
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

1 October 2013

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

Let us now generate a positive motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines:

I need to obtain enlightenment for the sake of benefitting all sentient beings. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

4.2.1.4. CONSIDERING THE WAY NEGATIVITY IS FRIGHTFUL (CONT.)

4.2.1.4.2. If one does not purify negativity, then one must experience suffering even in this life

This has three subdivisions:

4.2.1.4.2.1. If one does not purify one's negativities, then one's friends and relatives cannot rescue us from the suffering of the life-force being cut

4.2.1.4.2.2. It is fearful because of not having created merit

4.2.1.4.2.3. One will be overcome by regret

4.2.1.4.2.1. If one does not purify one's negativities, then one's friends and relatives cannot rescue us from the suffering of the life-force being cut

This is an essential point because it relates to the most critical time of our existence, which is the transition to the next life. As the outline indicates, friends and relatives cannot help us at all at that time. The analogy that is given in other teachings is that the end of our life is like plucking a hair from butter; just like the piece of hair comes out solely by itself, there is nothing you can take with you when you go onto the next life.

The point here is that the consequence of not purifying our negativities is that we will experience suffering when our life force is cut, hence the need to purify negativities. If one were to die without having the opportunity to create any merit or virtue, the prospect of having to experience the consequences in a future life would generate great fear. However, as everyone here is engaged in purification practices, I'm sure no one here would have this fear!

Nothing can help us at the time of death except for our stock of virtue and merit, coupled with the purification practices we've done. So here we are being exhorted to actually engage in purification practices.

The lines relating to this section are:

40. *While I am lying on my bed,
Although I am surrounded by all my
relatives and friends
The feeling of being separated from life
Is experienced by myself alone.*

41ab. *When I am held by the minions of the lord
of death*

*What benefit are friends, what benefit are
relatives?*

Shantideva is saying, 'There is nothing to alleviate my fear; friends and relatives are of no use against the minions of the lord of death when he holds my frightened flesh'. This again is not very obscure or abstract—it is quite obvious that when someone dies, they are completely alone and nothing can help them at that time.

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary is also quite clear so we will go through the next few verses quite rapidly. As Gyaltsab Je explains:

If one does not create merit, then at the time of death, when I am lying on my bed, although friends and relatives surround me with their affection and sorrow, I will have to experience by myself alone the suffering feeling of having my life-force cut.

We can readily understand that merit is accumulated by abandoning the ten non-virtues such as killing, stealing and so forth. In fact, adopting the ten virtues and avoiding the ten non-virtues are very practical ways to accumulate merit. If one has not engaged in practices such as these, then, even though we are surrounded on our deathbed by loving friends and relatives, which is often customary, they cannot help us.

As the commentary explains, no matter how much affection they have for us, at that time *I will have to experience by myself, alone, the suffering the feeling of having my life force cut*. When the teachings refer to the suffering of death they are specifically referring to the suffering that arises when the mind, or the consciousness, is separated from the body. For those who are not prepared, that will be a time of great suffering.

While the main suffering at the time of death is the separation of the mind from the body, there are other kinds of suffering too, such as being separated from one's loved ones, one's wealth, possessions and all the enjoyments one was attached to in this life. This separation brings great mental agony and suffering.

As explained in the teachings, one form of suffering is not being able to meet with those we want to meet and not being able to accumulate the wealth we want and so forth. Having amassed a certain amount of wealth and met with loving people, we experience suffering when we have to separate from loved ones and discard our wealth. As explained in detail in the teachings, all of these sufferings become more pronounced and more intense at the time of death.

In this life, we all know that even a temporary separation from one's relatives and loved ones causes us suffering. But there is always the likelihood of meeting them again or finding another loved one, at which time the earlier suffering will be alleviated. But at the time of death, the separation is permanent; you will have to leave absolutely everything behind, never to be seen or enjoyed again.

As the commentary explains, friends and relatives cannot help us against the minions or messengers of death.

When the lord of death holds our frightened flesh, friends and relatives are of no use. Only the Dharma can rescue us at that time. It is said that those who have created a lot of negativity and have not got around to purifying it, will experience all kinds of fearsome visions at the time of death, which cause great fear and suffering. Conversely, it is said that those who have accumulated a lot of virtue and merit will have pleasant experiences which will help to soothe and settle down their mind, rather than causing fear. These sorts of experiences seem to take place when an individual's life force is being separated from their body.

What point is there in being excessively attached to wealth, friends, relatives and so forth when at the time of death they cannot be of any help to us? We spend so much time and energy trying to please them, yet when we need them the most they cannot help us. In order to apply antidotes to overcome strong attachment to worldly objects such as relatives, possessions and so forth, one needs to engage in accumulating virtue, which is the Dharma. So here we are being exhorted to realise that only the Dharma can rescue us and help us at the time of death.

Our ultimate protector is the Dharma, which brings us back to our practice. One particularly powerful practice that we regularly attempt to do in our sessions is the *tong len* practice of giving and taking. How incredibly beneficial it would be if we could implement this powerful practice at the time of death resolving, 'At this time I am taking upon all of the suffering of all beings and may whatever discomfort I am experiencing now be a substitute for the suffering of other beings. May their suffering ripen upon me and may other beings not have to experience such suffering'. If we are familiar with this practice we will be able to recall it without hesitation when we are dying. What an incredible practice that would be!

As a consequence of this amazingly powerful practice of offering love and compassion to all other beings, the mind will naturally become calm and peaceful. And if one were to die in that peaceful and tranquil state there is no question that one will be protected in the next life, and not be reborn in the unfortunate realms. Indeed the very purpose of the *tong len*, or giving and taking practice, is that it is a way to transform all difficulties on the path to enlightenment. This is really an important point and I want to emphasise the importance of not taking the *tong len* practice lightly; if we take it seriously now it will definitely be of help at that crucial time of death.

We might not be experiencing extreme difficulty or great suffering right now, and so we might not see the relevance of doing this giving and taking practice. The real purpose of doing the practice now is to familiarise our mind with it. Then, when difficult situations arise, we will be able to immediately and naturally rely upon this practice because of our familiarity with it. If we don't pay much attention to practices such as the *tong len* practice now, but familiarise ourselves with strong desires and attachments then, due to that familiarity, it will be quite natural for strong desire and attachment arise at the time of death. So it is really important that we prepare ourselves from now on.

The *tong len* practice is definitely one of the highest forms of practice as it protects one from unfortunate rebirths. As mentioned previously, it is based on love and compassion towards other sentient beings, and if one dies with a sense of love and compassion in one's heart, then there is no possibility of taking an unfortunate rebirth. Not only will dying with love and compassion in one's heart secure a good rebirth, but it will be a rebirth endowed with the conditions of meeting with the Mahayana teachings and the perfect Mahayana gurus, and all of the conditions that will enable one to practise the Dharma. These are essential points that we need to keep in mind.

Even though it will be explained in more detail further on, we need to see that this explanation relates to the real meaning of Dharma. The Dharma protects whatever virtue and merit we have accumulated within our own mental continuum. In the teachings the actual or ultimate Dharma is presented as the true cessation and the true path that are in the mental continuum of the arya beings. If that's what we relate to as the Dharma, then how could the truth of path and truth of cessation in an arya being's mental continuum actually help us? We cannot relate to that on a personal level. If we relate to the Dharma in that way then it is really hard to explain how Dharma serves as our protector. Whereas when we relate to the Dharma to the virtue and merit that we have accumulated within our own mental continuum, then it makes sense when the teachings explain that the Dharma is the actual protector. That is what is to be understood.

To restate the point, it is explained that the Dharma protects one from the unfortunate realms. So when we relate to the Dharma as a protector, we need to understand how it protects us from an unfortunate rebirth in the next life. When we understand that it is the merit and virtue within our own mental continuum that protects us from taking an unfortunate rebirth, we begin to understand how the Dharma protects us. When we see that, we can understand the literal meaning of Dharma, which is to hold its own entity. In the context of the Buddhadharma, this means holding one's mind from adverse conditions. This is the real meaning of the Dharma. The meaning of the word *dara* in Vajradhara also means to hold; thus Vajradhara literally means 'the one who holds a vajra'.

4.2.1.4.2.2. It is fearful because of not having created merit

This implies that if one has created merit, there is no need to be fearful at the time of death. We can relate this to the experiences of people who are facing death. When people who normally don't pay much attention to spiritual practice and so forth come to the end of their life and face death, it seems that it suddenly dawns on them that there is something beyond the material world. It seems that they realise that there is some intangible thing that is not found in the physical or material world. At that time, they may experience sadness that they had not paid any attention to this during their life, when they were completely immersed in the worldly aspects of the material world. This experience is not restricted to spiritual or Dharma practitioners—it dawns on ordinary people from all walks of life.

The next two lines of the verse are:

*41cd. At that time only merit can rescue,
But I also did not rely on that.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on these lines read:

At that time only merits such as refuge, keeping morality and so forth are the supreme refuge, but I also did not rely on them.

This shows regret because of not having practiced virtue.

When the commentary explains, *at that time only merits such as refuge, keeping morality and so forth are the supreme refuge*, the word *only* implies that, as explained earlier, one's wealth, possessions, relatives and friends are of no help at the time of death. The only thing of benefit is the merit that one has accumulated by taking wholehearted refuge in the Three Jewels and observing morality, which is referred to in the commentary as the *supreme refuge*.

Observing morality is based on abandoning the ten non-virtues, which we can all definitely attempt to practise. There is no need for us to take the life of others, so we can definitely avoid killing; we are fortunate enough that we don't have to engage in the act of stealing due to insufficient means; as lay people you can definitely avoid sexual misconduct such as adultery and so forth. None of this is out of your reach. Avoiding the remaining non-virtues is also within your capacity. So abandoning the ten non-virtues is not an obscure practice, or difficult to relate to.

In fact the *Abhidharma* says that most Dharma practices are actually subsumed into abandoning the ten non-virtues and adopting the ten virtues. It is good to really pay attention to observing the ten virtues. In everyday life, we all take refuge as part of our daily practice, and we should spend significant time considering the qualities of the refuge objects and how they are the supreme objects, rather than just giving lip service and merely repeating the words. Taking such wholehearted refuge in our daily life, as well as observing ethics and morality, is a way to amass merit and virtue, which will help us at the time of death. This is the point that is being presented here.

Today when I was reading the text I spent some significant time just reflecting on these essential points—I became quite immersed in them for almost an hour.

Our whole practice is subsumed in the heading *It is fearful because of not having created merit*. That is the crux of our practice, so I try in my daily life to spend time considering these points. It would also be good for all of you to really pay some attention to them and take them to heart.

When studying this text or referring to these points, it is good to relate them to the Lam Rim teachings. The topics of the Lam Rim should not be put aside when one is doing other study or practices. The points in the Lam Rim are the very basis of whatever practice we do, so we should complement the explanations in this text with the understanding we have gained from reading and studying the Lam Rim. Then our study will be more beneficial.

4.2.1.4.2.3. One will be overcome by regret

All of the earlier points relate to the power of regret which is one of the four opponent powers. This is an essential part of any purification practice because it is said when strong regret is generated it suffices to purify half of the negativity that one has incurred. So it is essential that we try to develop a strong sense of regret for any negativity that we may have created in the past, along the lines of, 'It is incredibly unfortunate that I was compelled to engage in this negativity, and I need to overcome and purify it by every possible means'. That is the kind of intention one needs to develop.

We are all here under the assumption that we are Dharma practitioners, so we need to really pay attention to what is essential for our practice, which is developing regret about negativity, rather than rejoicing in it. There is the danger that one may regret some virtue, feeling that it is too hard and difficult. There is also the danger of rejoicing in having an opportunity to create negativity, thinking 'For years I have wanted to experience this and I have not had the opportunity so far. It's really incredible that I have this opportunity now. How wonderful!'. Rejoicing in negativity in this way is completely contrary to the actual practice of Dharma. So we definitely need to protect our minds from this danger.

Since we all bear the name of Dharma practitioners it is not out of place for us to attempt to practise the Dharma in the most appropriate way, which means developing regret for negativities, and rejoicing in our virtues and so forth. I don't blame those who try to fill what otherwise seems to be an uncomfortable and lonely life by trying to find a girlfriend or a boyfriend, who may seemingly fill that void and provide some sort of pleasant experiences. However, when we really think about it, there is really no ultimate benefit in spending time and energy on that.

The verse under this heading reads:

*42. Protector, I, this careless one,
Did not search out these dangers.
Even though, in this impermanent life
I accomplish much negativity for them.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary quite succinct:

Referring to the object of refuge as *Protector* one proclaims: I, this reckless person, did not search out these dangers of the lower realms and I did not know about them. But I generated much negativity in this impermanent life for the purpose of this life, such as friends and so forth. This I regret.

As the commentary indicates, the objects of refuge such as the buddhas and the great bodhisattvas are protectors who are endowed with loving kindness. In proclaiming them as *protectors* the commentary is indicating that one must rely on them. Thus *one proclaims* in front of these objects of refuge who are endowed with great love and compassion, 'I, this reckless person, did not search out these dangers or fears of the lower realms'. Here *reckless* comes from the Tibetan word *bak-me*, which is the opposite of *bak-yo* which means conscientiousness. Thus reckless

refers to the lack of conscientiousness, which I've explained previously.¹

So a reckless person would be one who does not maintain a conscientious mind. Such a lack of conscientiousness would allow the delusions to overpower the mind, leading to actions that incur many faults. Thus, many faults are created under the influence of the delusions because of the lack of conscientiousness. Conversely when we apply conscientiousness, we protect ourselves from the influence of the delusions, and thus from engaging in many faults.

When one does not apply conscientiousness, one becomes a reckless person, and out of recklessness, or a lack of conscientiousness, *one did not search out these dangers of the lower realms because one does not know about them*. This implies that recklessness arises as a result of ignorance, in particular ignorance of how karma functions. Due to a lack of faith in karma one doesn't realise that the consequence of negativity is suffering and so forth. Here *dangers* refers to the suffering of death itself, both at the point of the separation of one's mind from the body, as well as the sufferings of the intermediate state.

Apparently there are particular sufferings that are experienced in the intermediate state such as visions, and of course there is the suffering of the next life in unfortunate rebirths. Not considering the consequences of negativity brings about this suffering. And, as explained here, 'Due to this ignorance, I generated much negativity in this impermanent life for the purpose of this life such as friends and so forth'. One's life is impermanent and by not reflecting upon the impermanence of one's life, one incurs a lot of negativities due to attachment to friends, constantly trying to please them, and trying to vanquish or overcome one's enemies, or those with whom one disagrees due to aversion. In this way, one will incur a lot of negativities. Having realised that, and understanding the consequences, one will develop strong regret about having engaged in these negativities.

The essential point of this verse is that it is by reflecting upon the various negativities one has accumulated in this very lifetime, one develops strong regret, along with the intention to purify those negativities.

4.2.1.4.3. *The reason why it is so fearful*

The two verses presented under this heading read:

43. *If a person is led today to the place
Where his limbs will be chopped off, he is
frightened.
One's appearance will differ to before,
With a dry mouth, burning eyes and the
like.*
44. *One will be held by the terrifying
Helpers of the Lord of Death
And befallen by the terrifying sickness,
What need is there to mention the very
pitiable?*

The commentary then presents the meaning of these verses:

A person who is being led today by other humans to the ground where his limbs will be chopped off, will be frightened. His mouth will be dry, his complexion will be pale, his eyes will burn and so forth. As such, his appearance will be quite different to before.

If that is so, then what need is there to mention the fear of the extremely pitiful person, whose flesh is being held by the fearful minions of the lord of death and who is stricken with the fear of death. Such a person will have great fear:

Hence, generate regret for negativity!

In the past those who stole were punished by having their hands chopped off. So being led to the place of punishment where *their limbs were be chopped off* would generate a lot of fear. Using this analogy the commentary explains that when such a person is led to the place of punishment, they will be stricken with great fear to the point of their mouth being dry, the complexion of their face becoming completely distorted and their eyes burning and so forth. When we see someone being led to a trial and so forth, their heads are bent down and you can see on their face a lot of embarrassment, and the fear they are experiencing, and how their very appearance is completely different to their normal state.

People are taken to the places of punishment by *other humans* who have the same nature and body and so forth. If being led to the place of punishment by other humans generates great fear, *then what need is there to mention the fear of the extremely pitiful person, whose flesh is being held by the fearful minions of the lord of death*.

As mentioned previously, those who have engaged in negativities will experience extreme and fearful visions at the time of death. When such a person has these visions of fearsome beings leading them away from their life source, it definitely gives rise to extreme fear. I've heard that when those who have engaged in warfare and have taken the lives of others, such as generals and so forth, approach the last stages of their life, they have visions of weapons coming towards them, or others coming to kill them with weapons and so forth. It seems that what they engaged in during their life comes back to them in the form of these fearsome visions. In their mind, it is very real and brings about tremendous fear.

The point in relating all of this is that one needs to generate regret for one's negativity with the intention of wanting to purify it. We might bring to mind whatever negativity we can recall from this very lifetime, but there might be occasions when we feel, 'Oh, I haven't done anything as bad as taking a life and so forth'. But if one considers one's previous lifetimes, one can definitely assume that one has accumulated all sorts of negative and evil deeds in previous lifetimes. All of that needs to be brought to mind, and we need to develop regret for that as well, with a sense of wanting to purify that negativity.

¹ See, for example, the teaching of 21 March 2006.

4.2.1.4.4. *The way one will be overwhelmed by suffering later*

This is referring to our future lives. The two verses under this heading are:

45. *'Who can perfectly rescue me from
These great dangers', I exclaim.
With fear showing in my wide open eyes
I look into the four directions for help.*
46. *Seeing that there is no refuge in the four
directions
My mind becomes completely dark.
If there is no refuge in that place,
Then what shall one do at that time?*

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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In explaining these verses Gyaltshab Je's commentary reads:

Having been reborn in the hells and seeing the hell guardians, one becomes very afraid and exclaims: 'Oh, which person can rescue me from this great fear?'

With fear showing in one's wide open eyes, one searches in the four directions for a refuge. When one does not find one despite one's search, one's mind becomes completely dark. Hence one should go for refuge to the Three Jewels starting right now.

If there is no refuge in the hells that rescues one from dangers, then there is nothing to do then, and one must make an effort right now to becoming free from the causes of those dangers.

While the commentary is quite clear, the main point being presented is the importance of contemplating the prospect of having to be reborn in unfortunate realms such as the hell realms. The very nature that state is such that one has no immediate protector. Even if it occurred to one to search for refuge, one couldn't find it because that is the very nature of having such a rebirth, which, of course, is the result of one's negativities. If it is daunting to think about that prospect, the implication is that now is the time to rely upon the unmistakable refuge as protection from being reborn in states where there will be no refuge.

In very simple language, we are in the condition right now where protecting ourselves is definitely within our grasp! As the commentary concludes, *one must make an effort right now to becoming free from the causes of those dangers*. So, in simple terms, we rely upon ultimate protection and refuge, which we can all identify, and we can apply the practices of adopting the ten virtues and avoiding the ten non-virtues. We need understand that now is not the time to lay about thinking that this is something we can put aside until later. Rather we need to make the commitment to apply it, beginning right now.

4.2.2. The power of the basis

We can leave this for our next session.

The main point of this evening's presentation is to reflect on the negativity that one has incurred during one's life, and to develop strong regret about that. Then, based on that strong regret, one engages in purification practices in order to purify those negativities. This is an essential practice for our own benefit. These are really important points for our own personal benefit.

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྡོད་པ་ལ་འདུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual we can engage in the meditation practice.

Now we can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put into it into practice well.

Generating this strong wish to benefit others will be extremely beneficial; it also encourages us and is really important for our practice.

As the Lam Rim teachings indicate, the states of mind that allow one to actually benefit other beings are great love, great compassion and the superior intention. These are three of the six causes of the seven-point cause and effect sequence, which produces the bodhicitta that compels one to actually benefit others. Whereas the first three - recognising all beings as one's mother, remembering their kindness, and wishing to repay that kindness - serve as the basis for developing that wish to benefit others. The Lam Rim presents very precise instructions on how to actually develop that bodhicitta state of mind. So if we rely on these instructions and put these very orderly steps into practice, then we can definitely develop the mind that compels one to benefit others.

The love and compassion that we need to develop, as presented in the teachings, is unbiased love and unbiased compassion. How wonderful it would be if we were to actually develop a love and compassion that does not discriminate between friends, enemies and strangers! What an incredible state of mind to develop! Once we develop that, then the Great Vehicle or Mahayana path will be established within our mental continuum. It will then be possible to practise on that path and obtain the fruit of the path. I personally feel that it is really important to put all one's energy into this core practice of developing unbiased love and compassion, which, of course, I attempt to do. It is definitely the case that without developing unbiased love and compassion, the rest of the Mahayana practices are not obtainable.

I feel like expanding on this point a bit more, however I will leave it for now. If one really analyses these points then the logical conclusion we reach is that this is really the core of our practice, for it is also a powerful means for accumulating merit and purifying negativities. So in this way we can see the great value of these practices.

4.2.2. The power of the base

We have come to the second of the four opponent powers. What is the first power called?

Student: The power of regret.

Regret is not the literal translation of the Tibetan term. Does anyone recall the term used in the commentary?

Student: Power of thorough repudiation.

That's correct. So what is that power of repudiation?

Student: Recognising that we have created negativity.

More specifically, what is the mind that one should generate in order to develop the power of thorough repudiation?

Student: Fear of the consequences of that negativity that we have created.

That is correct. The way to develop that opponent power of thorough repudiation is to contemplate the consequences of the negativity that one has engaged in in the past. When one really thinks about these consequences in detail, great fear will naturally arise, and then the power of thorough repudiation will be generated in one's mind.

The second opponent power is the power of the base or reliance. So, what is the power of reliance?

Student: Refuge.

The Tibetan word for the power of the base or reliance is *ten kyi top*, and *ten* means to *rely*. Here it means to rely on the objects for one's confession and purification. So, what do we rely upon? It is explained that whatever objects we created negativity with are the very objects we need to rely upon to purify those negativities. We create negativities in relation to either the Three Jewels or sentient beings, so we have to rely on both the Three Jewels as well as sentient beings for purification.

Thus, by relying on the objects of refuge, one is able to purify one's negativities.

As presented in the commentary, this section has three subdivisions.

4.2.2.1. Relying on the refuge of the Three Jewels, starting right now

4.2.2.2. Relying on the powerful prayers of the children of the conquerors

4.2.2.3. Having gone for refuge, practising according to the advice

4.2.2.1. RELYING ON THE REFUGE OF THE THREE JEWELS, STARTING RIGHT NOW

In accordance with the earlier explanation, when one is born in an unfortunate realm such as the hell realms, then there is no opportunity to rely upon the objects of refuge at that time. We need to take this as a personal instruction, and rely upon the objects of refuge ourselves, right now while we have all the conducive conditions, and not leave it for later when we may not have these good conditions.

The very outline itself presents the meaning of the verse of the text and it becomes most meaningful if we take it as a personal instruction. We need to take it as a reminder that relying on the objects of refuge will ensure that whatever practice we do becomes intact. We might assume that we are Dharma practitioners, but without genuine and strong reliance on the objects of refuge there is no real basis for our practice. Every attempt that we make in relating to this advice and putting it into practice makes the foundation of our practice established much more firmly.

To actually contemplate this, think about the words *relying on the refuge of the Three Jewels starting right now*. How do you understand them? Contemplating how it is essential to go for genuine refuge beginning from right now actually becomes the means to establish the foundation of our Dharma practice. The more we develop this mind of reliance on the objects of refuge, the more it lessens our clinging to the affairs of this lifetime. As the clinging to the affairs of this life reduces, to that extent, our Dharma becomes purer.

This is another way to relate to the meaning of what is presented here.

The two verses relating to this heading read:

47. *Therefore, from today onwards I take refuge
In the Conqueror, the protector of migrators,
Who works to rescue migrators
And who eliminates the powerful dangers.*
48. *I also take perfect refuge
In the Dharma that he understood,
Which eliminates the dangers of cyclic existence,
And into the assembly of bodhisattvas.*

Even though my intention is to try to go quite quickly through these verses somehow that doesn't seem to be happening! Gyaltsab Je's commentary on these verses is:

One does not find a refuge when one is reborn in the lower realms, even if one searches. Therefore I quickly take refuge in the Conqueror, the protector of migrators, who strives to rescue all migrators, and who has the perfect ability to eliminate all the very powerful dangers.

Further, I accept the Dharma that the Conqueror understood and taught, the Dharma Jewel that eliminates all the fears of cyclic existence.

I also accept the assembly of bodhisattvas that have attained the state of a superior, as friends helping to accomplish the path, and purely go for refuge to them.

When the commentary states *One does not find a refuge when one is reborn in the lower realms, even if one searches*, this is a clear explanation that as we will not be able to find refuge when we are reborn in the lower realms, we need to take refuge in the conquerors, from now on. What we need to understand from this presentation is that that developing a strong reliance on the objects of refuge, and taking refuge in them is the means to block the door to the lower realms. We actually shut the door to the lower realms by taking refuge.

If one were to ask, 'What is the method for blocking the doorways to rebirth in the lower realms?', then the answer is 'By taking refuge'. As presented in the teachings, if, at the moment of death, we have strong refuge in our mind that will, at the very least, definitely prevent rebirth in a lower realm in the immediate next life. Even if we have engaged in quite a lot of negativity during our life, if our mind is in tune with taking strong refuge at the time of death, then this completely virtuous mind will definitely prevent rebirth in the lower realms in the next lifetime. In contrast, if someone were to spend most of their life seemingly engaging in Dharma practice, but at the time of death their mind is not in a virtuous frame then, because of the non-virtuous state of mind at that time, they will have an unfortunate rebirth in the next life.

The only way that we can prepare ourselves to ensure that we are in a virtuous state mind at the time of death, is to continuously familiarise ourselves now with the conqueror Buddha Shakyamuni, which is done by meditating on and visualising the image of Buddha Shakyamuni while reciting the mantra. Whatever time we spend on a regular basis, such as meditating and reciting the mantra, even to the extent of remembering the Buddha in our daily activities, and every time before we go to bed, and perhaps even having dreams of the Buddha, then, due to that familiarity, it is said that an image of the Buddha will naturally come to mind very vividly at the time of death. Seeing an image of the Buddha and having faith in him at the time of death would be wonderful! Likewise with the familiarity one gains by

relying on a deity such as Chenrezig, or Avalokiteshvara as one's main deity; reciting the *Om mani padme hum* mantra and remembering Chenrezig daily and before going to bed, and even having dreams of Chenrezig, will also have the result of having very vivid clear image of Chenrezig at the time of death. It is said that it is as if one is actually in the presence of the Buddha or a deity at the time of death, which would have a soothing and calming effect, with no fears or anxiety whatsoever. This would be incredibly beneficial at that crucial time.

The commentary goes on to explain that due to this fear of a lower rebirth one *quickly takes refuge in the Conqueror*. The Conqueror is described as *the protector of migrators* because he entered the path that leads to enlightenment from the moment he first developed bodhicitta, and from that time onwards he completely dedicated his life to benefiting sentient beings through the practice of the six perfections and so forth. Through all of those practices, the Conqueror reached the ultimate state of having the perfect ability to help all beings eliminate all the fears of cyclic existence.

The qualities of the Buddha or the Protector are actually presented in the first line. When the text refers to *the protector of migrators, who strives to rescue all migrators, and who has the perfect ability*, the term *perfect ability* can also relate to the various enlightened qualities of the Buddha, such as the ten powers and so forth. The Conqueror has the ability *to eliminate all the very powerful dangers*, which are the sufferings of the cyclic existence of migrators. So for that reason, as presented at this point in the text, *I quickly take refuge in the Conqueror*, here, *quickly* indicates that from this moment on, one takes refuge in the Conqueror morning, day, and night.

Thus, the first paragraph of the commentary presents taking refuge in the Conqueror or the Buddha as a guide on the path. As this is a Mahayana refuge, one needs to also understand that the commitment one makes in taking refuge is that we take refuge in the Conqueror as our guide on the path until we attain the final state of enlightenment.

We need to understand that the second line, *I accept the Dharma that the Conqueror understood and taught*, refers to the two main aspects of the Dharma, which are the realisations and the oral teachings of the Buddha. Taking refuge in *the Dharma Jewel that has the ability to eliminate all the fears of cyclic existence*, indicates that one relies on the Dharma Jewel as the path that leads to the ultimate result of enlightenment. The Dharma Jewel also has two other aspects, which are the Mahayana truth of cessation and the Mahayana truth of the path.

When the third paragraph of the commentary states *I also accept the assembly of bodhisattvas that have attained the state of a superior*, the *superior* specifically indicates the *superior Mahayana state* of a non-returner. When the commentary states *as friends helping to accomplish the path, and purely go for refuge to them*, the word *purely* indicates that going for refuge to the Three Jewels needs to be free from deceit and doubt. It would be deceitful if one gives mere lip service to the words but does not actually have strong feeling of refuge. If one is not really convinced that the objects of refuge have the ability to protect oneself then that would be doubt. So *purely going for refuge* indicates having a heartfelt genuine mind of refuge that is free from deceit and doubt.

Purely also indicates having the conviction that the objects of refuge have the full capacity to free one from all fears. Having generated the fear of an unfortunate rebirth and cyclic existence, one develops an absolute conviction that the objects of refuge have the full ability to free one from those

fears. So, pure refuge is a heartfelt faith in the objects of refuge, knowing that they have the ability to free one from the lower realms and samsara.

To summarise the essential points, one goes for refuge with the two causes for going for refuge intact.

- The first cause is having generated fear of the lower realms and the suffering of cyclic existence in general, and urgently wanting to be free from those fears. Seeing that the objects of refuge have the ability to free one from those fears, one takes refuge in them.
- The second aspect of taking refuge is a heartfelt reliance on the Buddha as the guide, the Dharma, which is the Mahayana truth of cessation and Mahayana truth of path, and the Sangha, which is the supreme assembly of Mahayana arya beings. So one develops complete reliance on these three, and generates the mind, 'I will go for refuge to them until I achieve enlightenment'.

Having that single-pointed focus on the objects of refuge, and relying upon them single-pointedly is the way of taking Mahayana refuge. It is important to keep this summary in mind for your daily Dharma practice.

4.2.2.2. RELYING ON THE POWERFUL PRAYERS OF THE CHILDREN OF THE CONQUERORS

Here *the children of the conquerors*, refers to the eight close disciples of the Buddha, which I think we listed in an earlier session.

The next two verses read:

49. *Having become afraid of the dangers
I offer myself to Samantabhadra,
Also to Manjushri
I offer this body of mine.*
50. *Also the protector Avalokiteshvara,
Whose actions are non-deceptive due to
compassion,
I implore in anguish:
Rescue me, the sinner.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Having become afraid of the fears of the lower realms I offer myself to the child of the conquerors, Samantabhadra, who does many powerful prayers. Through this, please rescue me from the dangers.

Likewise to Manjushri, without others having to urge me I offer my body with a clear mind.

To Avalokiteshvara, whose non-deceptive actions for others are motivated by compassion spontaneously and uninterruptedly, I also implore in anguish to please rescue me, who is pitiful due to these dangers. Please rescue me the sinner.

When the commentary states, *having become afraid of the fears of the lower realms*, it is specifically indicating the three unfortunate rebirths that are explained in detail in the teachings. There are the unimaginable and unbearable sufferings of the hell realms, and the hungry ghost realm, and even in the animal realm, which is, of course, is familiar to us. It is unbearable to even think about the prospect of having to experience such suffering. Having generated such fear of the lower realms one *offers oneself to the child of the conquerors*.

The way to be free from the fears and the sufferings of the lower realms is to rely on, and take refuge in, the objects of refuge. As Lama Tsongkapa mentioned in one of his works, 'There is no certainty that we will not be reborn in the lower realms. Therefore we take heartfelt refuge in the objects of

refuge as only they have the power to protect us from this fear of a lower rebirth'.

Children of the conquerors refers to the disciples who were close to the Buddha. They are referred to as children because of being close disciples. Another implication of *children of the conquerors* is that it refers to those who hold the entire lineage of the teachings of the Buddha. So there are different implications of *child of the conquerors*.

Samantabhadra is one of the bodhisattvas who was a close disciple, *who does many powerful prayers*; while *I offer my body to the conquerors* is an entreaty, 'Please rescue me from the dangers'. Similarly with Manjushri, who was another close disciple, there is the proclamation, *without others having to urge me, I offer my body with a clear mind*.

Also *Avalokiteshvara*, whose non-deceptive actions for others are motivated by compassion spontaneously and uninterruptedly, indicates that Avalokiteshvara benefits sentient beings continuously and spontaneously. Avalokiteshvara is called Chenrezig, which in Tibetan means *that which constantly sees the sufferings of sentient beings*, and this indicates that Chenrezig's eyes are always open and always looking down at sentient beings with compassion. That is the connotation of the name Chenrezig.

I implore in anguish, means that out of desperation one implores the children of the conquerors, 'Please rescue me, who is pitiful due to these dangers. Please rescue me the sinner'.

Then Gyaltsab Je poses a question as an introduction to the next two verses:

If asked, 'In what manner?'

51. *The superior Essence of Space and
The Essence of Earth and
All compassionate protectors
I implore from the heart to rescue me*
52. *I take refuge into the Vajraholder
Whose mere sight causes the
Angry minions of the lord of death
To flee into the four directions.*

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Likewise I go for refuge to the bodhisattva superior Essence of Space and Essence of Earth, and to all greatly compassionate protectors who have love and have eliminated obscurations. I implore them from my heart: Please rescue me.

I also take refuge into the Vajraholder (Vajrapani), whose mere sight causes the angry minions of the lord of death to scatter into the four directions.

I implore is the translation of the Tibetan word *sol*, which has the connotation, 'I have something to request'.

Having listed three children of the Conqueror earlier, i.e. Samantabhadra, Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara, this verse refers to the bodhisattva *superior Essence Of Space* (Akasagarbha), the bodhisattva *Essence of Earth* (Ksitigarbha) and all compassionate protectors. The next verse refers to the Vajraholder, who is Vajrapani. I have explained the qualities of Vajrapani extensively in the past. Vajrapani has the power to eliminate adverse forces, obstacles and obscurations that hinder Dharma practice.

The other two close disciples which are not mentioned here are Maitreya and Sarvanirvarana Viskambhin (*Dripa nam sel* in Tibetan; the literal English translation is *clearing away all obscurations*). When the commentary says *I implore them from my heart*, it means that one makes a heartfelt request to be rescued by these children of the Conqueror.

The implication of mentioning the eight children of the Conqueror is that they are all *arya* beings and are worthy objects of refuge.

4.2.2.3. HAVING GONE FOR REFUGE, PRACTISING ACCORDING TO THE ADVICE

The real implication of going for refuge is so that one will practise according to their advice. Also there are specific commitments that we need to uphold after having taken refuge.

In essence, practising the advice encompasses the practice of the three scopes. Another way of presenting this is that relying on the objects of refuge is the means to achieve the ultimate goal of complete enlightenment. What the advice actually entails is adopting those practices we need to accomplish - which is to accumulate virtue and merit - and abandoning that which needs to be abandoned, which are negativities. So, refuge is actually subsumed into these two practices of adopting and abandoning.

This is presented in the following verse:

53. *Previously I transgressed your words
Now, having seen great danger,
I take good refuge in you; by this
Eliminate all dangers quickly I request.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this this verse reads

Previously I transgressed your words, committed negativities and did not practise virtue. Now, having seen the infinity of cyclic existence and the great dangers of the lower realms, I take refuge in you.

By my implementing what has to be practised and what has to be abandoned, according to your advice, please quickly eliminate all fears I pray.

Previously I transgressed your words refers to not following the advice of the Buddha. In essence, the Buddha advised us to shun negativity and create virtue. However, because of not having followed that advice, one has committed negativities and did not practise virtue, and as a result now finds oneself being completely overwhelmed by the sufferings of cyclic existence.

Seeing now that the consequence of not following that advice will lead one into *the infinity of cyclic existence*, the connotation here is that if one relies on the object of refuge to some degree, then it might free you from some of the great sufferings in the next rebirth. As explained earlier, by taking heartfelt refuge in the object of refuge at the time of death, one will be protected from rebirth in the unfortunate realms in the next life. However, merely taking refuge and not practising the advice means that one will still be reborn in cyclic existence, not only once or twice but for an infinite number of times.

When one thinks about that prospect, it becomes apparent that it is urgent that one follows the advice of the Conqueror and takes refuge in him, *by implementing what has to be practised and what has to be abandoned according to your advice.*

This means that we are saying that we will implement these practices of abandoning what has to be abandoned and adopting what has to be practised into our daily life. We really need to take this as personal advice. To this we can add a further essential, which is the three higher trainings of morality, concentration and generating wisdom. Practising the three higher trainings is another way to implement the Buddha's advice.

As mentioned previously, the more we really contemplate and take to heart the two causes of going for refuge, the

more firmly it is established, the stronger one's conviction in the infallibility of karma becomes. These are the essential practices that establish that foundation.

We will recite together the *Eight Verses of Mind Training*, and dedicate it to my old friend, Geshe Sonam Rinchen, who passed away on Saturday morning. He was a very dear Dharma friend; we studied together in the same class, under the same teacher, and went through many hardships and difficulties together. We shared whatever meagre food we had and escaped into India together, continuing our studies there later on. We shared difficulties and hardships and the joy of our studies and so forth for so many years. He was not just an ordinary geshe but someone who had accomplished great knowledge of the Dharma, both in understanding and in practice. Not only was he skilled in citing the teachings but he was also skilled in logic and reasoning. So he was endowed with the qualities of the scriptural understanding as well as the logic of the teachings. By sharing that great knowledge he benefited so many beings in his thirty-five years in the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. The many students and disciples who studied under him found him to be very kind in sharing his Dharma knowledge.

I tried to visit him when I was in India at the beginning of this year. I purchased a ticket to go up to Dharamsala but unfortunately the airline, Kingfisher, went bankrupt, so the ticket was useless. In any case the teachings didn't end on time. So I was not able to see him—in fact, I haven't been able to see him for many years.

From my side the best thing we can offer is our practices. With the recitation of the prayers we generate the wish that he come back again for the purpose of the teachings, and to benefit sentient beings. May he come back in another reincarnation and once again engage in the Dharma as a way to benefit other beings. With that sort of intention in our mind we make strong prayers, which will help us to make a connection with Geshe-la and meet him again in the future.

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

བྱང་ལྷན་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

15 October 2013

With a motivation based on the *Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer*, we can now engage in the meditation practice. [meditation]

It would be very good to regularly engage in the *tong len* practice that we have just attempted to do. As it is a practice that increases one's love and compassion for other living beings, the *tong len* practice really seems to be the essence of the Mahayana practice. As one further develops and establishes love and compassion within one's own mental continuum, and as this becomes stronger and stronger, one will actually be able to engage in this practice of giving and taking.

4.2.3. The power of thorough application of the antidote

Having completed the power of thorough repudiation or regret, we can start to think about the order of the four opponent powers and how they are a means to engage in the purification practice. Relating to their sequence is in itself really beneficial.

It is good to have a general understanding of the term *the power of thorough application of the antidote*. In general, it is an antidote that counteracts the negativity that one has created. As presented in the teachings, any virtue accumulated with the intention that it will serve as an antidote to negativity is sufficient to overcome that negativity!

More specifically, there are the six different methods that were listed earlier and it is good to keep them in mind.

This section is subdivided into two:

4.2.3.1. The reason why it is appropriate to purify negativity

4.2.3.2. Why it is appropriate to purify soon

Here, the Tibetan term *jang*, which is usually translated as *purify*, can also mean *practice*. In this case the practice to overcome negativity refers to a method that counteracts the consequences of the negativity that one has created. So, as the translation suggests, *purify* in this case refers to purification practice. Practising virtue, on the other hand, refers to the practice of accumulating merit and so forth. By further developing and increasing the virtues within oneself one is practicing virtue. So the Tibetan term *jang* refers to practices that can have different intentions. I have explained this previously, but it is good to refresh one's memory.

4.2.3.1. THE REASON WHY IT IS APPROPRIATE TO PURIFY NEGATIVITY

It is good to consider the way the commentary uses headings to put the text into a logical context. Through their systematic, logical sequence the headings in themselves are quite profound. Rather than beginning with how to purify negativity we are first presented with the reason why it is appropriate to do that. If we

understand why it is appropriate to purify negativity then we will naturally be more inclined to engage in that practice. Next we can consider why it is appropriate to purify our negativity right now.

We actually gain a lot of insight just from the way the material is presented. In fact one could say that the manner in which it is presented is, in itself, a means to increase our intelligence and wisdom. It is important to first see the reason why we engage in an activity, and then analyse whether there is any benefit or not. When we find that there is benefit in a certain activity, we will then naturally be more inclined to adopt it. We can apply this practical principle to our everyday life activities. Even though these are classical teachings we can still derive a lot of practical advice that we can apply in our everyday lives. Basically, they are teaching us how to make best use of our intelligence and wisdom.

There are two sub-headings in this section:

4.2.3.1.1. Showing by example of sickness why it is necessary to purify soon

4.2.3.1.2. Showing the necessity to relate it to the example of the abyss

4.2.3.1.1. Showing by example of sickness why it is necessary to purify soon

This is subdivided into three:

4.2.3.1.1.1. Stating the meaning of the example

4.2.3.1.1.2. The sickness of the three poisons has many shortcomings and the medicine to destroy it is rare

4.2.3.1.1.3. It is appropriate to practice in accordance with the advice of the supreme physician

4.2.3.1.1.1. Stating the meaning of the example

The relevant verse reads:

54. *If one has to act according to the doctor's advice
Even when in fear of an ordinary sickness,
What need is there to mention one who
Is afflicted by the hundreds of faults of
attachment and so on?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

When one is concerned that one may die as one is afraid of the sickness, one has to implement the method to destroy the sickness in accordance with the advice of the physician, even to cure a common disease like a disturbance in the winds or bile.

If that is so, then what need is there to mention that it is appropriate to rely on the antidote according to the instructions of the Conqueror, the supreme physician, in order to be cured from the chronic disease of the three poisons of attachment, anger and ignorance, as one has been continuously beaten down since beginningless time by the sources of hundreds of thousands of shortcomings.

It is appropriate to rely on the antidote to negativity.

According to traditional medicine, the cause of many illnesses is *disturbance in the winds or bile*. When an illness worsens it is common to rely upon a doctor and, depending on the severity of the illness, to willingly undergo quite severe treatments such as surgery, or even amputation, in order to be cured. Harsh and severe treatments are necessary at times to save one's life. Thus

we are patient and are willing to endure them, knowing that they are for our own benefit. When the doctor prescribes a treatment that includes changing our normal lifestyle, regulating our diet to avoid certain kinds of food and drink, or taking up some sort of exercise, we take all that advice willingly in order to be cured. Rather than holding a grudge against the doctor for the severe treatment, we are quite happy to accept it.

The point of the analogy is that we willingly accept unpleasant treatment knowing it is for our own benefit. It has been statistically shown that if one doesn't have confidence in the doctor, then the prescribed medicine doesn't seem to be of much benefit. Mostly though, as the commentary explains, with respect to ordinary ailments we follow *the advice of the physician* in order to cure the disease.

Then the commentary uses the illustration of the analogy to conclude, *If that is so, then what need is there to mention that it is appropriate to rely on the antidote according to the instructions of the Conqueror, the supreme physician, in order to be cured from the chronic disease of the three poisons of attachment, anger and ignorance.* To these three poisons, we can add the other delusions.

When we really think about the harm that these delusions cause us, we realise that they are indeed a very deep-rooted disease. We experience the effects of the three poisons on a continual basis, and we have been affected by these afflictive delusions from beginningless lifetimes. The disease of the three poisons affects almost everyone regardless of their status and their physical condition; those who are physically healthy are not immune to the mental afflictions.

We can definitely see that most people have, at some time in their life, had to endure some form of mental distress caused by attachment, anger or some other delusion such as jealousy, pride and so forth. Even though they are seemingly well physically, there is always an underlying mental distress and agony; some sort of an unsettled and restless mind is always there in the background. As mentioned in the commentary, ordinary beings have been affected by this mental distress over countless lifetimes; *one has been continuously beaten down since beginningless time by the source of hundreds of thousands of shortcomings.* Because they are so very deep-rooted, they are classified as a *chronic disease*.

The delusions, and in particular the three poisons, are like a chronic disease because we have been continuously affected by them since beginningless time and they are *the source of hundreds of thousands of shortcomings* and suffering. In order to be cured of this chronic disease, it is appropriate to rely on the antidote in accordance with the instructions of the Conqueror, who is likened to the *supreme physician*. So the antidote for overcoming the chronic disease of the three poisons was presented by the compassionate teacher, the Conqueror.

Even though we have not seen the Buddha directly, we have definitely come into contact with qualified teachers who have presented the unmistakable teachings of the Buddha. So right now we have these incredible conditions where we can use the teachings of the Buddha as an antidote for overcoming this chronic disease. We

have the ability and intelligence to recognise what the delusions are, their shortcomings, how they affect us, and the need to overcome them.

We would be doing ourselves a great disservice if we do not take advantage of these perfect conditions that we have now to make a genuine attempt to apply the appropriate antidotes for overcoming the delusions in our mind. Trying to develop an attentive and focussed mind in meditation is not sufficient by itself. We need to really work at applying the specific antidotes for overcoming the different delusions, which involves first recognising them. As the great teacher and master Lama Tsong Khapa mentioned, the real sign of one's meditation and practice bearing fruit is when we develop strong faith in the Dharma, along with the confidence that if we apply the antidotes, we will be able to overcome the delusions in our mind.

So *applying the antidote* means applying the antidote to the very causes of negativity, which are the delusions; the three poisons in particular. In fact, these three are the fundamental cause of all our physical and mental diseases and suffering. So, as mentioned here in the teachings and in the commentary, we need to apply an antidote to the source of the hundreds of thousands of shortcomings, i.e. the delusions. That is what we need to focus on.

4.2.3.1.1.2. The sickness of the three poisons has many shortcomings and the medicine to destroy it is rare

As I have explained earlier, it might be difficult to find these good conditions again in the future. So not utilising these conditions now while we have them would be like not bothering to seek treatment for a chronic disease. There is no benefit in having access to an incredible panacea and not making use of it. If we don't take our prescribed medicine we will not be cured. Likewise, if we don't apply the practices and antidotes for overcoming our delusions, we can't expect the delusions to naturally fade away, leaving us completely cured! The heading alone, *the sickness of the three poisons has many shortcomings and the medicine to destroy it is rare*, actually points out the great conditions we have now, and that we have that rare medicine right now!

We have met with the unmistakable Dharma teachings and the pure teachers who present them, so it would be an incredible waste if we don't utilise this wonderful opportunity now. The point is that, as the teachings mention, if a skilled doctor has prescribed the best of medicine to cure a disease, but the patient doesn't follow the treatment, then the patient cannot expect to be cured from the disease. Likewise, we are not deprived now of the teachers and the teachings, so if we find we are not making progress in our practice of overcoming the delusions, it is not the fault of the Dharma or the teachers. The fault lies with us because we have not applied the practice to ourselves. So we need to ensure that we don't fall into this trap of not using this opportunity we have now.

We really need to take to heart just how essential it is to apply the antidotes to overcome the delusions. I assume you are afflicted by the disease of the three delusions—I certainly am! So if we are alike in being afflicted by the

chronic disease of the delusions, then we are alike in that it is up to us to try to cure it. It's not as though we are deprived of the means to do so. We all have the ability to apply the cure for overcoming the chronic disease of the delusions; more specifically the root delusion of grasping at the self.

In this way we see that the teachings gives us the way to overcome the very core of our chronic disease, which is grasping at the self. The more we gain an understanding of the selflessness, or emptiness, of persons and the emptiness of phenomena, the more profound that understanding will be. Then we can begin to actualise that understanding and gain even more insight into emptiness. As explained in the teachings, the direct realisation of emptiness is the ultimate antidote for overcoming the chronic disease of grasping at the self. So once we are able to overcome this grasping at the self we begin to shatter our grasping at all other phenomena, and then the delusions will slowly become weaker and weaker. It is good for us to really reflect upon how the realisation of selflessness or emptiness serves as an antidote that overcomes grasping at the self.

In order to understand that, we first need to understand how grasping at the self affects our perception. How do we perceive things when we are grasping at the self? How does grasping at the self cause delusions? The more we understand that the grasping at the self is the cause of all of the delusions and the problems and suffering that we experience, the more we will realise that we need to overcome that grasping. And the means to overcome grasping at the self is to realise selflessness, or the emptiness of the 'I' and other phenomena. That is the crucial antidote. These are the essential points to understand.

In his Lam Rim teachings Lama Tsong Khapa explained that we should begin by applying the antidote to the strongest and most prominent delusion. As presented very succinctly in the teachings, the antidote for overcoming strong attachment is to meditate on the imperfections of the object. To overcome anger one generates love and compassion for the object of anger. To counter ignorance, one meditates on emptiness. To eliminate pride one meditates on the various aspects and different categories of phenomena; and the best method to overcome discursive and disturbing thoughts is to meditate on the breath.

Although these methods will not overcome the very root of these delusions, they will definitely help to settle down the mind and to overcome the manifest aspects of these delusions, which means that the strong feelings these delusions give rise to will subside. So to that extent we will definitely benefit from applying these antidotes. We all know that during intense moments of anger we are really disturbed, and when that intense anger subsides, we definitely feel relief and a genuine sense of calmness. Of course we may not yet have overcome the very root of anger, but even at a manifest level the intense anger has subsided; so we do gain benefit from these techniques.

If one leaves these instructions to overcome strong and pronounced delusions in one's mind aside, and instead attempts to meditate just focusing on an object, I wonder how focused one could really be on any chosen object

while in the grip of strong delusions. Even if one were to achieve some sort of focus temporarily, it would soon be overridden by that strong delusion. So it is much more practical to overcome the strong delusion first, and then apply the meditation technique. Some people have confided in me that, 'When I attempt to meditate, I am able to focus for quite a long time. However after the meditation finishes and I come out and begin to interact with my partner, I immediately become very upset and angry!' That illustrates that the intended effect of the meditation is not taking place.

The term *three poisons* is very succinct, yet we can easily relate to it. As presented in the teachings, the three poisons are attachment, anger and ignorance. The ill effects of the three poisons are not obscure; we have all experienced them. Feeling ignorant about something is quite daunting and disturbing, and another form of ignorance is where the mind becomes very dull and dark. So we can see the ill-effects of ignorance. We definitely know the strong effects of anger as we have all experienced that! Then there are the ill-effects of attachment. It is attachment that keeps us very busy, rushing around all the time; it makes us go to work, to earn money and so forth. The driving force behind all this busyness is actually attachment.

On a subtler level ignorance is of course what prevents us from knowing the ultimate nature of phenomena, which is emptiness. As the teachings present, our problems arise because of this fundamental ignorance. So we can see how essential it is to gain the profound understanding and realisation of emptiness.

The verse relating to this heading is:

*55. Even a single one of these destroys
All humans of Dzambuling [or Earth]
If one does not find a different medicine
In all the directions to cure it.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Even one moment of anger towards a bodhisattva can destroy all humans in Dzambuling and throw them into the lower realms. The medicine against this great sickness, meditating on the path and so forth, one will not find anywhere else, apart from the texts that reveal it.

If one cannot find it in any other place, such as the world of Brahma and so forth, then it is unfindable elsewhere and therefore rare.

As the commentary explains very precisely, *even one moment of anger towards a bodhisattva can destroy all humans of Dzambuling* (our world) by *throwing them into the lower realms*.

In his many texts Gyaltsab Rinpoche often refers to the great negativity that would be incurred by engaging with a bodhisattva in a hostile manner. There is, of course, a profound reason why Gyaltsab Je specifically uses the example of bodhisattvas in this way. In *A Commentary On Valid Cognition*, Gyaltsab Je mentioned that it is extremely difficult to know who really is a bodhisattva. So the great danger in harming others is that if they are a bodhisattva, which may not be at all obvious, then we will incur very heavy negative karma. Gyaltsab Je explains this with the analogy of a pit with burning embers at the bottom,

camouflaged with leaves and so forth on the top. If someone happened to step on the leaves over the pit, they would fall in and be burned by the embers. Just as we don't know where the camouflaged pit may be, likewise, we can't tell who could be a bodhisattva. There may be some bodhisattvas amongst us here right now. How are we to know? We wouldn't! So, as explained in many teachings, the best way to relate to others is by developing a pure view and seeing others in a good light and not focusing on their negativities. We need to always remember that what appears to us is not necessarily based on reality. In general we can say that it is best not to criticise those who have good qualities, who may also be quite learned! At least this can be quite obvious. Criticising someone who has good qualities is quite dangerous, so we need to be careful.

The particular delusion that Gyaltsab Rinpoche and other masters caution us against is anger towards these supreme beings. Of course, other delusions are also as damaging, but anger is the most likely one that we might develop and, as just explained, the consequence is very heavy negative karma. As mentioned in the commentary, *even one moment of anger*, or any other delusion for that matter, can cause a human to be reborn in the lower realms. If one delusion can cause so much harm and bring so much suffering, there's no need to mention the suffering created by all of the delusions combined together!

Having explained the great danger in allowing delusions such as a moment of anger to rule our behaviour, the commentary goes on to say that, *the medicine against this chronic disease is meditating on the path and so forth*, and this is something *one will not find anywhere else, apart from the texts that reveal it*. The teachings of the Buddha present the unmistakable antidotes for overcoming these delusions. As emphasised here, *one will not find it anywhere else*, which indicates that there is no instruction other than the unmistakable teachings that present the unmistakable methods for overcoming the delusions. *One cannot find it in any other place, such as the world of Brahma and so forth, therefore it is unfindable elsewhere and rare*.

We need to be able to apply this to ourselves, by recognising and acknowledging that we have met with these rare teachings that provide the unmistakable methods to apply the antidotes to overcome these chronic diseases. We have an incredible opportunity now, when we have these perfect conditions and have met with these rare teachings! So we need to really take it to heart and try to apply the practice as much as we can, while making strong prayers to never be parted from these profound teachings of the Buddha. In this life and in all future lifetimes we need to continuously meet with these perfect conditions until we reach our ultimate goal of enlightenment. So we must not waste this opportunity that we have now, and it is also important to make strong and fervent prayers to meet with these conditions again in the future.

Having explained how it is very rare to meet with these conditions, a question which may arise as to whether it is appropriate to practise according to the advice of the supreme physician. In other words, do we have the

capacity to practise in that way? The meticulous presentation here shows how this is definitely possible.

The verse relating to this reads:

56. *And if one thinks not to act in accordance
With the advice of the all-knowing
physician,
Which can cure all pain,
Then that is extremely ignorant and the
object of ridicule.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

If one stays obsessed with the causes of infinite cyclic existence and the lower realms, instead of putting the advice given by the all-knowing physician, who knows all the medicines to eliminate the sickness of the afflictions, and that liberates from all the pain of the afflictions, into practice, then that action is extremely ignorant and the object of criticism.

Therefore one should take refuge in the teacher from one's heart and practise the Dharma shown by him accordingly.

The opening lines from the Tibetan text are that *the medicines to eliminate the sickness of the afflictions* are presented *by the all-knowing physician*, which refers to the omniscient Buddha. Because the cure to overcoming the disease of the afflictions is presented by the omniscient one, that in itself answers the earlier hypothetical query, 'Is it appropriate to practise according to the advice of the supreme physician?' The answer is that it is definitely appropriate because it is presented not just by anyone, but by the supreme being who is all-knowing and thus free from all obscurations. Because the all-knowing omniscient Buddha is free from all obscurations, the methods and techniques presented by the Buddha will not have any mistakes or flaws. So it is appropriate for us to apply this medicine-like teaching and practice, because it is presented by the unmistakable Buddha, the all-knowing one free from all obscurations. Thus we put into practice *the advice given by the all-knowing physician, who knows all the medicines to eliminate the sickness of the afflictions; that liberates from all the pain of the afflictions*. But *if one stays obsessed with the causes of infinite cyclic existence and the lower realms*; in other words, if we don't put the advice into practice, then the flaw comes from our own side.

As the commentary explains, the medicine-like antidote to overcome the disease, which is presented by the all-knowing one, the Buddha, eliminates the sickness of the afflictions. It is also implied here that this antidote eliminates the sickness of the afflictions at its very core. As explained earlier, the very core of all our delusions, problems and mistakes is grasping at the self, and the Buddha presents the techniques and methods to overcome that grasping. Eliminating that grasping at self eliminates the sickness of all afflictions. When we overcome the very cause of the disease, then naturally the disease itself will subside. So when the core and the very root of those afflictions, self-grasping, is completely eliminated, all afflictions are eliminated.

If, rather than implementing this technique we intentionally create more causes to be in samsara, then as the commentary states, *that action is extremely ignorant and*

the object of criticism. Whenever someone wastes a great opportunity, they are scorned with comments like, 'How stupid that is'. We would fall into that category if we neglect to adopt the practices and intentionally create even more causes to remain in samsara. To avoid falling into this trap *one should take refuge in the teacher from one's heart.* This means that having understood the qualities of the Conqueror, the omniscient one, the great compassionate all-knowing one, who has no flaws and who is endowed with only great qualities, we need to take heartfelt refuge with the confidence that the Conqueror has the ultimate means to free us from the disease of the delusions. Then, having taken refuge, we practise the Dharma taught by the Buddha, which is the means to cure the disease of the delusions. Just like receiving treatment for a disease, we implement Dharma practice to cure ourselves. Accordingly, we should follow what the unmistakable teacher, the Buddha, taught.

As the Buddha very succinctly said, 'Don't engage in any negativity, accumulate all virtues, and subdue your mind; this is the teaching of the Buddha'.

The three higher trainings are the realisation of the Buddha's doctrine and the three baskets are the oral teachings of the Buddha's doctrine.

There followed a discussion of the translation of two specific Tibetan terms that are translated interchangeably as Dharma or the teachings.

In a general sense dharma refers to all phenomena because the literal meaning of *dharma*, is *to hold its own identity*. So whatever holds its own identity is the dharma. This glass, for example, holds its own identity. Whenever we see it, whenever we look at it, wherever we put it, it is always a glass.

Earlier we referred to the Buddha's doctrine or teachings as an antidote to overcome the delusions. Here Dharma refers specifically to the Buddha's doctrine or teachings, rather than general phenomena or dharmas.

If we refer to the Dharma as the Buddhadharmas, it might have a more specific connotation and relate more to the Buddha's teachings. Also there are many faiths which have personal benefits and we can then say that these are dharmas too, but they are not the Buddhadharmas or the Buddha's teachings.

As I have mentioned hundreds of times, whatever practice we do can become a Buddhist practice if it is based on the principles of non-violence and having sound faith in the Buddha.

This is my definition of Buddhadharmas: if one practises non-harmfulness and goes for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, then whatever one engages in will be a Buddhist practice.

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Edited Version
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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའི་སློབ་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

22 October 2013

By focusing on the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* as a motivation we can now engage in the *tong len* meditation practice. [meditation]

To set the motivation for the teaching, we can think along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings, by liberating them from suffering and leading them to the ultimate state of happiness, I first need to achieve enlightenment myself. So, for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and practise well.

If one wonders, 'What is the purpose of coming to listen to these teachings?', then this motivation can serve as a reminder of the purpose of listening to the Dharma. This motivation indicates that it is not sufficient just to aspire to become enlightened; rather we need to actually put the Dharma into practice. When we set this motivation it actually ensures that our activities of teaching and listening to the Dharma becomes meaningful.

It is good to understand the significance of one's motivation. When one generates such a positive motivation in accordance with the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment, that which encompasses the three principles of the path, then the whole Mahayana path is encompassed in that motivation. That's why it is extremely meaningful. While generating that positive motivation is crucial, the only way to bring that to fruition is through study and practice. Without both study and practice, one cannot actualise those good intentions.

Now let us return to the text; my intention is to try to go through the text a bit more quickly.

4.2.3. The power of the thorough application of the antidote

4.2.3.1. THE REASON WHY IT IS APPROPRIATE TO PURIFY NEGATIVITY (CONT.)

4.2.3.1.2. Showing the necessity to relate it to the example of the abyss

The outline uses the example of an abyss to show the necessity of purification.

The relevant verse in the root text reads:

57. *If one needs to be conscientious
Regarding ordinary small abysses,
What need is there to mention
The abyss that goes down a thousand bagtse?*

Gyalsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

If one needs to be very conscientious with small heights like hills, where falling down would merely cause injuries to one's limbs, then what need is there to mention that one has to be conscientious about not falling into the great abyss

of 32000 *bagtse*, only indicated here by one thousand, where one needs to remain for a long time if one falls down?

One needs to rely on the antidote to the afflictions.

The first part of the commentary presents the analogy of an abyss between mountains. One has to take great care and *be very conscientious* about not falling down into an abyss. Out of the fear of falling and breaking one's limbs and so forth, one applies conscientiousness to avoid falling down into such an abyss. Now if we normally take extreme measures to protect ourselves from physical injury, then, as the commentary mentions, *what need is there to mention* the need to protect ourselves from the great abyss that one would fall into if one commits negativities. Such an abyss is greater in depth than any abyss on mountains; the text mentions an abyss of 32000 *bagtse* or leagues, which is the measure of the depth of the lower realms. So the abyss that one would fall into by creating negativities would be that of the unfortunate rebirths, which are not only incredibly deep but also extremely difficult to escape from.

Therefore one needs to be conscientious and apply methods to protect oneself from falling into the deep abyss of the lower realms. One needs to ensure that one applies *the antidotes to the afflictions*, which are the cause of all negativities, within a virtuous frame of mind. There is a significant point why the power of thorough application specifies applying antidotes to the afflictions; that is because in order to completely eradicate all negativity one has to apply the antidotes to the afflictions.

What one needs to derive from this explanation is that the ultimate goal is to completely overcome and purify all negativity from its very roots. Thus, it is only by completely eradicating the afflictions from their very root that we can be satisfied that we have completely purified all our negativities, and that eradication is achieved through the purification practices that have been presented.

As explained in the teachings, the main afflictions are attachment and grasping. Due to the ignorance about karma and its effects, we are compelled to take rebirth again and again in cyclic existence. So when the link of grasping and attachment is severed, we will not have to take rebirth again in cyclic existence. Therefore attachment and grasping are the main links that we need to break in order to achieve the cessation of rebirth in cyclic existence, and the lower rebirths in particular. The main point is that without overcoming attachment and grasping, one will have to continuously experience the consequences of negative karma in cyclic existence.

4.2.3.2. WHY IT IS APPROPRIATE TO PURIFY SOON

This outline indicates that it is not adequate to think that we will purify our negativities some time in the future, by thinking, 'Oh, I can gradually and slowly purify negativities'. The point presented here is that one needs to engage in purification right now!

There are two subheadings to this heading:

4.2.3.2.1. Strive in the antidote to the afflictions starting today.

4.2.3.2.2. It is unsuitable to be lazy in meditating on the path, because there is no reason to be unafraid of suffering.

With respect to the first subheading, we need to see that this is an exhortation to strive to apply the antidote for overcoming afflictions, starting right now, and not leave it for another time. We are so habituated to procrastinating and leaving things for later! This teaching cuts through all of that and points the finger at us saying, 'You can't leave it for later; you have to do it right now!' If we actually take heed of this presentation, we will find great purpose and meaning in this exhortation.

The second subheading is very profound. *There is no reason to be unafraid of suffering* also implies that when one achieves the state of being certain of not having to experience the consequences of negativities, then at that time there is no need to be afraid of suffering. This means that one should be very afraid of suffering if one has not purified the negativities and applied antidotes to one's afflictions. *It is unsuitable to be lazy in meditating on the path*, means that one needs to apply the meditations and practise *on the path*.

4.2.3.2.1. Strive in the antidote to the afflictions starting today

The verse from the root text reads:

58. *It is unsuitable to abide comfortably
Saying 'I won't die right today'.
The time of the self becoming non-existent
Will come about without any doubt.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of this verse quite clearly, so I might not have to elaborate too much. I will of course elaborate when I feel capable of doing so, but when I am not too sure about something then I won't! The commentary begins with a rhetorical proposition:

One may think: Although it is necessary to strive in the antidote, it is good enough to start next month or year.

The answer to that is:

It is appropriate to start right from today because it is unsuitable to remain comfortably, not applying the antidote and being lazy, thinking that one will not die today. As there is no certainty that one will not die today, the time for me to become non-existent will most likely be tomorrow.

Hence I shall not be lazy and strive from today.

This of course relates to the points I've mentioned earlier. As a way to overcome the thought that it is not necessary to strive to apply the antidote right now, this is an exhortation to apply it right away. Immediately! The rationale behind the hypothetical proposition is that it may be acceptable to apply the antidotes to the delusions and negativity later. The response is in fact *it is appropriate to start right from today because it is unsuitable to remain comfortably, not applying the antidote and being lazy, thinking that one will not die right today*. Thinking that one will not die today implies that there is no certainty about when death will occur.

Here, *laziness* refers to the laziness that is associated with feeling comfortable about indulging in frivolous

activities, or having a good time in a worldly sense—socialising with friends, having a party, perhaps going out for a picnic and having a drink or two, enjoying a nice meal and so forth. The underlying state of mind that makes these plans definitely gives no thought to the fact that one could die at any given moment. That is the laziness of comfort, where we *remain comfortably*, engaging in worldly pleasures.

Actually all forms of attachment have an aspect of laziness. The definition of enthusiasm or joyous effort is being happy and joyful about creating virtue; the opposite of that is laziness, which is being happy to engage in non-virtue. Laziness does not necessarily refer to being inactive and passive, lying around doing nothing—some forms of laziness involve being very active. Indeed, the definition of laziness here is applied to someone who would normally be seen as being very active and talented, but only in pursuing their attachments.

Therefore we are being exhorted to not give in to the laziness of being comfortable, thinking we will not die today and not applying the antidote. This is inappropriate, *as there is no certainty one will not die today, the time for me to become non-existent will most likely be tomorrow!* As death could come as soon as the next day, the conclusion is *I shall not be lazy and strive from today*.

Then Gyaltsab Je quotes from a text called the *Letter of Kanika*

From the *Letter of Kanika*:

This is for tomorrow, today I do this—
This is not a pure action for a human
Because the time to become non-existent,
The tomorrow, is certain to come.

The practical implication of these instructions is that we need to ensure that we apply the antidotes to negativity by following the process of purification throughout the day. As ordinary beings it is inevitable that we will commit some negativity, however as soon as we realise that we have done so, we need to apply the antidote, which is purification; this is essential. If we commit negativity in the morning we need to try and confess and purify that by noon; if negativities have been committed at noon, we need to purify them by late afternoon; and at night we recall the negativities committed in the evening or throughout the day and apply the antidotes for purifying them. If we were not to purify them that evening, and die before we get out of bed the next day, then some of our negativity would remain unpurified, which would be most unfortunate.

To re-emphasise the point, if we purify our negativities before going to bed, then even if we were not to wake up the next morning, we would have purified at least some negativities. That is the attitude we need to carry throughout our lives.

The way to purify negativities is to apply the four opponent powers, which are being presented here in this second chapter.

- The first part of the confession and purification is to develop strong regret about having committed that negativity, thinking, 'It is extremely unfortunate that

I have again fallen victim to the delusions and have thus committed such negativity'.

- Having generated that remorse one will naturally want to do something about it. 'What can I do to rectify that negativity I have committed?' At that point one needs to rely on an object that will help one to rectify that negativity. So the next opponent power is the power of reliance on the basis, which is the Three Jewels and sentient beings. When one develops a strong reliance on the objects of refuge, the relevance of that strong refuge becomes most apparent.
- Even though they are essential, developing regret and relying on the objects of refuge is not sufficient, as they do not completely eradicate the negativity. The next opponent power is the power of thorough application of the antidote. Here one needs to engage in the activity of applying the antidote to the negativity, in particular to the delusions that are the cause of the negativity. So applying the antidote and understanding how to apply the antidote is really essential.
- To seal all of that, one resolves not to commit that negativity again.

This is how we purify negativity. We need to be aware that we can very easily engage in negativity. Just as we might be compelled to engage in some negativity within a few moments, by the same token it is also possible for us to apply the purification practice within a few moments. When we know the method then it's just a matter of bringing it to mind and acknowledging the negativity one has committed, feeling regret and so forth. So these four opponent powers can be applied in the same time that it takes to commit the negativity! So, as we have the means on hand at all times, it is most appropriate that we apply them.

As many of you would already be aware, the preliminary practices before engaging in a committed meditation practice, such as a long retreat, mainly consist of purification practices, and we need to understand their significance. Without purifying the negativities that our mind is still carrying, our meditation would not be fruitful as we would not be able to maintain any clarity or focus. We need to apply that principle to our regular practice, as purification practice is not just important but essential. I feel that as beginners, it would be more worthwhile to spend fifteen or twenty minutes doing a purification practice, rather than sitting cross-legged, with our eyes closed trying to focus on an object, while still being affected by distractions, and assuming it is meditation. Because we have not purified our negativities, our mind will not be focussed and will drift here and there. So I feel that it would be much more worthwhile to use one's time for a purification practice. Indeed, without having purified negativity the mind will be neither settled nor focussed. I'm relaying an important point here.

In relation to the appropriateness of applying the antidote to afflictions, let us take the example of attachment. If one has applied the antidote to overcome attachment, then to the degree that one has successfully done so, the mind

will not be affected by attachment and so one's meditation would be much more stable. Otherwise attachment will be a hindrance to one's meditation, and most of the obstacles to meditation are in the form of attachment. Because of this, Shantideva explains the antidotes for overcoming attachments in great detail in the eighth chapter of the *Bodhicharyavatara* text.

4.2.3.2.2. *It is unsuitable to be lazy in meditating on the path, because there is no reason to be unafraid of suffering*

As mentioned previously, there is no certainty about not having to be afraid of suffering, so *it is unsuitable to be lazy in meditating on the path*.

The verse relating to this reads:

59. *Who will offer me freedom from fear?
How will I be freed from danger?
If I am definite to vanish
How can I remain with a happy mind?*

Again, Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with a hypothetical proposition:

Even though death occurs, being afraid of it will not help, so there is no need to be afraid.

Then the commentary continues:

One sees and hears that all others die. Thus while the fear of falling into the lower realms is there, what holy person can bestow fearlessness by saying that there is no need to be afraid of negativities and death?

Since there is nobody that can bestow freedom from negativities and death, how will one attain liberation if one does not strive in the antidote? One will not, and through death one will definitely become non-existent.

So why do you, due to the force of laziness, remain with a happy mind, and not strive in the antidotes to the negativities? This is unsuitable. Strive in meditating on the antidote!

We all operate under the assumption of the preliminary hypothetical statement. We often make comments like, 'Oh, I'm not afraid of death? Why should I be afraid?' Yet even though we say this casually, that fear might definitely arise quite strongly when the prospect of death is imminent. As the commentary explains, *one sees and hears that all others die and the fear of falling into the lower realms is there*. This is something that we can all relate to.

What holy person can bestow fearlessness on you emphasises the earlier point, that while *one sees and hears that all others die*, and *the fear of falling into the lower realms is there*, and since there is no holy being who can bestow fearlessness on you, you need to purify negativities.

Since there is nobody who can bestow freedom from negativities and death, how will one attain liberation if one does not strive in the antidote? One will not, and through death one will definitely become non-existent means that life as one knows it will completely end. It doesn't mean that one becomes totally non-existent, rather that this life will be severed, thus becoming non-existent in the context of this present life.

Thus the conclusion is, *so why do you, due to the force of laziness, remain with a happy mind, and not strive in the*

antidotes to the negativities? This is unsuitable and one should strive in meditating on the antidote!

Again, *laziness* does not refer to the laziness we understand in the worldly sense, which refers to someone who is inactive and just laying around and not doing anything. In this context a lazy person could be very active and engaging in much frivolous activity, and be enjoying the comforts of life out of attachment. To be more specific, applying the antidotes requires some exertion and some effort. Thinking that everything is fine and that we are just enjoying life, while not considering the negativities one is engaging in, let alone the need to apply the antidotes, is the laziness that is referred to here. As indicated earlier, the laziness of procrastination is also included here. We also need to protect ourselves from the sort of laziness that thinks, 'Oh, I can do it tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, or next week, or next month and so forth'.

As mentioned in the teachings, all virtues can become an antidote when they are practised with the intention of purifying negativities. As we all attempt to engage in virtue on a regular basis, and do some practices and so forth, it is good to ensure that these practices become a means to serve as an antidote.

4.2.4. The power of not reversing into the fault again

The fourth power is the power of not reversing into the fault again. It is good to remember the significance of the actual order of the practices of the four opponent powers. As explained previously, the first power, the power of thorough repudiation is, in short, the power of regret. The stronger the sense of regret one has, the more readily the intention to do something about the negativity one has committed will arise, and the more stable the next opponent power, the power of the basis, will naturally be. Then the third opponent power, the power of the thorough application of the antidote, will also be strong.

The power of not reversing into the fault again is divided into three:

4.2.4.1. Restraining oneself henceforth because of regretting the negativity

4.2.4.2. Confessing what one did before

4.2.4.3. Making a promise to refrain from the negativity after having requested attention

4.2.4.1. RESTRAINING ONESELF HENCEFORTH BECAUSE OF REGRETTING THE NEGATIVITY

This is sub-divided into two:

4.2.4.1.1. Purifying meaningless negativity

4.2.4.1.2. Striving day and night to be liberated from negativity

4.2.4.1.1. Purifying meaningless negativity

This is further sub-divided into two:

4.2.4.1.1.1. It is unsuitable to be attached because possessions are unreliable

4.2.4.1.1.2. It is unsuitable to be attached to family and so forth

4.2.4.1.1.1. It is unsuitable to be attached because possessions are unreliable

The verse relating to this reads:

60. Of past experiences, which have ceased,

What has remained of them?

By grasping at them

I transgressed the advice of the teacher.

The commentary's explanation of this reads:

The experiences of enjoyment of past cyclic existence were unreliable and have ceased. Now what is left of these enjoyments that I took to have essence? There is nothing left.

Therefore, regret having transgressed the advice of the teacher, and then generated negativity due to having grasped at, and being attached to, these phenomena without essence.

As the commentary explains, *the experiences of enjoyment of past cyclic existence were unreliable*. This also implies that one has experienced all types of enjoyments within cyclic existence. That is definitely true! There are no enjoyments that we have experienced in this life that are not related to the five senses—we have seen beautiful objects and sights, we have heard beautiful sounds, we have tasted beautiful tastes and enjoyed fragrant smells, and have experienced beautiful tactile feelings. If we think of past lifetimes then we can definitely say that there is nothing that we have not experienced. But while we have definitely experienced every pleasure in relation to the five senses, they were *unreliable*, meaning that there was no real value and substance to them.

When the commentary mentions that they *were unreliable and have ceased*, it is indicating that because they cease, they are unreliable. So there is an interrelationship between cessation and unreliability. Whatever the enjoyment or pleasure we may have experienced from the five senses, the moment of actual pleasure is the first moment when the sense consciousness meets with the sense object. But the very next moment, the pleasure that one has experienced ceases. Therefore nothing remains; there is no substance and nothing remains. So what remains from the enjoyments in the past? They were only momentary and there's nothing left to show the enjoyment we experienced.

When the commentary says *now what is left of these enjoyments*, the implication of *now* is, why do we still become attached to the enjoyments, failing to see that they were momentary and unreliable? Why are we still so attached to the enjoyments of the five senses when they have no essence? We experience pleasure or enjoyment at the moment of contact between the sense and the sense object, but at the very next moment the enjoyment ceases and there is nothing left. Not having realised this, we have continuously engaged in negativities.

Having considered that, we need to take the initiative, and *regret having transgressed the advice of the teacher and then generated negativity due to having grasped at, and being attached to, these phenomena without essence*. Here, *teacher* can refer to one's own teacher, the teacher of the three times, the Buddha Shakyamuni, and the bodhisattvas. We have *transgressed* or completely ignored the advice they presented in the past, and have continuously engaged in negativities by grasping *and being attached to phenomena*. The verse under the heading *It is unsuitable to be attached because possessions are unreliable* has thus explained succinctly that the enjoyment that we experience is only momentary and is thus unreliable. So why continue to

engage in that, as there is nothing to be gained? The Tibetan word used here, *lhakpa*, means *extra*. So there is nothing extra to be gained by engaging in the enjoyments of the five senses. Having understood and acknowledged that, one needs to apply the opponent power of regret about having transgressed the advice of the teachers and so forth.

4.2.4.1.1.2. It is unsuitable to be attached to friends and so forth

The verse relating to this reads:

61. *If, in a similar fashion to this life,
I have to give up friends and relatives,
And I have to go alone,
How suitable are all friends and non-friends?*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

This body I have while alive is without essence, and leaving behind friends and relatives in a similar fashion, I have to go, without certainty of the direction and without freedom.

Regardless of whether they are friends or non-friends, they do not have the slightest benefit, and it is unsuitable to have attachment to them.

This body I have while alive is without essence indicates that even though one is alive, one's body is already without essence. If that is so now, how much more so when, at the time of death, one has to discard one's body, friends and relatives. Those to whom one would otherwise have been attached will be of no help.

One has to leave behind the things with which one is most familiar such as one's cherished body, one's friends and relatives, and go completely alone on an unfamiliar journey. We have no choice; while it is certain that we have to go on to the next existence, the next life, we don't have any knowledge or wisdom regarding how to go about that. We are not sure how that journey is taken and how we will go on that journey. There is no certainty. So here again, we are exhorted to be wary about having too much attachment to our body, our possessions and particularly to our friends and relatives.

Now is the time to train our minds to prepare for the time of death. Here we are being given a succinct presentation of the method and means to prepare ourselves for our death, which is inevitable. The main point is that neither friends nor relatives can benefit us or help us at the time of death, the crucial moment when we have to go on a journey all by ourselves. So we need to reduce our strong attachment to our possessions, body, friends and relatives, which will release the mind so that it will accept and be ready for death whenever it occurs.

As one of the great masters mentioned, our body is just like a guesthouse where we spend a night or two, where the consciousness is the guest!

As explained and emphasised in this and other teachings, at the time of death nothing but the Dharma will help. Since it is only the Dharma that will benefit us at the time of death, we need to rely upon it now, and try to integrate the practice of the Dharma into our lives now. Without applying ourselves to practise now, we cannot expect the Dharma to miraculously help us at the time of death. So the way to practise the Dharma now is to avoid creating

negativity in relation to our possessions and friends and so forth, and to create virtue.

The next session is a discussion session followed by the exam, however my intention is to try to finish the third chapter this year. So we can have the discussion night, skip the exam and then we continue with the teaching straight after the discussion.

It seems that there are many who like the discussion and who seem to benefit from it.

Student: Some prefer the exam.

Maybe that's something we can look into at the next session. It is good to find a general consensus of what works and what doesn't work based on our experience. When there is a general consensus of what works, then it is worthwhile following. Of course, we can't always accept the opinions of one or two people, but when there is a general consensus of what works and what doesn't work, we can follow that.

It's good to follow the opinions of the younger generation such as Tara, who comments that she likes the discussion.

So as a compromise, this time around we will have the discussion but no exam, and continue the teaching after that, but next time around we will have the exam and no discussion. Next year we will see how we should proceed. Of course from my side, I like to try to go through the text, but I think that two teachings a week might be too hard for you.

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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The login username is "studygroup", the password is "bwol" (just remember "Bodhisattva's Way of Life").

Discussion

Week: 1 (1 October 2013)

1. Nothing can help us at the time of death except what?
2. a) What will those who have created a lot of negativity and not got around to purifying it experience?
b) Conversely what will those who have accumulated a lot of virtue and merit experience?
3. What practice is Geshe la referring to when he says: "How incredibly beneficial it would be if we could implement this powerful practice at the time of death."? Elaborate on this practice.
4. a) 'The only thing of benefit is the merit that one has accumulated by taking wholehearted refuge in the Three Jewels and observing morality'
a) In the commentary, what is morality referred to as?
b) What is morality based on?
c) What does the Abhidharma say about this? Elaborate in terms of taking refuge.
5. "When one does not apply conscientiousness, one becomes reckless."
As a result of what does recklessness arise?

Week: 2 (8 October 2013)

6. What is the core practice that Geshe la personally feels we should put all our energy into?
7. a) Of the four opponent powers what is the first power called
b) What is the way to develop that opponent power?
8. What is the only way that we can prepare ourselves to ensure that we are in a virtuous state of mind at the time of death?
9. 'To summarise the essential points, one goes for refuge with the two causes for going to refuge intact.' What are the two causes?
10. 'This means that we are saying that we will implement these practices of abandoning what has to be abandoned, and adopting what has to be practised, into our daily life. We really need to take this as personal advice'. To this we can add a further essential, which is what?

Week: 3 (15 October 2013)

11. Give a general understanding of the term '*the power of thorough repudiation of the antidote*'.
12. 'We all have the ability to apply the cure for overcoming the chronic disease of the delusions, and more specifically the root delusion of grasping at the self.....'
The more we gain an understanding of the selflessness, or emptiness of persons and the emptiness of phenomena, what will begin to happen?

13. In his Lam rim teachings Lama Tsong Khapa explained that we should begin by applying the antidote to the strongest and most prominent delusion.

Give the antidote for overcoming the following delusions:

Strong attachment:

Anger:

Ignorance:

Pride:

Discursive and disturbing thoughts:

Week 4: (22 October 2013)

14. In verse 58 the first line says 'It is unsuitable to abide comfortably', what does remaining comfortably refer to? [1st para, 2nd col, pg. 2]

15. 'The way to purify negativities is to apply the four opponent powers, which are being presented here in this second chapter'. What are the four opponent powers? Give brief explanation of each. [Dot points bottom page 2 and beginning of page 3].