept all phenomena as truly existent, and do not know how to posit a false prime cognition.

This analogy should be quite clear. *In a dream one observes a child who is dying or who is actually dead and thinks, 'now the child does not exist anymore', and this thought that the child does not exist anymore eliminates the thought of the child as still existing.* Even though *both the dream object of abandonment and the dream antidote are false*, having a false antidote destroy a false object of abandonment is not contradictory. Using the same reason, it is not contradictory for a false prime cognition to comprehend a false object of comprehension.

The contradiction presented by the Enumerators is that if the prime cognition is false, then it could not perceive a true object. But for the **Madhyamika**, of course, this is not a contradiction. *It is not the same*, indicates that it is not the same for us because the Enumerators accept all phenomena as truly existent, and do not know how to posit a false prime cognition.

As mentioned previously, for us, a prime cognition can comprehend emptiness. While Enumerators cannot posit a true prime cognition perceiving a false object, for us, a prime cognition, which may be false itself, can also perceive an object that lacks true existence. That is a point being presented here.

2.3.2.3.1.4. Summarising the meaning of generation from no-cause

The first two lines of the next verse are presented:

141ab. *Therefore, by analysing in such a way
There is nothing without a cause*

Then the commentary explains:

Therefore, for these reasons, if one investigates with the reasons mentioned above, not only does generation from discordant causes such as Ishvara and the primary principal become impossible, saying 'there is no result that generates without a cause', it is also the concluding summary of the refutation of causeless generation.

This explanation is quite clear, so not much further explanation is needed. *If one investigates the many reasons that were presented earlier, the generation from discordant causes such as Ishvara, as some non-Buddhists posit, and the primary principal as others posit, is impossible. Saying 'there is no result that generates without a cause' it is also the concluding summary of the refutation of causeless generation.* In other words the argument that something can be generated without any cause is refuted.

A significant point to reflect upon here is that investigating with the various reasons that were presented earlier implies that the arguments and refutations are not just accepted blindly, or that some parts are accepted and other parts are 'left to beg'. Rather, the conclusion that the generation from discordant causes – such as Ishvara and the primary principal – is not tenable arises from thorough investigation with many reasonings. When careful logical reasons are presented the conclusion has to be accepted. Here the conclusion is that causeless generation is not tenable because all the arguments have been refuted, and so the conclusion has to be accepted. This is also in line with what I usually share with you, which is that you need to use your intelligence and wisdom to decide things.

2.3.2.3.1.5. Refuting generation from both self and other

This section begins with the comment in the commentary:

These four lines can be a summary for the refutation of generation from three principles, and can also be related to the refutation of generation from both self and other.

It's important to understand this. What is being refuted here is generation from both self and other.

Generation from self refers to generating from a separate permanent self as the non-Buddhist schools posit. That was refuted earlier. Generation from other refers to an effect that is generated from an inherently existent cause. All schools, including the Buddhist schools below the Prasangika assert such a cause. Here the Prasangika refute generation from both self and other.

The lines relating to this are:

141cd. It also does not abide on the individual Conditions or their collection;

142ab. It does not come from other, It does not abide or go.

The commentary explains:

The sprout abides neither inherently on the individual causes such as the water, fertiliser, warmth and moisture nor on their collection, as a juniper tree would abide on the bronze base¹. If it abides in such a way it should be observable, which it is not. It is the same for other results. They also do not exist at that time because without the conditions taking shape the sprout cannot be generated. It also does not come from some- thing other than these conditions, it also does not abide inherently upon having been generated inherently, and it does not go somewhere else upon cessation. Hence, it does not exist inherently in the slightest, and therefore there is also no generation from self, generation from other or generation from both self and other.

In short, this establishes the directional property of the argument, 'take the subject the aggregates and the person': it follows they are not generated inherently –

because they are not generated from self, generated from other, generated from both or generated from no cause.

As the commentary explains, *the sprout abides neither inherently on the individual causes such as the water, fertiliser, warmth and moisture nor on their collection.* The assertion is that the sprout is generated from the collection of all of these causes. For the sprout to generate it is initially dependent on the seed and then other conditions such as fertiliser, warmth and moisture. The fact that it depends on all of these causes shows that the sprout does not exist inherently, and it does not abide inherently on any one of individual causes or the collection itself.

The analogy is that they are like a juniper tree that abides on a bronze base. *If it abides in such a way then it should be observable, which it is not and it is the same for other results.* If the cause were to exist inherently then the sprout would have to be observable at the time of the cause, but it is not observable. This indicates that while the sprout depends on causes it does not exist at the time of the cause. That is what refuting generation from self means.

They also do not exist at that time because without the conditions taking shape the sprout cannot be generated means that the sprout cannot exist or be generated while the necessary conditions are being assembled. *It also does not come from something other than these conditions* means that since the sprout does not exist before the conditions such as fertiliser and so forth come together, it does not exist inherently at that time or at any other time.

It does not come from something other than these conditions means that since it depends on these conditions, it cannot be produced from anything other than these conditions. *It also does not abide inherently upon having been generated* means it is not generated inherently nor does it abide inherently. Furthermore, *it does not go somewhere else inherently upon cessation.* The conclusion here is *that it does not exist inherently in the slightest, and therefore there is also no generation from self, generation from other or generation from both self and other.* That is how it is refuted.

A summary of this is presented in the next paragraph of the commentary.

In short, this establishes the directional property of the argument, 'take the subject the aggregates and the person': it follows they are not generated inherently – because they are not generated from self, generated from other, generated from both or generated from no cause.

The syllogism here is *Take the subject 'the person and other phenomena': it follows they are not generated inherently from self – because they are not generated from self, generated from other, generated from both or generated from no cause.* This syllogism is related to the syllogism known as the King of Reasoning as explained in *Root Wisdom*, which is, "take the subject 'persons and phenomena': they do not exist inherently – because they are dependent arising". This syllogism specifically states that, persons and phenomena are not generated inherently, whereas the earlier syllogism said they do not exist inherently. It's a slight difference but it comes down to the same point.

The King of Reasoning is the syllogism that uses the reasoning that the subject, whatever it may be, is a dependent arising, and this applies to all phenomena. Since the subject here, persons and phenomena, is all-inclusive,

¹ Another translation says it's just a metal base.

saying that they do not exist inherently because they are dependent arising applies to all phenomena.

The reasoning in the syllogism presented in the commentary is that since the aggregates and the person are not generated inherently, then that has to apply to all generated phenomena. The *aggregates and persons* are phenomena that have a particular cause, and are therefore generated. Thus, *they are not generated from self, generated from other, generated from both or generated from no cause.*

2.3.2.3.2. *The reason of dependent arising*

142cd. *How is that made true by delusion Different from an illusion?*

The explanation in the commentary begins with:

What difference is there between the object labelled and made true by afflicted delusion, i.e., ignorance, and an illusion, dream, reflection and so forth? They appear as inherently existent while being empty of inherent existence.

This is a point that supports the earlier explanations. *What difference is there between the object labelled and made true by afflicted delusions, for example ignorance, or an illusion or a dream, or a reflection and so forth? Although things appear as being true, they are actually known to be false. Likewise, though things appear as being inherently existent, they are actually empty of inherent existence.* The point being made here is that conventionally we all accept these as false, which is also the case for the lack of inherent existence.

The next verse reads:

143. *That magically generated by a magician
And that magically generated by a cause
Where do they come from, where do they go?
You should analyse this.*

Then the commentary explains:

If the illusory horse and elephant conjured by the magician and the functionalities conjured by the causes and conditions were to exist truly then, when they are generated, they should come from somewhere else, and when they cease they should go somewhere else. In this case it should be analysed where they come from and where they go to. Because they do not possess inherent coming or going, take the subject 'the person and the aggregates' - they lack inherent existence - because they are dependent arising, e.g., like a reflection of a form.

The commentary starts with an example, *if the illusory horse and elephant conjured by the magician, and the functionalities conjured by causes and conditions were to exist truly, then when they are generated they should come from somewhere else, and when they cease they should go somewhere else.* This is saying that illusions may look like they actually exist, in that they come and go. But that is not the case.

Where do they come from and where do they go? The conclusion is that they do not inherently come or go, which relates to the earlier syllogism that was based on the subject 'the person and the aggregates'. The syllogism here uses the same subject. Take the subject '*the person and the aggregates*': *they lack inherent existence - because they are dependent arisings.* The example is *like a reflection of form.*

First of all as mentioned earlier, one needs to contemplate how the person and aggregates would have to exist if they were to exist truly. What would their mode of existence be if they were to exist truly? Once you really understand that question then the syllogism should make sense. The subjects, which are persons and aggregates, lack inherent existence,

because they are dependent arisings. This implies that if they were to exist inherently, then they could not be dependent arisings i.e. they could not depend on anything else. But since they are dependent arisings, they cannot exist inherently.

To gain an understanding at a more personal level, we first need to accept the fact that we still have the misconception of grasping at a truly existent person. What does grasping at ourselves mean? We have this misconception that a person exists truly or inherently, so how do we relate that to ourselves.

The investigation begins by first analysing how we perceive ourselves? How does the misconception of grasping at a self, apprehend the self? As explained in the teachings, the misconception of grasping at a self apprehends a self that exists without depending on any other causes and conditions, existing from its own side in and of itself. That is how the 'I' appears to exist for the misconception of grasping at a true self.

The next investigation is to analyse and check whether the 'I' actually exists in that way or not? We investigate by asking: "Do I exist independently, without depending on any other causes and conditions?". When we realise that such an 'I' could not possibly exist in this manner, then an understanding of how the 'I' lacks true existence will begin to dawn on us. So we need to overcome that misconception of grasping at a truly existent self starting with our own personal individual self.

It is impossible to meditate on emptiness without having scrutinised and really understood how that misconception of grasping at a self appears to us. If whatever understanding of emptiness we have does not actually counteract grasping at the self, then claiming to be meditating on emptiness is quite lame. The very purpose of meditating on emptiness is to overcome the misconception of grasping at a self beginning with our own individual self. If we are indeed meditating on emptiness adequately, then the longer the time we spend in meditation the less intense our grasping at a truly existent individual self will become, and eventually it will be completely overcome. In simple terms, meditation on emptiness has to be able to counteract the misconception of grasping at an individual self.

The manner of conducting the investigation on a personal level is explained very clearly in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. As presented there, an appropriate time to investigate how the personal 'I' appears to us when a strong sense of 'me' is evoked. For example when someone criticises us, or accuses us of doing something that we haven't done, our self-defence mechanism is triggered and we become outraged: "How dare you accuse me!, I didn't do that!". In that instance how does the 'me' or 'I' appear to us? When we notice that this 'me' or 'I' appears to be completely independent, existing in and of itself, then that is when we are beginning to identify the object of negation.

Likewise when something good happens and we feel elated, thinking: "Oh, I feel so happy, something really good has happened to me". How does the 'I' or 'me' appear to us at that time? If that 'I' appears to be existing independently in and of itself, and not dependent on any other causes and conditions, then such a fabricated 'I' or 'self' is the object of negation that has to be refuted. That how *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* explains how to investigate the 'I'.

For us ordinary beings the usual way that forms appear to us is said to be the appearance of the object of negation.

When we ordinary beings apprehend form, it appears to us as existing independently, in and of itself. Thus the appearance of the object that we apprehend is the object of negation.

It appears to exist independently in and of itself because the form appears as something that exists 'out there'. Regardless of the fact that it is imputed by the mind, it actually appears to exist 'out there', from its own side. That is the appearance of the object of negation for ordinary beings. I have explained this many times in the past, so we need not spend too much time on this again.

The next verse reads:

144. *That which is seen due to proximity
To something, which likens the artificial
reflection
In being not if that does not exist,
How could it possess a true reality?*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Any result, such as compositional factors or the sprout are seen to generate in proximity to their cause, such as ignorance or the seed and the like. Because they are artificial phenomena that are not generated if these causes do not exist, they are like a reflection of form. How could they exist in the very nature of true existence? They do not.

The four lines of, 'That magically [...] and so forth establish the pervasion of the reason of dependent arising. The next two and a half lines show the reason, and the next half is the example and the last line shows the thesis.

if one wishes study this more extensively, then one should study the great commentary on the Introduction.

As it explains here results *such as compositional factors or the sprout are seen to generate in proximity to their causes, which are respectively ignorance and the seed and the like. Any result refers to any type of result such as compositional factors, which is the second of the twelve links. The cause of compositional factors is ignorance, so ignorance precedes compositional factors in the list of the twelve links. Therefore ignorance is the cause of compositional factors, which is karma. The cause of any kind of sprout is a seed. The seed precedes the sprout and is therefore the cause. So just as the sprout is seen to generate in proximity to its cause, and compositional factors arise from the cause of ignorance, because they are artificial phenomena that are not generated if these causes do not exist, they are like a reflection of form. So how could they exist in the very nature of true existence?* The conclusion is that they are not truly existent.

The commentary explains that *the four lines of verse 143 – that magically generated by a magician and so forth – establish the pervasion of the reason of dependent arising. They show that whatever is a dependent arising definitely can't exist truly or inherently. That is the pervasive reasoning of dependent arising.*

The next two and a half lines of verse show the reason, and the next half is the example, where it talks about the artificial reflection being like an illusion. The last line shows the thesis, which is could they possess true reality if they do not exist? That is the reason that has been established.

Then the commentary concludes by saying that *if one wishes to understand this more extensively, then one should study the great commentary on the Introduction, by Lama Tsongkhapa.*

Another commentary on the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* says that the reasoning of dependent arising is the most supreme of

all reasons as it presents the most succinct logic to establish the view of dependent arising. That is why it was established as the King of Reasonings by Lama Tsong Khapa and his sons, i.e. his main disciples.

Then there is also a quote from the *Madhyamakavatara*, which we have studied previously. You can refer to *Madhyamakavatara* teachings², which explain the syllogism. These are really profound explanations that establish the right view, which the view of emptiness. So it is very good to have a sound understanding of them.

Around the time when we were studying these points in the *Madhyamakavatara* text, His Holiness was visiting to Australia. I saw His Holiness just briefly, and he asked me: "What subjects are you teaching these days?" I mentioned that we were in the middle of the *Madhyamakavatara* teachings and that on another night I was teaching *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*. Then His Holiness actually put his palms together and said: "Oh, it's really incredible that these actually include both method and wisdom. That's incredibly good". I'm sure all of you would have also received a blessing when he put his palms together and made that comment.

We should really acknowledge our great fortune in being able to study such texts as these. Further on, the text also explains the great purpose that one can achieve through the understanding of emptiness. So keep this in mind!

The text will also explain the relationship between understanding emptiness in relation to oneself and helping others. As will be explained, understanding emptiness helps to overcome the eight worldly concerns, as well as gaining various ways and means to benefit other sentient beings.

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

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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² See the teachings around 20 April 2004. The teachings on the five types of reasoning, specifically the four extremes of reasoning that have just been completed here, began on 15 April 2003.

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

4 April 2017

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

Generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings.

Our basic understanding of the bodhicitta motivation is a seed of bodhicitta, so it's a matter of further developing and enhancing it. Without putting some effort into increasing our level of bodhicitta it will not just suddenly and spontaneously develop within ourselves. Nourishing the seed of bodhicitta is our personal responsibility.

As explained many times previously, you have received the teachings and have an understanding of the different methods of developing bodhicitta, such as the sevenfold cause and effect sequence and the technique of exchanging self with others. Based on your understanding of these techniques, you need to familiarise yourself with them again and again; that is how you actually engage in the practice of developing bodhicitta.

The bodhisattvas who have already developed bodhicitta did done so by using these very techniques and are constantly increasing their bodhicitta by benefiting sentient beings, There's no other way to develop bodhicitta other than training your mind in the techniques presented.

If the bodhisattvas spontaneously generate the mind of bodhicitta without any effort, then we might also resolve to wait around for the day that we spontaneously generate it too. But since that is not possible, as I regularly emphasise, it is important for us to train our mind to become more compassionate and kind. For every effort we put into doing this, the benefits will definitely be reaped in this life, and in many future lives. So making every attempt in training our mind to cultivate bodhicitta is definitely of great benefit right now and in the long term.

If you wish to experience good results, then that is entirely dependent on generating positive and virtuous states of mind now. Likewise if we wish to avoid the experiences of suffering, then that is dependent on avoiding negative states of mind. What this shows is that we personally have the entire responsibility for securing a good future with positive results for ourselves, and avoiding negative results being experienced.

2.3.2.3.3. The reasoning refuting generation and cessation of existence and non-existence

This relates to refuting the effect and has three subdivisions:

2.3.2.3.3.1. Refuting inherent generation upon establishing the reason

2.3.2.3.3.2. Refuting this refutes inherent existence
2.3.2.3.3.3. Thus, establishing the equanimity of samsara and nirvana

2.3.2.3.3.1. Refuting inherent generation upon establishing the reason

With the earlier explanations from the text, the following passages should be easier to understand.

The first verse reads:

145. *For a functionality to come into existence
What need is there for a cause?
Even in the case that it does not exist,
What need is there for a cause?*

The commentary explains:

For a functionality to come into existence inherently, what need is there for a cause, for that which exists inherently does not need to be generated? Further, in the case that such a result does not exist, then what need is there for a cause as there is an inability to generate it? As all results are never generated at the time of the cause, this is not refuted, but what is refuted is that they are not generated at all.

The refutation of generation of an existing result, is the refutation of the result that exists at the time of the cause as asserted by the Enumerators, and results existing inherently as accepted by most others. But to say that since the effect is already generated it does not need to be generated, is a statement which is completely illogical. Thus, the non-inherently existing causes and effects are accepted to be like the illusion of a reflection.

Regarding establishing that a non-functionality is unsuitable to be created by a cause.

An argument is presented:

Argument: Although one does not need to generate something that is already generated, why should something non-existent not be generated?

The commentary explains, *for a functionality to come into existence inherently, what need is there for a cause? For that which exists inherently does not need to be generated.* This clearly explains that if a functionality comes into existence inherently, which means that it comes into existence independently, in and of itself then by default it would not depend on a cause since it does not have to depend upon anything for its generation.

The commentary continues, *in the case that such a result does not exist, then what need is there for a cause as there is an inability to generate it?* This is also quite clear: if such a result does not exist then there's no need for a cause. This relates to the refutation of generation and cessation of existence and non-existence, particularly in relation to causes and effects. The commentary explains, *as all results are never generated at the time of the cause, this is not refuted, but what is refuted is that they are not generated at all.* The commentary states that it is quite obvious that results are not generated at the time of the cause, therefore there is no need to refute what is quite obvious, but what is refuted is that they are not generated at all.

The *Prasangika* further explain, *The refutation of generation of an existing result, is the refutation of the result that exists at the time of the cause as asserted by the Enumerators, and results existing inherently as accepted by most others.* The Enumerators assert that the effect exists at the time of the

cause and this is what is being refuted. Also, most other Buddhist schools, which are the schools below the Prasangika, assert inherent existence, and thus they accept inherently existent causes and effects; this also what is being refuted.

The *Prasangika* make this comment, *But to say that since the effect is already generated it does not need to be generated, is a statement which is completely illogical.* They conclude by saying, *Thus, the non-inherently existing causes and effects are accepted to be like the illusion of a reflection,* explains that just as the reflexion of a face in a mirror is not the real face, and illusions conjured by a magician are not actual things, similarly although all causes and effects appear to be inherently existent, in fact they do not exist in that way in the slightest.

These analogies of illusions and reflections of a face in the mirror and so forth are very profound, as they can help you get a better understanding of what emptiness is. They are very good analogies to illustrate how although things appear to exist inherently that is not how they actually exist. Even if you don't immediately gain a profound understanding of the lack of inherent existence, at the very least it will help you to reduce strong afflictions like intense attachment and anger.

If you can bring to mind that although the object of attachment appears to be extremely attractive, in reality the beauty doesn't exist as it appears. When you spend some time reflecting on this, your attachment towards that object will definitely become reduced. Likewise, when an object of anger comes to mind, and you see it as being repulsive, if you were to recall that although it appears to be entirely repulsive, that repulsiveness doesn't exist in the way that it appears, then that will definitely help to reduce anger towards the object. These are very good trainings for our mind to see how things don't exist the way they appear to our mistaken consciousness; and thus helps to reduce the intensity of the afflictions.

If you actually contemplate in this way, an understanding of emptiness, on the basis of a lack of inherent existence of phenomena will dawn upon you, and the more you think about it and contemplate in this way, the more understanding you will develop. This is how it is of great benefit for you. The more you contemplate on emptiness to overcome the afflictions the more you will benefit by improving your life, which is only a gain. There is only great gain and no loss at all. Some seem to think that gaining an understanding of emptiness i.e. the lack of inherent existence, particularly in relation to reducing attachments, anger and so forth, will be some sort of loss in their lives. But you need not doubt that there is only gain. All the great masters of the past obtained their great realisations and achievements by overcoming the afflictions through these understandings.

As the teachings say, merely developing a doubt¹ about the validity of emptiness, will begin to shatter the very core of samsara.

The commentary continues to explain that, *regarding establishing that a non-functionality is unsuitable to be created by a cause, there's the argument that: Although one does not need to generate something that is already generated, why should something non-existent not be generated?* This leads onto the next verse.

What is being presented here is based on the earlier explanation and not too complicated to understand. The real essence of this whole presentation is presented in the following verses.

The next verse reads:

**146. Even through one billion causes
A non-functionality cannot be changed.
How can this status be functional?
What else is that which becomes functional?**

Then the commentary explains:

Madhyamaka: Even through one billion causes, a non-functionality cannot be changed into a functionality because a non-functionality cannot fulfil the function of any functionality. If it changes, does it change without giving up its non-functional status or upon giving it up? If we look at the first, how can the status of non-functionality be a functionality? The status of being able to perform a function and the status of not being able to perform a function are mutually exclusive. If we look at the second, what is the cause that changes into a functionality apart from being a functionality or non-functionality? There is no such thing.

This is quite clear, *Even through one billion causes, a non-functionality cannot be changed into a functionality,* means that any phenomena which by nature is non-functional, cannot be changed into something which is functional. That which is by its very nature non-functional cannot be transformed into something which is functional. This is quite clear.

A further question is asked to back up this statement, *If it changes, does it change without giving up its non-functional status or upon giving it up?* This is a reasonable question. In the first instance it says, *how can the status of non-functionality be a functionality?* If something which was non-functional gives up its status of being non-functional and changes into something functional, then how can the state of non-functionality be a functionality as they're mutually exclusive. Then, *If we look at the second,* this explains that, *what is the cause that changes into a functionality apart from being a functionality or non-functionality?* This indicates that something has to be either a functional thing or a non-functional thing, there is no third possibility. It is absurd to say that a non-functionality changes into a functionality, and there is no point asserting that a functionality changes into a functionality, because it is already a functional phenomenon. This is quite clear.

The verse reads:

**147. If an existent functionality is impossible when
non-existent,
When does functionality become existent?
Without having been generated as functionality
It does not become separated from this non-
functionality.**

**148ab. It is not separated from non-functionality
An occasion for the existence of functionality is
impossible?**

¹ Here 'doubt' has a positive connotation in the sense of suspecting that the teachings on emptiness are indeed valid.

Then the commentary explains:

Further, if it does not give up the status of non-functionality, and if it is not possible for a functionality to exist at a time when no functionality exists, when does functionality become existent? Functionality has not been generated at the time of non-functionality.

Further, if it becomes upon having abandoned the status of non-functionality: Without functionality having been generated it is impossible to become separated from non-functionality, and if it is not separated from non-functionality, then there is no chance for the existence of functionality, because these two types of status are mutually exclusive.

Again, this is quite clearly explained in the commentary so there's no need to elaborate further. What can be noted here is that the Vaibhashika assert that if it is existent phenomena it necessarily has to be a functional phenomenon – so even space is functional phenomenon. Their definition of functional phenomena is, that which can be conceived by a consciousness. So whatever can be conceived by a consciousness is what they would assert as a functional phenomenon. However according to the Prasangika system, functional phenomena relates to something which is produced by causes and effects, and thus cannot be permanent.

The next two lines of the verse read:

*148cd. Also, the functionality does not become non-existent
Because it would follow that it has two natures.*

Then the commentary explains:

Just as a non-functionality does not become a functionality, a functionality does not become a non-functionality because if it would be half functionality and half non-functionality, then the consequence would arise that merely one would have two natures.

These reasonings refute all generation from non-existence and non-functionality.

Take the subject 'sprout' – it is not generated inherently – because it is not inherently generated as existent, and it is not inherently generated as non-existent, e.g., like the child of a barren woman. Although its generation is refuted if non-existent at the time of the cause, it is a refutation of its inherent generation at the time of generation, even though it is non-existent at the time of the cause. Therefore, one needs to relate it to the object of negation.

What is being refuted in, *although its generation is refuted if non-existent at the time of the cause*, is that although the effect does not exist at the time of the cause, an inherently existent effect is generated from an inherently existent cause. Thus the commentary explains, *therefore, one needs to relate it to the object of negation*.

2.3.2.3.3.2. Refuting this also refutes cessation as being inherently existent

Having refuted inherently existent causes and inherently existent effects, this also refutes inherently existent cessation. That is what is being presented here.

The verse reads:

*149. Likewise cessation does not exist in such a way
And because functionalities also do not exist*

*All these migrators
Are never generated and never cease.*

The commentary explains:

If we look at the non-inherent existence of generation due to the reasoning explained above, cessation also does not exist inherently and because functionalities do not exist inherently, all these migrators are never inherently generated or inherently cease, they are primordially pacified and naturally liberated.

The main point being presented here is that when inherent generation is refuted by the earlier presented reasons, then inherently existent cessation is also refuted.

2.3.2.3.3.3 Thus, establishing the equanimity of samsara and nirvana

It was mentioned earlier that sentient beings are primordially pacified and naturally liberated, so this point establishes the equilibrium of samsara and nirvana.

The first two lines of the verse read:

*150. Migrators are like a dream
When investigated they are like banana trees*

The commentary explains:

The dream-like migrators of existence have not the slightest nature and they abide individually, without action and activity mixing. When analysed with the reasoning investigating suchness they are like a banana tree, they appear as if there is something identifiable but there is not the slightest inherent essence.

The demarcation that decides whether it becomes an analysis into suchness or not: If one is not satisfied with mere imputation by name and analyses on the basis of wanting to investigate how the basis exists, then it becomes an analysis into suchness, but if one is satisfied with mere imputation by name and investigates whether Devadatta comes and goes, then it is a nominal analysis.

The commentary explains, *the dream-like migrators of existence have not the slightest nature and they abide individually, without action and activity mixing*, which refers to the fact that migrators abide individually by performing actions and activities. When first analysed it appears to be like that but, *When analysed with the reasoning investigating suchness, they are like a banana tree*, means that although they appear like there's something identifiable, there is not the slightest inherent existence.

With the banana tree illustration, when you peel the trunk there is no solid core to be found. Similarly, sentient beings and migrators and their activities appear to exist from their own side, but in fact lack inherent existence. The word identifiable means that although they appear to exist from their own side, independently and in and of themselves, they actually do not exist in the slightest in that way.

The commentary now applies further reasoning with, *the demarcation that decides whether it becomes an analysis into suchness or not*, which is to point out the demarcation between the analyses of conventional reality and ultimate reality.

The statement, *if one is not satisfied with mere imputation by name and analyses on the basis of wanting to investigate how the basis exists*, highlights that when a name is imputed to

a person (e.g. Tom or *Devadatta*), if one is not satisfied with that mere label, and wants to investigate further on how the basis exists, this would be an investigation or analysis into suchness.

On the other hand, *but if one is satisfied with mere imputation by name*, meaning if you are satisfied with just the label that is given, *whether Devadatta comes and goes*, and you don't analyse further than that, *then it is a nominal analysis*. This was also explained previously.

The first two lines of the next verse read:

*150cd. Having gone beyond misery and having not gone
They do not have any distinction.*

The commentary states:

There is no difference in suchness between those gone beyond sorrow free from the bonds that bind them to existence, such as attachment, and those not gone beyond sorrow that are caught in the prison of cyclic existence, because both existence and peace are the same in being empty of inherent existence.

This highlights that as far as lacking inherent existence is concerned, there is no difference whatsoever between those gone beyond sorrow i.e. those gone beyond the deluded state and thus are liberated, with those still caught in samsara. Both are exactly the same in that they both lack inherent existence. It continues that, *because both existence and peace*, existence here referring to the cyclic existence, and peace referring to nirvana, *are the same in being empty of inherent existence*. This is the point.

The commentary then quotes from the *King of Concentration*:

The dream-like migrators of cyclic existence,
They are not born and neither do they die.

This is quite clear. Then from the *Sutra Requested by the Superior Upali*:

If one has comprehended the nature of phenomena,
then all results are non-existent and there is also no
result to be attained.

These again are in reference to phenomena being in the nature of emptiness.

3. ADVICE THAT IT IS SUITABLE TO STRIVE IN REALISING EMPTINESS

These following passages show why it is suitable, and the great advantages and benefits one would obtain by gaining the realisation of emptiness.

What is presented here in the following passages are meticulous and profound explanations. The heading here is sub-divided into three:

3.1. The actual advice

3.2. Showing the object of great compassion by showing the disadvantages of cyclic existence

3.3. Showing the mode of apprehension of the aspect of great compassion

3.1. The actual advice

That is then divided into two:

3.1.1. Showing the meaning of the mode of abiding

3.1.2. It is suitable to strive in realising that

3.1.1. Showing the meaning of the mode of abiding

The verse reads:

*151. How can functionalities thus empty
Be attained or lost?
How could one be praised?
How could one be criticised?*

The commentary then explains:

If one comprehends the actual nature of functionalities that are thus empty of inherent existence in the way explained earlier, then which gain does one attain and become attached? Through the loss of what gain does one generate anger? What is the benefit received by praise, and what is the harm received by criticism, and by whom?

What is presented here is one of the immediate benefits of gaining a realisation of emptiness: to overcome the eight worldly concerns. As previously explained, while the benefits of overcoming the eight worldly concerns are usually expressed as a way to overcome a strong sense of attachment, aversion etc. this passage relates to how the eight worldly concerns are developed, and how we are compounded by that, and how the eight worldly concerns are overcome by the actual understanding of emptiness.

You can do some research on what the eight worldly concerns are, and be prepared to answer questions if I ask you to list them. While the heading here specifically advises that it is suitable to strive to realise emptiness, headings in some other commentaries refer to the following passages as the actual results of realising emptiness.

We have nearly come to the end of chapter nine so I guess in the next few sessions we'll complete it, and then the tenth chapter is on dedication, which serves as a conclusion.

We might be able to start the teachings on the *Path to Enlightenment* in June.

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

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Edited Version*

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

11 April 2017

As usual let us spend some time in our meditation practice. [*tong-len meditation*]

Now we can generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings

3. ADVICE THAT IT IS SUITABLE TO STRIVE TO REALISE EMPTINESS¹

3.1. The actual advice

3.1.1. Showing the meaning of the mode of abiding

The root text reads:

151. *How can functionalities thus empty
Be attained or lost?
How could one be praised?
How could one be criticised?*

The commentary begins by stating:

If one comprehends the actual nature of functionalities that are thus empty of inherent existence in the way explained earlier...

This refers back to the various reasons that refute or negate the inherent existence of functionalities, which were presented earlier.

The commentary continues:

...then which gain does one attain and become attached? Through the loss of what gain does one generate anger?

This refers to the first two of the eight worldly concerns: being glad when one has obtained gained something and upset and unhappy when one does not gain anything. If we are glad when we gain something, then that can induce attachment to what we have gained. Likewise anger can arise when we are unhappy about not gaining something.

So we need to equalise those states of mind by understanding how the gains that we obtain and the lack of gain both equally lack any inherent existence. Since they do not exist from their own side, there is no independently existent gain to be obtained or lost. By contemplating this fact then our whole attitude towards gain and loss can change to feeling happy when we do not gain anything and unhappy when we gain something.

The misapprehension that perceives things as being inherently or independently existent also explains how that initial grasping at gain, and aversion towards not obtaining gain is actually induced by a self-grasping mind. So there is this combination of a self-grasping mind that is strengthened by the perception of objects as being inherently existent. That is the main point.

Here we need to be careful to not misinterpret this as meaning that we should avoid all gains. The main point is that we should overcome attachment to gain. If we think that it is necessary to completely avoid all gains, then that would imply that bodhisattvas would completely shun all gains, and not have possessions and so forth. That of course is not the case. There are bodhisattvas who have vast riches and so forth, but because of their lack of attachment to those riches they utilise them to benefit many other beings. Great practitioners such as the seventh Dalai Lama, Kelsang Gyatso, and the fifth Panchen Lama, Lobsang Yeshe, had great riches in their lifetimes. Yet it is said that they did not even cling to their robes as being 'mine'. They didn't have the slightest of thoughts that anything 'belongs to me'. This goes to show that it's not gain that we need to avoid, but the grasping and attachment to gains and so forth.

The commentary then asks:

What is the benefit received by praise, and what is the harm received by criticism, and by whom?

This relates to the second set of the eight worldly concerns: liking praise and not liking any criticism. As they both equally lack any inherent existence from their own side, why be so glad about praise and why be so unhappy about criticism?

The relevant verse reads:

152. *Where do happiness and suffering come from?
What is there to like or dislike?
Having investigated suchness
Who craves, and for what?*

Here the commentary explains:

From what true cause does the suffering of happiness, for which one engages into effort to attain and abandon it, arise? What is the inherent object of aversion and desire that one dislikes and likes? If one investigates suchness with the reasoning investigating the nature of the mode of abiding, then which craving person generates craving for which object, in dependence on which basis is craving generated? The three circles of craving lack inherent existence.

Being glad when experiencing happiness and despondent and unhappy when experiencing suffering is said to be one of the worst worldly concerns, as it is the cause of so much agitation, distress and mental suffering. That is because the happiness we crave eludes us so often, while we keep on experiencing what we really want to avoid. The moment we experience some sort of pleasurable samsaric happiness, attachment immediately arises in our minds, and the moment we experience any kind of discomfort and suffering, aversion and anger arise in our minds. We know this from our own experience. The moment we feel any discomfort, our mind is likely to become upset, and we begin to feel agitated and angry.

The way to equalise and overcome this worldly concern is to contemplate how there is no truly and inherently existent happiness. Likewise, there is no truly and inherently existent suffering existing independently from its own side. With this understanding strong grasping at the experience of worldly happiness, and the desire to avoid suffering is overcome.

¹ The body of the text has three sections: the need to realise emptiness, the method to generate the wisdom realising suchness and this section, advice that it is suitable to strive to realise emptiness.

There is also the exchanging and equalising method that is mentioned in the mind-training teachings. This involves exchanging your attitude from one that likes happiness with an attitude of disliking happiness, and exchanging disliking suffering with the attitude of liking and welcoming suffering and problems. This is, of course, a very profound level of mind-training, but through regular practice it is possible to actually reach the stage of exchanging the mind that craves happiness to being wary about experiencing worldly happiness, and then replacing it with an attitude of looking forward to experiencing difficulties and suffering.

Adopting this technique of exchanging worldly concerns can definitely be assisted by contemplating karma. All of our experiences come from previously created causes and conditions – none of them comes about randomly without any cause. When we apply this to ourselves, then we realise that the happiness we experience is result of our virtuous behaviour and the good karma that we have created in the past. So if we get attached to that happiness, then we are actually using up the virtue that we created in the past. So there's nothing to be happy about in using up and wasting the good karma that we have created in the past. When we think in this way and really understand the implications, it is very reasonable to not feel too elated about experiencing happiness.

Likewise, suffering is the result of negative karma that we created in the past with negativities and non-virtuous behaviour. So whatever suffering we experience now is actually exhausting our previously created negative karma, which is quite a good thing. When we understand things on this level then we welcome problems, because they are exhausting our negative karma. Wouldn't it be great to use up all your negative karma so that there are no more negative karmas left to experience?

Shantideva himself mentions five qualities of suffering. One of these is that when we experience suffering, we can immediately contemplate shunning negativities and accumulating virtue, and in that way see suffering as a way of encouraging us to accumulate virtue. Whenever I drink tea or enjoy a good meal, I contemplate how this is the consequence of good karma. Contemplating in this way actually encourages us to accumulate more virtue. Rather than becoming a cause for attachment, it actually reminds us that we need to accumulate more good karma. Conversely, when we experience any kind of mishaps and difficulties, we can remember that the uncomfortable experience we are experiencing now is a result of past negativities. This reminds us to purify our negative karma so that we won't have to experience the consequences in the future.

Shantideva mentions that we should develop a mind of being cautious about creating negativities, and glad and happy about accumulating virtues.

This is an essential point that we need to really consider. Whenever we have a good experience then, rather than getting too excited and feeling elated, we should immediately remind ourselves, 'OK, this is a result of the virtue that I accumulated in the past. So I should not waste it by becoming attached'. This also reminds us to accumulate more virtue. As soon as we experience any kind of mishap, discomfort and suffering we should

immediately remind ourselves that this is result of the negative karma that we created in the past, and that we must not engage in negativities now. Contemplating in this way develops a very strong impetus to accumulate virtue and shun negativities, which is the essential practice of Dharma.

The next line in the commentary is:

What is the inherent object of aversion and desire that one dislikes and likes?

Again, this is referring to what is liked or disliked such as liking happiness and disliking suffering, and liking pleasant words while disliking unpleasant words. As the commentary suggests:

If one investigates suchness with the reasoning investigating the nature of the mode of abiding, then which craving person generates craving for which object, in dependence on which basis is craving generated?

The conclusion is that:

The three circles of craving lack inherent existence.

The three circles refer to the person who is craving, the object that is being craved and the actual action of craving. All three lack even an atom of inherent existence. When we really analyse the person who likes and dislikes, the object that is liked and disliked, as well as the actions of craving for what we like and craving to be free from what we dislike, we find that all of them lack inherent existence. When we contemplate in this way it definitely reduces strong attachment and aversion in relation to, respectively, beautiful and repulsive objects. What is being presented here is that without a proper understanding of emptiness then it is very difficult to overcome the mental afflictions. Conversely when there is a good understanding of emptiness, the lack of inherent existence of ourselves and other phenomena, then that helps to reduce and ultimately overcome the mental afflictions. This is what needs to be understood.

The next verse is:

153. *When analysed, this life's worldly being,
How can it pass away here?
What will arise, what arose?
Who is a relative or friend?*

Here the commentary explains:

If one analyses thus a result, if one analyses karma and the person accumulating karma, then, because death is empty of inherent existence, how can this worldly sentient being die here in existence? How can it arise in a later life, how could it have arisen in a previous life? As there is not even the slightest inherent existence, who is the benefiting relative, or the attractive friend? Therefore, having worked at gaining a complete understanding of the meaning of the mode of abiding, one should train in equanimity for the eight worldly dharmas.

If we investigate the *karma and the person* who is *accumulating the karma*, then we are investigating on the basis of a living person now, as well as the experience at the time of death, and the future lifetime. All three, the living person now, the person who will experience death, and the person in the future, equally lack inherent existence.

As there is not even the slightest inherent existence, how can this worldly sentient being die here? How can it arise in a later life? How could it have risen in a previous life? What is being pointed out is that the living being now, that which will experience death, that which is to be reborn in the future as well as that which has come from the past, all equally lack any inherent existence. The reference to the *relative* who *benefits and the attractive friend* relates to friends and relatives who we perceive as existing inherently and from their own side, and are thus an object of attachment and craving. Understanding the lack of inherent existence of all the various objects of our attachment and aversion will help to overcome strong attachment and aversion, as well as all other afflictions.

Then comes the exhortation, *Therefore, having worked at gaining a complete understanding of the mode of abiding, one should train in equanimity for the eight worldly dharmas.* Although we may not have a complete understanding of the mode of abiding, i.e. the lack of inherent existence of phenomena, we can strive towards overcoming the eight worldly concerns with whatever understanding of emptiness that we do have now. This is the main point.

3.1.2. It is suitable to strive in realising that

The following two lines of verse are:

154ab. *Everything is like space -
That is how the likes of me should hold
everything.*

The commentary explains:

Therefore, those like me, the author, should hold all phenomena to be like space, because it is the main path to cut the root of existence and progress to all-knowing transcendental wisdom. 'Those like me' is to reduce the pride of the author, and the main reason is as advice to those ordinary individuals that have not yet realised suchness.

The definition of space is the mere negation of obstruction. Emptiness is likened to space as it is a non-affirming negation; i.e. emptiness is the mere negation of inherent existence.

Because it is the main path to cut the root of existence and progress to all-knowing transcendental wisdom explains that the realisation of emptiness is the main path that cuts the root of cyclic existence, and *progress to all knowing transcendental wisdom.*

This is a specific explanation: the wisdom realising emptiness is both the root cause for obtaining liberation i.e. cutting the root of cyclic existence, and for obtaining the all-knowing transcendental wisdom that is enlightenment. So the realisation of emptiness is the unequivocal cause of both liberation and enlightenment.

The remainder of the commentary is quite clear. *'Those like me' is to reduce the pride of the author. The main reason or purpose, however is to entice ordinary individuals who have not yet realised suchness, to actually gain the realisation of emptiness.*

3.2. Showing the object of great compassion by showing the disadvantages of cyclic existence

The following passages are not difficult to understand if you read through them slowly. They contain essential advice how to engage in practice.

There are five subdivisions:

- 3.2.1. The disadvantages of this life
- 3.2.2. The disadvantages in the next life
- 3.2.3. Contemplating that despite taking rebirth in the happy realm there is no time to practise Dharma
- 3.2.4. Contemplating the difficulty of attaining a birth with leisure and endowment
- 3.2.5. That oneself and others are afflicted by the suffering of cyclic existence is suitable to be mourned

3.2.1. The disadvantages of this life

Contemplating the disadvantages of this life also helps to induce compassion for other beings as well. That is the main point presented in these lines of verse:

- 154cd. *Those who desire happiness for themselves,
Through the causes of fighting and liking,
155. Are agitated or joyful;
Are miserable, striving and arguing,
Cutting, stabbing, and creating negativity
With each other; it is a very difficult life!*

The explanation in the commentary reads:

Even in this life, those desiring happiness for themselves are not beyond the power of suffering. Out of the wish for happiness they fight with enemies and like their friends, and through these causes they are either very disturbed or joyful. They are miserable when not achieving their aim. It appears as if they have to lead a very difficult life with much exertion, and yet attain little fruit due to the effort exerted to achieve the aim of their desires, due to arguing with others, cutting and stabbing each other's bodies, and accumulating infinite negativities of speech, mind and so forth. Therefore, the wise ones should not crave for the perfections of this life.

As the commentary explains, *Even in this life, those desiring happiness for themselves are not beyond the power of suffering.* Although we wish to experience happiness, we constantly experience suffering.

This is the same point that was presented in an earlier verse in the text. Shantideva really hit the mark when he said:

Although not wishing any sufferings,
Beings constantly run towards suffering
And although wishing for happiness,
They destroy the very causes of happiness.

As the commentary explains very clearly, *Out of the wish for happiness they fight with enemies.* We have all seen those who try to overcome enemies with the intention of gaining some happiness. However, far from attaining happiness, their actions just incite more hostility, so the desired result of happiness has become the cause for more suffering. We can see this on a global level. All the current conflicts arose from an initial intention to defeat and vanquish enemies in the name of peace, yet these conflicts have just created more and more hatred, and more combat, and more fighting. It is the same with friends. We try to please our friends, but sometimes that just causes more misery, and we realise that we haven't found the friendship we were looking for.

As the commentary further explains, *through these causes they are either very disturbed or joyful but they are miserable* because they do not achieve their aim. *It appears as if they have to lead a very difficult life with much exertion.* We can see this in our own lives: we put so much time and energy into the pursuit of

success and so forth but happiness still eludes us. As the commentary clearly explains people *attain little fruit due to the effort exerted to achieve the aim of their desires*. These efforts include *arguing with others, cutting and stabbing each other's bodies, and accumulating infinite negativities of speech, mind and so forth*. This is all very clear. *Therefore, the wise ones should not crave for the perfections of this life*. Here we are being exhorted to be careful about being overly concerned with the pleasures of this life.

The main point is the need to be mindful of acquiring the right conditions and causes for happiness. If we follow mistaken causes, then instead of experiencing happiness we will experience suffering which, of course, is what we have experienced all too often. The reason why we end up experiencing problems and thus suffering is because we are not acquiring the right causes for our happiness, and we keep on creating the causes for more problems and suffering. That is what we have done in the past, and that is what we are doing now. When you really contemplate these points especially in relation to the next verse, it really instils a strong compassion for those who are completely ignorant of the cause and effect sequence of how to accumulate virtues to experience happiness, and how to avoid the causes of suffering. Because of this ignorance they constantly experience suffering.

3.2.2. The disadvantages in the next life

The next few lines express the plight of sentient beings very succinctly. It is quite difficult for them to free themselves from cyclic existence, because this circle of constantly craving more causes us to experience the sufferings of cyclic existence again and again.

156. *Taking a higher rebirth from time to time,
And having experienced plenty of happiness
there
One falls after death into the lower realms,
Experiencing long and terrifying sufferings.*

As the commentary explains:

Through the force of occasionally meeting with a virtuous teacher one takes a happy rebirth from time to time for the shortest of periods, like a flash of lightning in the sky. Having enjoyed much happiness there, one then has to experience the rough hot unpleasant sufferings of the lower realms and fall into the unceasing great hells where one remains for infinite eons experiencing terrifying suffering. Therefore, contemplate the sufferings of the lower realms.

Again this is essential advice, and it's not too hard to understand. It is a very strong reminder to actually practise the Dharma. As the commentary explains, *through the force of occasionally meeting with a virtuous teacher one takes a happy rebirth from time to time for the shortest of periods*. Right now we are enjoying the perfect conditions of a human life with its ten endowments and eight freedoms, because we met virtuous teachers in the past, and accumulated virtuous karma or merit in the past.

However, as explained here, although we have obtained a higher rebirth from time to time in the past, each of those lives were very short. The good conditions that we enjoy now will definitely not last much more than eighty years. As mentioned here, *like a flash of lightning in the sky, having enjoyed much happiness then one has to experience the rough*

hot unpleasant sufferings of the lower realms. When we have exhausted the merit to experience good conditions, then what remains is the negative karma that we created in the past, which then propels us to the lower realms once more.

Contemplating these points definitely brings a sense of urgency about securing a good future by accumulating virtues now. As the commentary explains, the alternative is to remain *for infinite eons experiencing terrifying suffering*. So we need to *contemplate the sufferings of the lower realms*.

In this life we are exhausting the merit that we have accumulated in the past, and unless we accumulate further virtues and merit to secure a good rebirth in the next life, we will have to experience the suffering of an unfortunate rebirth in the lower realms. So the main point here is that we need to develop a sense of urgency about accumulating virtues now. While that definitely inspires me to accumulate virtues and shun negativities, we all can benefit from thinking about this point.

While contemplating the sufferings of an unfortunate birth in the next life encourages us to engage in virtues and practise Dharma, it also induces a sense of compassion for other beings. They are experiencing so much suffering at this time, and they have no understanding of how to overcome the causes of that suffering. Their plight is really pitiful, and contemplating that can induce great compassion for them.

On a very basic level try to avoid negativities and accumulate virtues. While we may not yet have a vast understanding of the teachings, we can definitely practise at a simple and practical level. Understanding the ten virtuous and the ten non-virtuous actions gives us all that we really need to practise morality. There are the three non-virtuous physical actions of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct; the four non-virtuous actions of speech i.e. lying, divisive words, harsh words, and idle gossip; and three mental non-virtues of covetousness, harmful intention, and wrong views. By avoiding these ten non-virtues, and making a promise to practise the ten virtues, you are engaging in the practice of avoiding negativities and adopting virtues.

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

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Edited Version*

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

18 April 2017

As usual, let us spend some time for our meditation practice. [*tong-len meditation*].

Now let us generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings, thinking, 'for the benefit of all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice well'.

3.2.2. The disadvantages in the next life

Under this heading, we covered the first verse and its explanation in our last session. We are now onto the next verse.

What is being presented here are profound ways for encouraging ourselves to engage in Dharma practice. As explained earlier, although we may have obtained a rebirth in a fortunate realm, the period of time we have in this fortunate rebirth is very short. Therefore, having obtained this precious human rebirth at this time, and particularly having had the good fortune to meet with a qualified Mahayana teacher, we need to seize this opportunity and put the Dharma we have studied into practice well. This is the essence of what is being presented here.

In fact, we covered this yesterday in the last session of the Easter course on *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, when we went through the details of contemplating the sufferings of sentient beings as a way to generate bodhicitta. So we can easily relate to this point.

In yesterday's session, we reached the point in the verses about the purpose of realising emptiness. As we didn't have time to go further with that, this can be a continuation of the same topic - how to go about generating the realisation of emptiness.

The first three lines of the next verse read:

*157abc. There are a multitude of precipices in the world.
Suchness does not exist there
And they contradict each other.*

The commentary explains:

Contemplating the general sufferings of existence, in the existence of desire, form and the formless there are great multitude of precipices of harmful sufferings. The cause why one is not beyond this is that this world does not comprehend suchness, which is the method to be liberated from suffering. Situations such as being bound by the noose of existence is mutually exclusive with such an understanding.

Therefore, if one does not comprehend suchness, then one fabricates functionalities as truly existent, and as a result, one will be in contradiction to the cause of liberation. Then there is nothing left but to circle in cyclic existence ...

What is being explained here are the many pitfalls of suffering that exist in the desire, form and formless realms.

Just to explain further about the 'formless realm': we may recall that the definition of a person is 'that which is nominated upon one or more of the five aggregates'. So while beings in the formless realm don't have the form aggregate, by definition they are a person or a being, as they are nominated upon the aggregates of consciousness along with the compositional factors, feeling and discrimination.

Again, we can relate the commentary to what we were discussing in the verse of the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path* at yesterday's session. The purpose of realising emptiness is as explained here: *the cause why one is not beyond this is that this world does not comprehend suchness or emptiness, which is the method to be liberated from suffering.* The commentary goes on: *situations such as being bound by the noose of existence are mutually exclusive with such an understanding.* As was also explained in yesterday's session on the purpose of realising emptiness, beings are bound to cyclic existence due to karma and afflictions. If we recall the analogy of a person bound to a tree, the binding factor - the rope - is analogous to karma and the delusions. As I have mentioned previously, gaining an understanding of one aspect of the teachings, and maintaining that understanding, can help us to relate to other similar explanations. When you have read and understood a particular aspect of the teaching, then whenever you find it presented in a text, that part of the text will be very clear to you.

So if we understand cyclic existence as being our own contaminated aggregates, the binding factor - or as mentioned here the noose - is karma and the delusions, and that which is being bound is the person, ourselves. We are bound to the contaminated aggregates by the noose or rope of the afflictions and karma. Thus, we will not be free of being bound to the contaminated aggregates unless and until we generate the understanding or realisation of suchness or emptiness. This is the essential point.

The commentary further explains:

Therefore, if one does not comprehend suchness, then one fabricates functionalities as truly existent, and as a result, one will be in contradiction to the cause of liberation.

When we have the false perception of grasping at phenomena as truly or inherently existent, this mistaken view will bind us to cyclic existence, which is *in contradiction to the cause of liberation*. If we view things as being empty of true or inherent existence, then that will not be in contradiction to the cause of liberation. In fact, it will be the very cause of our liberation.

Here, we need to understand that the fabricated perception we have that sees *functionalities*, or phenomena *as being truly existent* is the main cause that binds us to cyclic existence, a specific example of which would be our own contaminated aggregates. Until we thoroughly understand why we need to abandon our contaminated aggregates, there is no way we can develop the mind of wanting to be free from cyclic existence.

In relation to the three types of sufferings – from our own experience, we can all relate to the *suffering of suffering* as something we desperately want to overcome. Even animals want to be free from the suffering of suffering. Some translations refer to it as the ‘suffering of pain’ denoting the emotional and physical pain that is experienced. This is not an obscure point; because of the very experience of physical or mental suffering, all beings are naturally inclined to want to be free from that. The next type of suffering is the *suffering of change*, which is a little bit more obscure. It is not, however, unique to the Buddhist tenets, as there are some other traditions that view the suffering of change as something to be abandoned as well. The third level of suffering – *all-pervasive, compounded suffering* – is said to be the subtlest suffering to realise, and thus to be abandoned. But until we see the need to abandon our contaminated aggregates, then there is no way we can be free from cyclic existence. This is what specifically needs to be understood here, which is an uncommon and unique presentation in the Buddhist teachings. If, on the other hand, we are in contradiction to the cause of liberation, *then there is nothing left but to circle in cyclic existence*.

The last line of Verse 157 and the two lines from Verse 158 read:

157d. *Hence, nothing like it exists in the world.*

158ab. *Additionally, there is a terrifying infinite Ocean of suffering without example.*

The commentary explains:

Because in the world of circling there is no such thorough comprehension of suchness, and it is a unique existence in which one experiences an ocean of terrifying infinite suffering without example. Therefore it is suitable to strive in understanding emptiness.

This serves as a reason for the earlier point. The commentary starts by saying that because of the lack of the *thorough comprehension of suchness*, *it is a unique¹ existence in which one experiences an ocean of terrifying infinite suffering without example*. In other words, until we gain the thorough comprehension or understanding of suchness or emptiness, we will not be able to see the end of cyclic existence. In earlier teachings, there were questions about whether or not there is an end to cyclic existence. Here, we are shown that we will not be able to see the end of cyclic existence if we do not have the comprehension, or thorough understanding, of suchness. Such a person will experience a seemingly endless round of rebirth in cyclic existence. But a being who develops a thorough understanding of suchness will be able to see that there is an end to their cyclic existence.

Rather than getting caught in endless debates about whether in general there is an end to cyclic existence or not, it is much more worthwhile for us to understand that, on a personal level, for as long as we do not gain the thorough or complete, unmistakable understanding of the correct view of suchness, there will be no end to our personal cyclic existence. We will have to be continuously

reborn in cyclic existence. But when we gain a good understanding and realisation of emptiness, from then on, we will be able to clearly see that there is an end to our own personal cyclic existence. So, as the commentary concludes, *it is suitable to strive to understand emptiness*.

Here, we need to contemplate our own mistaken view, or the view of the transitory collections. With this view, one grasps at oneself (the individual ‘I’) and the ‘my’ and ‘mine’ which belong to the aggregates as being inherently existent. That core misconception – grasping at the self – is what binds us to cyclic existence. We must then see the possibility of overcoming this mistaken view, and that there’s an antidote to this mistaken view of the transitory collections. The antidote is to cultivate the understanding of the correct view, which is that the ‘I’ and the things that belong to the ‘I’ do not exist inherently. When we comprehend that and realise the view of selflessness, we overcome that mistaken view of the transitory collections.

As the teachings explain, when grasping at the self is overcome, then we release the noose that binds us to cyclic existence. We need to see that the object apprehended by self-grasping – an inherently or truly existent ‘I’ – does not exist. Once we see that there is no truly or inherently existent self, we will have negated the object perceived by self-grasping. That is how we understand the selflessness of the ‘I’.

3.2.3. *Contemplating that despite taking rebirth in the happy realm there is no time to practise Dharma*

The next verse exhorts us to overcome the thought, ‘although I didn’t get time to practise much in this life, I can certainly aim to practise further in the next life’. What may sound to us like a comforting thought is in fact just a form of laziness, specifically the laziness of procrastinating.

The following passages help us to overcome such laziness by reminding us that, although we may have a good rebirth at the moment, it is very short, and there is not much time to actually practise the Dharma.

So we can relate the following passages to our precious human life:

158cd. *There thus it is weak
And one's life is short.*

159ab. *There are actions to live
And stay healthy; thirst and fatigue,*

The commentary explains:

There, in that existence, although one takes rebirth in a happy realm, as a consequence the power to create virtue is thus weak, and the basis for achieving virtue, the freedoms and endowments, is short-lived.

Even during the briefest times there, one is engaged in actions with which one hopes to stay with for a long time, such as washing and massaging the body and relying on medicine to stay free from sickness. There is thirst, fatigue on the road, ...

So *although one may take rebirth in a happy realm such as a human rebirth with freedoms and endowments, the power to create virtue is still very weak*. Even if one has obtained a human rebirth with *freedoms and endowments*, it is also very *short-lived*. It doesn’t last for a long time. We really need to reflect upon this in relation to our own circumstances.

¹ Translator’s note: the Tibetan word here means ‘an existence which has no comparison or has no example’. I think that’s why this translation uses the word ‘unique’ here.

Even during the briefest times there, one is engaged in actions with which one hopes to stay with for a long time... So, although the duration of our stay in the happy realms or in fortunate rebirths is only for a short time, we hope to stay for a long time. Thus, we engage in the means for staying healthy and prolonging our life, by engaging in activities such as washing and massaging the body and relying on medicine to stay free from sickness and so forth.

We know that the daily act of washing or taking a shower – and especially taking a bath – takes some time out of our day. The main point being made here is that if we engage in these activities frivolously or mindlessly, then we are using up our time without taking the opportunity to practise the Dharma. When I take a bath, I incorporate thoughts about the Dharma, such as, ‘By cleaning and taking care of my body, may it be sustained for the purpose of the teachings, for the purpose of benefiting others’. With that attitude, such actions can become meaningful. Otherwise, if we engage in activities like cleaning ourselves or eating simply with worldly concerns, then since most of the day is taken up with such activities, our time will have been used frivolously and we won’t have had the time to practise Dharma. Likewise, when we get sick, we are so absorbed in our aches and pains, it is hard to think about the Dharma at that time.

Most of our day is taken up with such worldly activities. So, if we seek to set a separate time for practising Dharma, there is not much time left. However, if we were to engage in all our daily activities in a virtuous frame of mind, they would become meaningful. That is why, as I regularly recommend, it is important to remember offering every meal we eat and every drink we have, and think that we are consuming food and drink as a way to sustain ourselves for the purpose of Dharma. That then becomes the means for accumulating merit and engaging in virtue. Otherwise, if we think Dharma practice is to be done only at a separate allocated time, and regard everything else outside of this as merely daily activities for our survival, we will carry them out mindlessly, in a worldly way. If that is the case, then definitely there will not be much time left for what we would consider ‘time for Dharma practice’.

The next lines of verse are:

*159cd. Sleep and harm. Likewise, due to
Meaningless association with the childish,*

*160ab. Life passes by quickly, and
The opportunity to investigate is extremely
rare.*

Then the commentary explains:

... sleep and [being harmed by] various inner and outer harms. Likewise, through meaningless association with the childish negative friends, life passes quickly without meaning and disintegrates without the time to practise Dharma.

Because it is extremely difficult to find an opportunity to investigate the meaning of suchness, which is the cause to go beyond existence, for that reason one should strive in the method to reverse cyclic existence.

We could say that up to half of our life is spent sleeping. In 24 hours, up to half the time may be taken up with

sleep. Sleep takes up a lot of time that otherwise could be used to practise Dharma.

The *inner harms* could relate to inner diseases, or psychologically feeling weighed down or depressed. The *outer harms* are harms from external sources that also cause mental agony. If we are not mindful when we are in pain and agony, this time could detract from our practice of Dharma, and become a condition for us to create non-virtue rather than a virtuous state of mind. That is why these harms are considered as times that keep us away from the practice of Dharma.

Likewise, through meaningless association with the childish, i.e. non-virtuous friends, life passes quickly without meaning... This means our life doesn’t wait for a moment. It is passing away continuously, subtracting from our lifespan, while most of our time is used up with these frivolous activities. So our life passes quickly without meaning, and disintegrates without finding the time to practise Dharma.

Because it is extremely difficult to find opportunities to investigate the meaning of suchness, which is the cause to go beyond existence, one should strive in the method to reverse cyclic existence

Returning to the topic of sleep, for those who are not familiar with the mental factors sleep is one of the four ‘changeable’ mental factors. This means that it can be virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral, depending on the motivation preceding the act of sleep. If, prior to falling asleep, one has a virtuous mind, it is said that when one falls asleep, one’s sleep will actually become virtuous, due to the last moment of mind before sleep being virtuous. If one has a negative mind just prior to falling asleep, the rest of the sleep actually becomes non-virtuous. Whereas if one has neither a virtuous nor a non-virtuous mind and just falls asleep within a natural state of mind, then that act of sleep will also be neutral - what we call neither virtuous nor non-virtuous. I mentioned ‘motivation’ earlier, but I think the meaning here is more like your state of mind prior to falling asleep.

In terms of making sleep virtuous by adopting a virtuous mind, I had some personal experience with this last month. I was in bed and reciting the prayer of the Four Immeasurables; I recited it a few times, then I fell asleep. Sometime later, when I woke up, I was actually still reciting it – I woke up reciting that prayer!

As I have shared a few times previously, when I put my head on the pillow to go to sleep, I normally visualise the Buddha just above my head. Then I imagine light rays coming from the Buddha’s heart and pervading my body, imagining that I am receiving the blessings of the Buddha. Then, when I fall asleep in that state, I feel like my sleep has been worthwhile. However, that is just something I have chosen to do. I’m not saying that you all have to do the same. I’m sharing this as an example of how to bring about a virtuous mind just before falling asleep.

It is specifically explained in some instructions that one can visualise the light rays coming from the Buddha, like a net or canopy of light. I guess we could think of the image of a mosquito net draped over a bed. The body is covered with the rays of light descending from the

Buddha: one sleeps within that canopy of light. It is said that one can feel very joyous and very protected under those rays of light. The instructions say that it is one of the best methods to protect one from external harms. It can also help one to ward off nightmares and uncomfortable dreams.

3.2.4. Contemplating the difficulty of attaining a birth with leisure and endowment

First, the argument or hypothetical doubt is presented:

Argument: It is acceptable because one can stop cyclic existence through meditating on emptiness when one takes rebirth in a happy realm and meditates on emptiness.

This is in relation to the earlier point that it is difficult to obtain a human rebirth in the next lifetime. Here, the argument is that, *it is acceptable because one can stop cyclic existence through meditating on emptiness when one takes rebirth in a happy realm and meditates on emptiness.* This is a doubt held by many people, 'Well even in this life if I don't achieve something significant, that's fine! I can relax, because in the next life, I will have the opportunity to practise the Dharma.'

There are those who often say 'I didn't get much time to practise Dharma in this life, but that's okay, because in the next life, I will obtain a human rebirth, and then I will be able to practise.' The text proceeds to remove such wishful thoughts, and encourages us to practise the Dharma now, when we have such good conditions.

160cd. How can the method to overcome Habituation with distraction possibly exist there?

161ab. Demons work there to throw one Into the vast hells;

Then the commentary explains the meaning of this verse, which serves as an answer to the earlier argument:

Answer: Cyclic existence is extremely difficult to stop due to having habituated oneself since beginningless samsaric lives to grasping at functionalities as truly existent, and to the distractions such as outer excitements and the like. How can there be the method to stop it, as conducive conditions are extremely rare and harmful obstructing conditions abound? Even during this limited time to practice, the dharma demons such as the 'Son of Gods' work for one to fall into the great hells. The conditions obstructing liberation from existence are many and difficult to stop.

What the commentary is explaining here is that *cyclic existence is extremely difficult to stop due to having become habituated since beginningless samsaric lives to grasping at functionalities as truly existent, and to the distractions such as outer excitements and the like.* We have a long habituation to grasping at truly or inherently existent functionalities, which include 'self' and other phenomena. This is due to the very deep-rooted seed of grasping at true existence, as well as our habituation to the distractions such as outer excitements, which means being distracted by, and engaging in frivolous activities. Due to this long habituation, we find it difficult to ignore these conditions.

As the commentary asks, *how can there be the method to stop it, as conducive conditions are extremely rare and harmful obstructing conditions abound?* We can relate to the examples or analogies given in the lam-rim teachings that

illustrate how our negativities are plentiful. One analogy compares our negativities to being like an expansive, deep-rooted tree, while our virtue is weak. There's another analogy: it is difficult to make a large quantity of a bitter substance palatable and sweet. Our virtue is like a few small drops of a sweet substance like honey that we put into a huge pot containing a bitter substance – one or two drops definitely cannot make it sweet. It would require a lot of the sweet substance to sweeten it. This analogy illustrates how, while our negativities abound, our virtue is very, very weak, as we have few opportunities to accumulate virtue.

There is a two-fold understanding for us here. On one hand, because our virtues have been weak, we cannot expect a radical, immediate change, expecting that by engaging in a few practices, we will suddenly experience a great transformation. That is too grand an expectation. On the other hand, despite our attempts at virtue being meagre, if we make every small effort to continuously engage in them, then eventually we can overcome our negativities – just like many drops of a sweet substance will eventually sweeten a big pot of a bitter substance.

Because of our habituation to perceiving things mistakenly with the view that grasps at inherent or true existence, and because of our many distractions, just practising a few lines of the Dharma could not possibly immediately change us. That is to be understood here. When the commentary further mentions that *even during this limited time to practice, the Dharma demons* – the Dharma demons mentioned here could refer to the negative influence of others, such as negative friends, but more specifically those who may show us a wrong or mistaken path that is not based on fact and reality, but on misconstrued, fabricated advice and teachings. Due to their influence and by following their advice, we could be misled and thus move further away from achieving the real Dharma, the truth. *The 'Son of Gods'* is the example mentioned here, which causes *one to fall into the great hells.*

Of course, when the Buddha teaches, he is able to subdue many sentient beings with his teachings. Because of the Buddha's majesty, he is able to attract many disciples. However, it is said that certain demons have a miraculous power to show an aspect of looking like the Buddha, just on the outside. When such demons give teachings, they mislead people into engaging in negativities.

It is said that evil-minded beings who do not like virtue and the Dharma, will be jealous when we do good virtuous deeds, and try to influence us to engage in negativities by telling us things that are untrue, leading us away from our Dharma practice and virtue. That is the main point being related here. We need to be mindful to protect ourselves from the negative influences that lead us away from the Dharma.

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

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