
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

29 November 2016

Based on the motivation we generated during the refuge and bodhicitta prayers, we can now engage in our regular meditation practice. [meditation]

As usual we can now generate a motivation for receiving the teachings based on the bodhicitta motivation.

The four close contemplations

Earlier, we talked about the close contemplation on the body.

As explained in the *Uttaratantra* by Maitreya, the purpose of presenting the four close contemplations is to gain a deeper understanding and insight into the four noble truths, and thereby engage in the practice of adopting and discarding. As presented in the teachings, **suffering** is to be known, **origination** is to be abandoned, **cessation** is to be actualised and the **path** is to be meditated upon.

The first **close contemplation** is **on the body**, particularly on the suffering nature of the body. By contemplating the impurities and basic suffering nature of the body, one gains an understanding of the truth of suffering in relation to the body. Thus the understanding and knowledge of the truth of suffering is enhanced.

The **close contemplations of feelings** refers particularly to the feelings that bind us to cyclic existence. Feelings of happiness generate attachment, and feelings of suffering generate aversion. Thus, by contemplating how attachment and aversion are the main cause that binds us to cyclic existence, one gains a more enhanced understanding of the truth of origination, that which is to be abandoned.

With the third **close contemplation on the mind**, we understand that it is on the basis of our mind that we grasp at an inherently existent self. Further, by using the mind when one investigates and analyses how a person is impermanent, empty and selfless, that grasping at the self will be reversed. When one comes to understand that there is no such inherently existent self, then one realises that grasping at the self is false. At a certain point, when one gains the confidence to completely abandon grasping at the self, then one gains the fearlessness of actualising the cessation of all suffering. This enhances the understanding of the truth of cessation, thereby generating the wish to actualise or obtain the truth of cessation.

The **close contemplation on phenomena** is based on two specific categories of phenomena in relation to our existence: purified phenomena, and defiled phenomena. Cultivating the class of purified phenomena becomes the antidote to overcoming defiled phenomena, and thus adopting what is to be adopted, and discarding what is to be abandoned. Then one actualises the path, and that becomes the means to meditate on the path.

This is a very brief explanation of how to relate the four close contemplations to the four noble truths. When His Holiness the Dalai Lama presents this text, he always relates it to the two truths in the beginning, and then to the four noble truths at this point. I have explained this in detail in my previous teaching on the ninth chapter, so I'm just covering the main points here.

As I mentioned in our last session, if one gains a good understanding of what the lack of inherent existence actually connotes, then the rest will be easily understood. All of these refutations establish the lack of inherent existence upon different categories of phenomena.

2.3.2.1. EXPLAINING THE SELFLESSNESS OF PHENOMENA BY WAY OF THE FOUR CLOSE PLACEMENTS BY MINDFULNESS

2.3.2.1.1. Meditating on the close placement by mindfulness on the body (cont.)

2.3.2.1.1.4. This also establishes the person as lacking inherent existence

The second two lines of an earlier verse relate to this heading:

*87cd. When the body does not exist in this way
At that time who is the man, who is the
woman?*

Then the commentary explains:

As a result, when the body of the person does not exist inherently, then at that time who is the inherently existing man, and who is the inherently existing woman? There is no inherently existing person.

In this school one does not realise the selflessness of person completely by merely realising the absence of a person that is a self-sufficient substantial existent. To this end, one needs to realise the absence of a person that is not posited in mere name.

There is no difference in the difficulty of realising the two selflessnesses, because on the basis of the person and the aggregates, one does not divide into the coarseness and subtleness of being an imputed existent, or being a substantial existent. In addition, one does not attribute a difference in coarseness or subtleness to the object to be negated.

In any case, the argument over whether or not hearer and self-liberator arhats realise the selflessness of phenomena while positing that they are unsuitable to realise the selflessness of person, should be understood as lacking comprehension.

What is being explained here should be quite clear when based on the understanding one has gained from earlier explanations. This heading establishes that the person also lacks inherent existence. When one has successfully established that the body lacks inherent existence, then without much further reasoning one is able to understand that the person also lacks inherent existence.

Note that this is not a specific sequence where one first needs to understand the lack of inherent existence of the body, before one is able to understand the lack of inherent existence of the person. This is not like the logical sequence of realising the selflessness of an individual person first before realising the selflessness of phenomena, because the earlier is easier to realise. The sequence under this heading is not because of logical necessity; rather, the commentary is simply saying that

when the body (on the basis of which the person is imputed) is established as lacking inherent existence, then that which is imputed, which is the person, can also be easily understood as lacking inherent existence.

The explanation in the commentary begins with, *as a result, when the body of the person does not exist inherently, then at that time who is the inherently existing man, and who is the inherently existing woman?*, meaning that there is no inherently existing man or woman that can be found.

When the body is established as lacking inherent existence then, if there's no inherent existence of the body to begin with, how could there possibly be an inherently existent woman or man?

Here, in the Tibetan terms for man and woman, there is an implicit connotation that shows an equality between women and men. That in itself shows that in Buddhist terminology, there is no discrimination between male and female. The terms merely connote a difference. As we have established, the basis of imputation of the body is dependent on other phenomena, and thus the body cannot exist inherently. Likewise, what is termed 'a man' cannot exist inherently, as it is dependent on other causes and conditions. The same reason applies to 'a woman', who also cannot exist inherently because she is dependent on other factors. So here we can also derive the understanding that the label 'man' is dependent on the label 'woman' and vice versa. If there's no woman, we can't label man and without man we cannot label woman. So the very labels 'woman' and 'man' are dependent on each other.

It's good to note here that there is no discrimination between men and women in relation to the realisations to be obtained on the path. That's completely clear in the teachings. Within the merit field, there is the whole assembly of the lama, the tutelary deities which are mostly the union of the mother and father deity, as well male and female buddhas, male and female bodhisattvas, dakas and dakinis (heroes and heroines), and so forth. So the merit field includes both male and female aspects of the buddhas and so forth.

Also, the *Heart Sutra* mentions sons and daughters of the lineage as being suitable vehicles to gain the direct realisation of emptiness, and thus obtain the path of seeing. Once the path of seeing is obtained, one is surely on the path to definitely attain enlightenment. Just from this passage, we can see that both males and females equally gain the direct realisation of emptiness, and thus achieve the path of seeing; then there's no doubt about achieving the paths leading all the way to enlightenment.

These are important points to note. Sometimes people misinterpret the Buddha's teachings as discriminating against women. Accusing the Buddha of discrimination would be really heavy negative karma. How could we possibly state that the Buddha has that sort of biased mindset, given his unconditional love and compassion towards all living beings?

On the basis of establishing the body as lacking inherent existence, one can then establish the lack of inherent existence of the person. Similarly, when one establishes the lack of inherent existence of an object where the basis

is a man, then using the same logical reasons one can also establish a woman to be also empty of inherent existence.

Then the text explains that, *in this school one does not completely realise the selflessness of person by merely realising the absence of a self-sufficient and substantially existent person*. We covered this point earlier.

Then the commentary further explains, *to this end, one needs to realise the absence of a person that is not posited by mere name and label*. What needs to be understood is that the absence of a person that is not posited by name implies that what is called a person is merely labelled by the mind.

Next it explains that *there is no difference in the difficulty of realising the two selflessnesses*. There are slightly different interpretations of this in the different texts studied in the monasteries. According to the text studied in our monastery, the selflessness of the person is realised first, followed by realising the selflessness of phenomena. That is because, as explained in our texts, in relation to oneself it is easier to realise the selflessness of the person first followed by the selflessness of one's aggregates.

However following the presentation here, the commentary further explains the reasons why *there is no difference in the difficulty of realising the two selflessnesses*. *One does not divide the basis of the person and the aggregates into the coarseness of a substantial existent and subtleness of an imputed existent*. This refers to the **lower schools**, who posit the aggregate of the body as being substantially existent, and the person itself as being an imputed existent. They say that because the person is imputed upon the body, in order for the person to appear as an object of the mind one needs to first apprehend the body.

In **our school**, *one does not attribute a difference in coarseness or subtleness to the object to be negated*. As explained earlier, the only difference between the selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena is the basis of imputation. When the self is negated on the basis of a person then the selflessness of person is realised; when the self is negated upon the basis of the imputation of the aggregates, then the selflessness of phenomena is realised.

In conclusion, the commentary states that *in any case, the argument over whether or not hearer and self-liberator arhats realise the selflessness of phenomena, while at the same time positing that they are unsuitable to realise the selflessness of person, should be understood as lacking the correct understanding*.

Having investigated the body in detail previously, one comes to the conclusion that there is no inherently existent body, and that establishes the selflessness of the body. That concludes the close contemplation on the body.

2.3.2.1.2. *The close placement by mindfulness on feelings*

This is subdivided into four:

2.3.2.1.2.1. Refuting that the nature of feeling exists inherently

2.3.2.1.2.2. Refuting that the cause exists inherently

2.3.2.1.2.3. Refuting that the focal object exists inherently

2.3.2.1.2.4. Refuting that their object possessor exists inherently

2.3.2.1.2.1. Refuting that the nature of feeling exists inherently

This is subdivided into three:

2.3.2.1.2.1.1. The feeling of suffering does not exist inherently

2.3.2.1.2.1.2. The feeling of happiness does not exist inherently

2.3.2.1.2.1.3. Advice to abide in the yoga of meditating on the lack of inherent existence of feeling

2.3.2.1.2.1.1. *The feeling of suffering does not exist inherently*

Here again we need to apply the understanding that it is not feelings that are being negated; rather, it is inherently existent feelings that are being negated. As indicated earlier, one needs to gain a profound understanding of what it is that is being negated as existing inherently. Then one will have a really good understanding of the content of the *Heart Sutra*.

The explanation in the commentary begins with this statement: *Showing that like the body, feeling also does not exist inherently*. When the form aggregate, which is actually our coarse body, is established as lacking inherent existence, then the next aggregate, which is the feeling aggregate, can also be logically established as lacking inherent existence. When we can infer in this way, we can also apply that logic to other aspects of the teachings. That is how we gain an understanding of the presentation of the *Heart Sutra*, which says that form is empty, feelings are empty, and so forth.

It may seem that I am skipping from one topic to another, but what I'm attempting to do is give you a broader perspective of the teachings, going beyond the particular explanation given here, and relating it to other aspects of the teachings. When one is able to apply one's basic understanding to other aspects of the teachings, one becomes rich in that understanding.

Then the two lines of verse are presented:

*88ab. If suffering exists in suchness
Then why does it not impede extreme joy?*

The commentary explains:

If that which is experienced, the suffering, and that experiencing, the feeling, exists in suchness, then for what reason does the feeling of suffering that exists on one mental consciousness, since it exists inherently and is unsuitable to change into something else, not harm the feeling of extreme joy and happiness? If it were to harm, and if that harm necessarily cancelled any occasion for the generation of happiness, then, because we can see happiness is generated, the former does not exist inherently.

As presented here, suffering is the experience and that which experiences it is feeling. So we talk about feeling as the experiencer, and what is being experienced, in this case, is suffering.

The term *exists in suchness* here means 'exists inherently'. If, as the **Realists** argue, the suffering and the feeling were to exist inherently, *then for what reason does the feeling of suffering that exists on one mental consciousness, since it exists inherently and is unsuitable to change into something else...* In other words, if the experience, which is suffering, and the experiencer, which is the feeling itself, were to exist inherently, they could not possibly change,

because they existed from their own side. In that case, because ...it [the feeling] is unsuitable to change into something else, how can that not harm the feeling of extreme joy and happiness?

The main point here is that, if the experience of suffering were inherently existent on the stream of consciousness, it would have to be a perpetual experience of suffering, and there would be no opportunity for happiness to be generated. Likewise, if happiness were to exist inherently, it would be the same - there would be no occasion for suffering to be experienced.

However, there are times when suffering is experienced by the consciousness, and other times when happiness is experienced. Therefore, the commentary concludes that, *if it were to harm, and if that harm necessarily cancelled any occasion for the generation of happiness, then, because we can see happiness is generated, the former does not exist inherently*. So if the one were to cancel the other, and since there would be an occasion for happiness to be experienced, the earlier assertion that suffering is inherently existent is not tenable.

2.3.2.1.2.1.2. *The feeling of happiness does not exist inherently*

The last two lines of the earlier verse and the next two lines of verse read:

*88cd. If happy, then why do deliciousness etc.,
Not give joy when overcome with misery?*

*89. If due to being powerful it suppresses
And there is no experience.*

As the commentary explains:

If happiness also existed inherently, then why does fine food and drink not provide joy in the mind at the time of being overwhelmed by misery because of a dead child? It follows it does make one happy - because fine food, drink and the like generate inherently existing happiness.

This is quite clearly explained. If happiness were to exist inherently then, if at a time of feeling great sorrow - for example, after losing a child - a person were given delicious, fine food, they would have to experience great joy and happiness in partaking of that food. But that is not the case.

As explained here *it follows it does have to make someone in that circumstances happy because fine food, drink and the like generate inherently existent happiness*, according to you **Realists**.

That is followed by this argument:

Argument: If you say, although happiness is generated at the time of being overwhelmed by misery, because the suffering is strong it suppresses the happiness, and that is why one does not experience happiness.

The **Realists** are responding here that there is some happiness when the person is having fine food and so forth, but because the suffering is so great, it overpowers the experience of happiness. So, they say there is some happiness there, but it is overpowered by the extreme experience of suffering.

The **Realists** are asserting here that there's a happiness here which is not experienced. How could one say there is a happiness which is not experienced, if happiness

itself is an experience? It is this absurdity which is being pointed out here.

89cd. *How can that not in the nature of Experience, be a feeling?*

90. *Merely subtle suffering exists, Isn't the coarse one cleared away? If, 'It is a mere joy apart from it', The subtle itself belongs to it as well*

In the first part of the commentary, the **Madhyamika** explain:

Madhyamika: How can that not in the nature of experience be the feeling of happiness? It follows it cannot - because it [happiness] is experienced. One can relate the answer likewise to the suppressing of inherently existing suffering by strong happiness.

Next is the argument:

Argument: Because at the time of strong happiness there is a subtle feeling of suffering it is not as if one does not experience any suffering.

This is quite clear. I will just read the next parts:

Madhyamika: If there are subtle feelings of suffering, then what harm did the powerful happiness give to the suffering, so that one posits the experience of powerful happiness? Did the powerful happiness not clear away the coarse suffering?

Argument: This I accept, but this subtle suffering is only a form of subtle joy apart, separate from that great happiness.

Madhyamika: Since this subtle happiness is not outside the definition of happiness, if it is subtle happiness, it needs to be happiness.

The main point being presented here by the **Madhyamika** is that whether the happiness is great or subtle, if it is a happiness, then it is an experience; and because it is an experience, it has to be happiness. That is the point.

If you have read the text carefully, then it shouldn't be too obscure. If you have not done any reading, then even if I attempt to explain it word by word, I don't think you'll get much out of it!

The next verse is:

91. *If, 'since the adverse condition is generated Sufferings are not generated.' 'Feelings are conceptual fabrications' Is this saying not established?*

That is presented first with an argument, which is:

Argument: Wishing to repudiate the fault of, 'If it is happiness, then why does fine food and so forth': Because the contrary condition for suffering, i.e., happiness, is generated from things like fine food and drink, therefore no suffering is generated at this time.

Madhyamika: Isn't the saying, 'the feelings of happiness and suffering are mere conceptual fabrications and imputations' established? It follows it is - because one instance of food or drink is labelled as the cause for both happiness and suffering through the power of conceptual thought.

This is relating to the earlier verse where it says:

88cd. *If happy, then why do deliciousness etc., Not give joy when overcome with misery?*

This is what is being contradicted by the argument: *Because the contrary condition for suffering, i.e., happiness, is generated from things like fine food and drink, therefore no*

suffering is generated at this time. Here, the **Realists** are saying that, because happiness is generated after having fine food and so forth, there cannot be suffering at that time.

The next point being made by the **Madhyamika** is: *Isn't the saying, 'the feelings of happiness and suffering are mere conceptual fabrications and imputations' established? It follows it is - because one instance of food or drink is labelled as the cause for both happiness and suffering through the power of conceptual thought.*

Thus the reason presented here is: *... because one instance of food or drink is labelled as the cause for both happiness and suffering through the power of conceptual thought.* This can be quite clearly understood; what we perceive as happiness or suffering is basically dependent on the conceptual thought that interprets that.

2.3.2.1.2.1.3. *Advice to abide in the yoga of meditating on the lack of inherent existence of feeling*

I've gone through the explanations of this in quite some detail previously. The verse relating to this is:

92. *Because of this very fact this analysis Should be meditated upon as its antidote. The mental stabilisation derived from the field of Analysis is the food of a yogi.*

Then the commentary explains:

Because of the very fact that feelings do not exist inherently, one should meditate on this analysis, which realises feelings to be lacking inherent existence, as the antidote against the true-grasping at feeling. If one meditates on the mental stabilisation of superior insight in dependence on the superior insight focusing on suchness that arises from the field of pure analysis and investigation, and in dependence on calm abiding, then the body of the yogi will be further and further increased and boosted. Therefore it is called 'food', like the ordinary food that increases the body.

What being presented here is that the wrong conception of grasping at true existence, or inherent existence, perceives feeling as being inherently existent. Whereas when the wisdom realising selflessness perceives feelings, it perceives them as lacking inherent existence.

These two perceptions are focusing on the same object, which is feelings, but are completely opposite apprehensions; while focused on the same object, the apprehension of each is completely different.

In the earlier view held by the **Realists**, which is the mistaken conception of perceiving feelings as existing inherently, that perception has no truth to back it up. It is actually based on falsity. Therefore, on the basis of that false perception, feelings cannot be established. When feelings are perceived as being inherently existent, the actual feelings cannot be established properly, or ultimately.

Whereas the **Madhyamika** viewpoint of the wisdom realising selflessness perceiving feelings as lacking inherent existence is able to establish feelings just as they are. This is how we need to understand what is being presented here.

If one meditates on the mental stabilisation of superior insight in dependence on the superior insight focusing on suchness that arises from the field of pure analysis and investigation, and in dependence on calm abiding ... So, having gained the profound understanding of the lack of inherent existence of feelings, one then uses one's mind to focus on that single-pointedly. Having obtained the calm abiding that focuses on the lack of inherent existence of feelings, if that is further developed, one will gain what we call superior or special insight into the lack of inherent existence of feelings – the emptiness of feelings.

When the yogi reaches the point of being able to apply special insight based on calm abiding focusing on, for example, the lack of inherent existence of feelings, then through that meditation the yogi actually gains sustenance to make the body even more powerful. That is referred to as the sustenance of concentration, or the food of concentration.

When the yogi is engaged in that level of concentration, because it naturally sustains the body, it is referred to as a food. The example given here is *like the ordinary food that increases the body*. As with ordinary gross food, we talk about eating healthy food, because when we consume the food, it nourishes and increases the strength of the body. Similarly, it is said that for the yogi concentration is becomes sustenance for the body.

The commentary concludes:

Through this concentration the ordinary body is also increased. Hence, one should strive in single-pointed meditative placement upon realising emptiness.

The conclusion here is that one needs to first gain a good understanding of emptiness. Then, based on that clear, good understanding, one attempts to generate a single-pointed focus upon the understanding of emptiness – although initially it is only a conceptual understanding of emptiness. Based on that, one then gains the actual direct realisation of emptiness.

Let us conclude the teaching here with a recitation of the dedication chapter of the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*.

Last week we did some prayers and dedicated them for Susie and Julie's mother. Since then, they've both passed away. So now we will dedicate this practice for them.

If you recall, when we mentioned doing the practice for Susie last week, I indicated at that time that she was in quite a happy frame of mind, and that in the past, I had advised to her to focus on Tara, and she has particularly held White Tara as her main deity. I'd mentioned to her to keep that as her main deity, to really focus on that complete reliance on Tara, and that that would be good for her mind. Apparently Sandra went to visit Susie the next day, and Sandra was able to convey that to her, right? So, Sandra what was her response?

Sandra: When I saw her, she was in the heavy breathing phase, and not talking at all. I passed on your message from last week, saying, "It's Sandra. I have an instruction for you from Geshe Doga. He said for you to totally rely on Tara and her mantra." She came out of her heavy breathing and opened her eyes. I then showed her a framed picture of Geshe Doga and one of White Tara. She was very clear and lucid and her face lit up. She gave a big smile and was happy. Moments later, she went back into

the heavy breathing. But she was definitely clear when I gave her the message.

Geshe-la: When I heard what you had relayed and her response, it made me very happy. Susie, as those of us here know, was a very kind lady, a very nice person, with a very nice personality. Thank you, Sandra, because you were there at the right moment to assist someone who was really in need of help. This is what I feel is the great service that we, as Dharma brothers and sisters, can do, being able to help each other at the time of need. So, I really thank you for that, Sandra. It is good.

Now, as mentioned earlier, we will do the dedication chapter and dedicate the merit to late Susie and Julie's mum.

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

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Edited Version*

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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

We can set the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: for the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice well. Having just spent time meditating on *tong-len* (the giving and taking practice), it will be easier now to generate the bodhicitta motivation.

The reason why the superior intention is not specifically mentioned in the exchanging-self-with-other technique of developing bodhicitta is because it is cultivated naturally after doing that practice of giving and taking. When engaging in the practice of voluntarily taking the sufferings of all living beings upon oneself, and giving one's entire happiness to others, it initiates the personal responsibility to alleviate the sufferings of all living beings and lead them to the state of happiness. Thus, this practice naturally encompasses the superior intention.

It is essential to have a good understanding of why one needs to generate the wish to take the responsibility to benefit all sentient beings. One also needs to ensure that one generates the mind of taking personal responsibility for the welfare of all sentient beings in one's daily meditation practice. Without developing the mind of taking personal responsibility to free all sentient beings from every suffering and endow them in the ultimate state of happiness, there is no way that one is able to develop the superior intention that serves as the cause for generating bodhicitta. As the teachings present, the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment is preceded by the sincere, genuine intention to take on the responsibility to free all beings from suffering and lead them to the state of ultimate happiness. With this reasoning we can see why it has to precede bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta consists of a two-fold aspiration: the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, and the aspiration to free all beings from suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness. The second aspiration is generated when one is moved to the point of not being able to bear sentient beings' suffering, even for a second, and cannot bear to see them deprived of happiness. Thus, one takes on the personal responsibility to free all beings from every suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness.

At this stage one investigates whether one has the full ability to do this right now, and comes to realise one does not have the ability. This investigation leads one to ask 'who possesses that ability?' It is at that point, by reflecting on the incomparable qualities of an enlightened being, one comes to understand the true significance of the Buddha Jewel. The Buddha is a supreme being endowed with all the qualities needed to free all sentient beings from suffering. Here one can reflect on the specific qualities of the Buddha's body, the qualities of the Buddha's speech and qualities of the Buddha's mind.

One can reflect on the qualities of the Buddha as presented in the teachings on refuge. In summary, the qualities of the Buddha's body are the ability to manifest infinite bodies to benefit numberless sentient beings in various numberless ways. With speech, he has sixty qualities of eloquent speech; being able to answer many questions asked at one time with one single answer, and so forth, which satisfies the needs of all sentient beings in accordance with their wishes. With his qualities of the mind, the Buddha's omniscient mind knows all existence past, present and future. Everything that exists is known exactly as it is by the Buddha's mind. He also has the quality of great unbiased compassion towards all living beings, regardless of whether the Buddha is respected or not, or treated nicely or not. From the Buddha's side there is unbiased compassion towards all living beings without discrimination, wishing to benefit them all and with the ability to do so. When one thinks about the qualities of the Buddha, this shows the abilities one would also achieve when one obtains the qualities of a buddha oneself. On a practical level, it is said that by contemplating on each of the Buddha's qualities one accumulates extensive merit oneself.

Since we need to accumulate merit, we need to use all the resources already available to us. Otherwise there is a danger of thinking 'I need to engage in some practice to accumulate merit, but I wonder what I should do?' If after receiving all these teachings, particularly the teachings on refuge, one feels one lacks the ways and means to accumulate merit, then one has missed the point.

Refuge explains the qualities of the Buddha so one can contemplate in a concise way the four qualities of the Buddha: that the Buddha himself is free from all fears; he has the means to free all other beings from all fears; he has love and compassion towards all sentient beings without any discrimination; and helps others regardless of whether the Buddha himself has been benefited or not. These four points are said to be the sole qualities of the Buddha. In terms of refuge, only the Buddha Jewel has these four qualities. It is in this way that one reflects on these points. In simple terms, when one goes for refuge or is making a request, basically one is saying that I admire your qualities and I would also like the qualities you have, please help me to do so. In essence, this is what going for refuge means.

The **causal refuge** is the enlightened being to whom one goes for refuge now, as a way to obtain their qualities. The **resultant refuge** is the buddha one becomes in the future. This acknowledges the potential one has to become a buddha. Going for refuge means taking refuge in the causal refuge, and then aspiring to obtain those qualities oneself.

These are important points to keep in mind and regularly mesh into our practice, because we will all reach the point where we cannot rely upon others, even if they want to help us. There will be a point when we cannot possibly ask others on the outside to help us, which is when we are totally at the mercy of what is in our own mind. At the time of death, we cannot rely on others, as there is nothing they can do for us. This crucial moment is the juncture between this life and the next life, when the mind of death occurs.

This is when we are completely dependent on the Dharma Jewel that we have developed within ourselves. Although we might not yet have obtained the actual ultimate Dharma Jewel, we have a similitude of it within our mind, comprised of all the practices we have engaged in such as meditating on love and compassion, observing morality and the practice of patience, generosity and so forth. All these practices we have attempted to engage in is called the similitude of the

Dharma Jewel that resides within ourselves. The extent to which we strengthen the Dharma Jewel now when we have time is what we can then rely upon at the time of death.

We need to be very mindful that the time will come when we must completely rely upon what we have cultivated in our mind. Many have commented to me that they never saw the real value of the Dharma until they had a grave illness such as a terminal disease, and at that time the value and essential nature of the Dharma become very clear. So, it is good for us not to wait until that critical moment, but prepare from now on so that we are familiar with what we need to do, and can maintain a virtuous frame of mind. A virtuous frame of mind, rather than a negative mind or neutral mind, is the best state of mind at the time of death.

As mentioned earlier, while the actual Dharma Jewel is only in the mental continuum of arya beings, the relative Dharma Jewel (or similitude of it) is the practice we bring to mind in our preparation for death. Meditating on death and impermanence is the best preparation for death as it a great impetus for practising the Dharma. With the nine-point death meditation, as you will recall, the three main points are: death is certain, the time of death is uncertain, and at the time of death nothing but the Dharma can benefit. Each of these points has three reasons and three conclusions. The three reasons for the last one being: at the time of death, friends cannot help, one's body cannot help, and one's wealth cannot help. Thus, the conclusion is that only the Dharma can help one at that time. These are essential points to contemplate.

Even during our life there will be times when we are deserted by friends and times when even our bodies might fail us. Definitely, at the time of death our body will desert us and even our wealth will desert us and cannot help. At the time of death we have to leave everything material behind. At that juncture, when one is completely deserted by all we have been so familiar with in our lives - our body, friends and wealth - the only thing that can help is the Dharma. If we don't familiarise our minds with the Dharma now, and assume that the virtuous Dharma mind will arise spontaneously at the time of death then that is wishful thinking.

When we attempt to meditate now, if a neutral state of mind is all we are familiarising ourselves with, then a neutral state will most likely be the state of mind we will have at the time of death. Therefore the focus of our meditation practice now should be on developing a virtuous state of mind and familiarising ourselves with virtue as much as possible. I am sharing these points which I find very significant myself. These are points that I really think about and try to put into practice myself. I find that there are many simple ways to put Dharma into practice. It doesn't have to be something complicated or profound; there are simple, practical ways you can put Dharma into practice. These are some simple points that I share with you.

Meditating on impermanence has many, many practical benefits that we can experience right away, e.g. helping to develop more contentment in one's mind and helping to alleviate a lot of unnecessary sufferings experienced in our daily lives. Attachment is one of the main sources of the agony that we experience. Because of this strong attachment to our body, we experience a lot of agony and suffering in relation to it. If attachment is reduced, contentment with one's body can definitely bring about more ease in our mind. Likewise, if we have a lot of strong attachment to our friends, then this causes a lot of problems and agony in our

mind. Likewise we have very strong attachment to our wealth. If we reduce these strong attachments to our body, friends and wealth, then our mind naturally becomes much more relaxed and calm, and much more expansive. Rather than being narrow minded and neurotic, the mind becomes more expansive and one can feel much more satisfied with what one has now, relieving us from feelings of dissatisfaction. One can think, 'my basic needs are met, I can sustain myself, and things are going quite well, so I can feel happy'. When one doesn't need to spend so much time and energy to focus on protecting and securing the various objects of attachment, there will be more space in the mind to develop a more positive state of mind.

This is where we take the inclination to develop more virtue in our lives. Familiarising ourselves with this way of thinking and putting it into practice is something which will come about through practice, not right away. Just thinking about it a few times and expecting results in a few months is not realistic. But over time, if we keep our mind in this direction, familiarise our mind with virtue, we will begin to see that a transformation takes place. These are points to put into practice in our daily life that I share with you.

I feel the most essential, the most valuable state of mind is a mind of love and compassion. In making attempts to develop this one begins to sense a genuine feeling in one's mind. Because of the unruly mind we have from beginningless lifetimes, it is hard to continuously maintain love and compassion, as self-centredness slowly creeps in. However, the more one familiarises oneself with it the more the mind of love and compassion will develop.

It is good to focus on each of the thoughts: may all beings be free from suffering; may they be endowed with happiness; may they never be separated from joy; and may they be endowed with equanimity. Just thinking about each of these and contemplating 'how wonderful it would be if all beings were free from suffering, may they be free from suffering, I myself will take the responsibility for freeing them from suffering, please gurus and deities bless my mind to be able to do so', encompasses the most essential points of the entire path to enlightenment.

Reflecting on the sequence of cause and effect encompasses the four noble truths, which, in themselves, are the basis for the entire structure of the path to enlightenment. When one thinks of expanding on each one, beginning with wishing beings to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering, it encompasses the points on the truth of suffering and the causes of suffering, the truth of origination. So we can relate to the four noble truths in a concise way as a means to put them into practice.

Indeed, when we go into more detail on the four immeasurables, we can see how they encompass the essence of the entire path, particularly the four noble truths. When we contemplate further on the sufferings, we recall from the classifications of general sufferings of migrators in cyclic existence from the Lam Rim teachings that there are the eight types of sufferings, the six types of sufferings, and the three types of sufferings that one can contemplate. Then having contemplated the sufferings, one generates the thought of wishing others to be free from the causes of suffering.

This is where one contemplates the causes of suffering from the very basic level of the ten non-virtues. Then more particularly, karma and delusion as presented in the truth of origination, which are the cause of suffering, and the various delusions. There are various types of delusions, and the

primary one is the ignorance of grasping at a self. When one relates to that, one wishes for others to be free from the fundamental cause of suffering, which reincorporates the deeper understanding that one derives from the four noble truths. With wishing other beings to be endowed with joy, this joy can be the joy of liberation and ultimately the joy of enlightenment, encompassing the whole path; then contemplating the truth of cessation, and so on. This is how we can use what seems to be a simple practice as a means to incorporate profound understandings.

Meditating on immeasurable equanimity in particular becomes an impetus for generating great compassion for sentient beings. The compassion developed then is much more profound than just wishing beings to be free from the obvious levels of suffering. Understanding that what causes suffering for sentient beings is when they are not in a state of equanimity, when they are feeling close to some and distant to others out of attachment and aversion. When one wishes beings to be endowed with equanimity that is free from being close to some and distant towards others out of attachment and aversion, then it is said that when one goes into these subtle levels of understanding the level of compassion is much more profound.

The different levels of compassion, from the basic to the profound, particularly the three types of compassion, are explained precisely by Chandrakirti in his teachings on the Middle Way. Feeling compassion because one relates to the suffering of suffering experienced by others is something that is quite readily developed.

One could say that even animals have that level of compassion. When an animal sees another animal suffering they do try to help. This shows that they have the wish for the other animal to be free from suffering. The wish to alleviate the suffering of suffering is also something animals naturally have. For example a dog will go around looking for food when it is hungry to alleviate the suffering of hunger. When the dog finds some food it is temporarily satisfied and will have a nice sleep. Whereas we may not be able to have a good sleep even after our stomach is full.

Similarly, some levels of our suffering of suffering can be alleviated quite easily, e.g. when we have a headache and we take a Panadol to alleviate the pain. That is, of course, a temporary relief from the suffering.

The wish to alleviate the suffering of suffering is quite readily felt by all, so wishing others to be free from this is not very profound. Whereas when one develops compassion towards other sentient beings by recognising their plight – the suffering of cyclic existence and the causes they are creating to remain in it – then generating compassion with that understanding becomes much more profound. We can relate to this. For example, when we see someone poor and destitute we might find it is easier to feel compassion towards them. Whereas when someone is rich and famous etc., it is harder for us to even recognise that we need to feel compassion for them. But when we think about it, despite their wealth, they are actually creating a lot of negativities through attachment of being close to some and aversion by being distant to others, and thus constantly creating the causes to be in cyclic existence to experience numerous sufferings again and again. So, when we can think in that way, even wealthy people will definitely become an object of our great compassion.

What I am attempting to share with you now is that it is really important to try to put into practice what one has already understood at a basic level. You've heard a lot of

teachings and have a wealth of knowledge in your minds already. Now it is time for you to put it into practice and try to derive the benefit of understanding what the teachings mean. You might not see immediate results but if you don't put it into practice now the results will never come. By integrating this into your daily practice, gradually your mind will become more and more imbued with the Dharma.

We all naturally look forward to getting more leisure time as we age, so when we finally get this time, we should refer back to all the teachings we have received and contemplate on them. This will definitely help to bring about a genuinely more subdued, calm mind, a more satisfied and happy mind; how wonderful would that be!

2.3.2.1.2.2. Refuting that the cause exists inherently

Preceding this was the explanation with reasoning that established the non-inherent existence of feelings. This section refutes that the causes of suffering exist inherently. This is subdivided into three:

2.3.2.1.2.2.1. Refuting the inherent meeting of sense power and object

2.3.2.1.2.2.2. Refuting the inherent meeting with the consciousness

2.3.2.1.2.2.3. *Contact that arises from the meeting of these three does not exist inherently* 2.3.2.1.2.2.1. *Refuting the inherent meeting of sense power and object*

What is being refuted here is an inherent meeting of a particle of the sense power and a particle of the object. It can also be related to the actual meeting of a sense power and its object. One needs to relate to this explanation as refuting every possibility of inherent existence. If one keeps that in mind then the following explanation will be clear.

The first two lines of the verse read:

*93ab. If there is room between sense power and object,
Then how can the two meet?*

The **Madhyamika** first present a statement followed by a question.

Madhyamika: One needs to refute that particles meet.

If the subtle and coarse particles of the sense power and the object meet, is there space between them or not?

The **Realists** state:

Realist: I say there is.

Madhyamika: How can these particles meet, as they possess the fallacy of having space in between? In the intermediate space there are also the particles of either light or darkness, between which there is again intermediate space, and thus it would become endless.

What is posited as a question is: If the subtle and coarse particles of the sense power and the object meet then is there space between them or not? In simple terms, the question is when they meet is there space in between them or not?

The Madhyamika is pointing out the absurdity of their statement by asking *how can these particles meet, as they possess the fallacy of having space in between?* The very term 'space' implies that there is a separation, and therefore they cannot meet. If there was no space in between, then how could you even talk about the meeting of two particles. If there is a meeting then it implies that there is space in between the two that are meeting. The main point is that if there is an inherently existent meeting, then there would be no space in

between at all. How can the particles meet if they possess an intermediate space in between? Then furthermore there are also the particles of either light or darkness. As indicated in the teachings, there is also an explanation of light particles and darkness particles.

Using the example of two fingers, if there is a separation (space between the two fingers) then there can be light particles in between and also darkness particles in between. If this is so, how can you say they are meeting when there is space in between and particles there? The commentary states, *'between which there is again intermediate space, and thus it would become endless*, meaning that there would be infinite regression. The main point to be understood, again, is that there is neither an inherently existent meeting nor inherently existent space in between. To summarise, what the Madhyamika are saying to the opponent is: if you say that there is inherently existent space in between the two particles then the fallacy of infinite regression will follow.

The next part refutes the meeting of two particles if there is no intermediate space.

The next two lines of the last verse read:

*93cd. If there is no room and they are merely one,
What is meeting with what?*

*94ab. Subtle particles cannot enter subtle particles,
They do not have the circumstance and are equal.*

That is followed by the argument.

Argument: There is no intermediate space.

If the **Realists** say that there is no intermediate space, then the **Madhyamika** present reasons to counter this, which are as follows.

Madhyamaka: Again, when two partless particles meet there cannot be the surface where they touch and the surface where they do not touch, and therefore they would need to touch each other in their complete nature. In that case, they merge into one point of reference, become one mere particle, and then what is meeting with which object to be met? It follows there is no such meeting - because there are no two objects.

The reason for that is that one subtle particle cannot enter, i.e. absorb, into another subtle particle, because there is not the circumstance of empty space between these particles, and they are of the same size.

This states the reason why they cannot meet in their complete nature.

The **Vaibhashika** posit that there are partless particles. What is being refuted here by the **Madhyamikas** is that if there were partless particles, how can they possibly meet when there is no surface or no two sides to them? So if there are no two sides since it is partless, then there couldn't be this side or that side. If there couldn't be this side of the particle, as opposed to the other side of the particle, then what is meeting with what? How can the two particles possibly meet if there are no sides to be met? These questions point out the absurdity of the Vaibhashika assertion.

If the particles didn't have separate sides (because each partless particle wouldn't have a side), when they meet, *they would need to touch each other in their complete nature*, or touch completely, meaning that when the two partless particles meet they would have to touch in every aspect and completely merge into one. As there is no one side that doesn't touch the other side - because there are no sides at

all - they will mingle completely and become one. That is the absurdity being presented here.

The commentary continues with the explanation:

In that case, they merge into one point of reference, become one mere particle, and then what is meeting with which object to be met? It follows there is no such meeting - because there are no two objects.

With this, the following reasoning can be clearly understood.

The next lines of verse read:

*94.cd. Without entering there is no mixing,
Those that did not mix cannot meet.*

*95. How could it possibly be valid to say
That the partless can meet.
In case meeting and the partless
Are seen, show it!*

The commentary explains the meaning of this verse:

There is a pervasion because particles that do not enter and absorb into each other cannot mix, and partless phenomena that did not mix cannot meet. How can the statement 'partless phenomena meet' be accurate? Because it is impossible, if you observe the meeting with something partless, then you should show it, but you cannot.

It explains clearly that if there were partless particles, then the earlier reasoning has a pervasion *because particles that do not enter and absorb into each other cannot mix, and partless phenomena that did not mix cannot meet*.

This reasoning is followed by, *How can the statement 'partless phenomena meet' be accurate?* Being a rhetorical question it implies that it is impossible for partless phenomena to meet, because if they were to meet they would become one, and if they became one you cannot call it meeting. Thus, *if you observe meeting with something partless, then you should be able to show it but you cannot*. This implies that the meeting of partless particles is impossible.

The inherent meeting of particles, refuted earlier, also explains that there couldn't be an inherent meeting of sense power and its object as well.

2.3.2.1.2.2.2. Refuting the inherent meeting with the consciousness

Having refuted the inherent meeting of particles, if the doubt arises that there might be a meeting between the consciousness and the object then again that meeting implies an inherent meeting. So, what is being refuted is that there is an inherent meeting between the consciousness and the object. We can cover this in our next session.

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

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Edited Version*

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

13 December 2016

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

Now we can generate the usual positive motivation for receiving the teachings.

2.3.2.1.2. The close placement of mindfulness on feelings

2.3.2.1.2.2.2. Refuting the inherent meeting with the consciousness

The verse reads:

96. *That primary consciousness without body
Can be met is simply invalid;
There is also no phenomenon on the collection,
Similar to the earlier analysis.*

The commentary explains:

The assertion that primary consciousness, which is without a form or body, can be met inherently is simply invalid because it does not have form.

The refutation of meeting with the coarse: Also the meeting with a coarse object that is a collection of many atoms does not exist inherently because no truly existent object exists on that. It is similar to inherent existence which was refuted earlier through the analysis of the collection of joints.

As quite clearly presented here, *the assertion that primary consciousness can be met inherently is simply invalid because it does not have form.*

The next part of the commentary is *the refutation of meeting with the coarse object that is a collection of many atoms.* This coarse object *does not exist inherently because no truly existent object exists on that collection.* As mentioned, *it is similar to the refutation of inherent existences that was refuted earlier through the analysis of the collection of joints.* So, as explained previously, the body is not the collection of its parts, such as the joints, limbs and so forth.

2.3.2.1.2.2.3. Thus, contact arising from the meeting of these three does not exist inherently

Here 'these three' refers to the object, the sense power, and the consciousness. It is the combination of these three that induces contact, and contact induces feelings. So one needs to understand that a feeling is preceded by its particular cause, which is contact, and that contact is preceded by the combination of the object, sense power, and consciousness. There are other states of mind that can arise simultaneously, but here we need to understand that feeling is preceded by the contact that serves as its particular cause, and that contact is preceded by the meeting of these three; the object, the sense power, and consciousness. The point being explained here is that the meeting of these three does not exist inherently.

We can also take note that this understanding about how contact arises, and how feeling arises is derived from the

study of Mind and Awareness, or *Lo Rig*; earlier studies form the basis of a more enhanced understanding of later subjects. Mind and Awareness was taught in 2001 over eight weeks, and these classes were attended by seventy-five people who made the commitment to come to all of the sessions.¹ At that time we didn't have time to cover the twenty secondary mental factors, but these were presented during the teachings on *Precious Garland*.

The first verse under this heading is:

97. *If thus there is no contact
From what does feeling arise?
What is the purpose of this exertion?
What is giving harm to whom?*

The first part of the commentary is an assertion by **Madhyamikas**.

Madhyamika: As explained earlier, the meeting of object, sense power and primary consciousness do not exist inherently. If, when looking at it from that point of view, contact does not exist inherently, then from what cause does truly existent feeling arise? A false cause does not have the power to generate a truly existent result. If there is no inherently existing feeling, then what good is the exertion and effort for its sake? It is meaningless.

This is again quite clear. Earlier it was explained that *the meeting of object, sense power and primary consciousness does not exist inherently.* The combination of the meeting of these three, which are the causes of contact, does not exist inherently. So the contact that is a result of these three also cannot possibly exist inherently.

As mentioned here *contact does not exist inherently*, because the causes do not exist inherently. So if there is no inherently existing cause *then from what cause does a truly existent feeling arise?* If there is no truly existent contact then how can there be truly existent feelings? *A false cause does not have the power to generate a truly existent result.* If contact itself does not exist inherently, then the feeling that is a result of that contact could not possibly exist inherently either, because a false cause does not have the power to generate a truly existent result. This is quite clear.

The *Madhyamika* then conclude that *if there is no inherently existing feeling, then what good is the exertion and effort for its sake?* So if feeling itself does not exist inherently, then what is the point of exerting oneself to acquire that feeling? In this context 'feeling' relates to a pleasurable feeling. Having presented that absurdity, the *Madhyamika* say that exerting oneself for non-inherently existing feelings *is meaningless.*

Then the **Realists** argue:

Argument: The exertion is for the sake of abandoning inherently existing feeling of suffering.

What the Realists are saying is that 'I'm not exerting myself to overcome pleasurable feelings, rather I'm exerting myself to overcome *inherently existent feelings of suffering.*

¹ These can be found on the CD of teachings available in the bookshop or downloaded from <http://www.tarainstitute.org.au/transcripts>.

The **Madhyamikas** refute that objection.²

Madhyamika: This is a fallacy because, as there is no inherently existing feeling, who is the person that receives harm from which cause?

This is a fallacy because, as there is no inherently existing feeling, who is the person that receives harm from which cause? This argues that, since the feeling of suffering does not exist inherently, it could not possibly harm the person who is experiencing it. So what point is there in exerting yourself to overcome a suffering that does not exist inherently?

The commentary continues:

In this world it is merely the happiness that alleviates earlier suffering that exists. While there is true suffering, there is no true happiness. For example, the experience of happiness that one experiences when, on a cold day, one stands in the sun and the suffering of cold recedes a little, is the feeling of happiness. But at that time the suffering of cold still exists. As soon as that suffering of cold ceases, uninterruptedly the suffering of heat begins. Thus, one needs suffering as the basis for imputing happiness, but one does not need happiness as the basis for generating suffering awareness; e.g. like blue and, short and long.

As presented earlier, contaminated or worldly happiness is the mere pleasurable sensation of alleviating an earlier suffering, and because of that it is experienced as happiness. The point here is that *while there is true suffering, there is no true happiness*. This is followed by the example of the *experience of happiness when, on a cold day, one stands in the sun, and the suffering of cold recedes a little*.

The commentary goes on to explain that *at that time the suffering of the cold day still exists, because as soon as that suffering of cold ceases the suffering of heat immediately begins*. Just as the suffering of cold begins to recede, the suffering of heat begins. This is establishing that one needs suffering as the basis for generating happiness, but one does not need happiness as the basis for generating an awareness of suffering.

What we perceive as happiness, i.e. worldly pleasure - which is contaminated happiness, or samsaric happiness - is based on suffering. As mentioned earlier, the alleviation of an earlier suffering is experienced as happiness, and therefore happiness is based on suffering. But one does not need happiness as the basis for generating an experience of suffering.

When we reflect on this from our own experience, we can actually see the truth of this fact. Any worldly pleasure that we experience is based on alleviating some kind of earlier discomfort, and the relief that one experiences when an earlier discomfort is lessened is experienced as pleasure or happiness.

These pleasurable experiences are mostly related to attachment. Nagarjuna said that the pleasure that we experience from attachment is like the pleasurable sensation one gets from scratching an itchy rash. One experiences pleasure from the relief of the itch. But, as Nagarjuna presents very logically, given a choice one would not opt to have the rash just to experience the

pleasurable feeling of scratching it. That is how the analogy that happiness is based on suffering is explained. Many people seem to really relate this to their own experience. Basically, worldly pleasures are just the relief of an earlier discomfort, and that's why they are not true happiness.

The further analogy is that it is *like blue and distance*. The colour blue is not dependent on anything for it to appear as blue - it is blue by nature. This is likened to the experience of suffering, which is that it does not have to be based on happiness for it to be experienced as suffering.

Whereas the experience of happiness is like short and long. The awareness of short is dependent on something that is longer, and the awareness of long is based on something that is shorter. Therefore the perception of long and short are dependent on each other. The perception of long is dependent on the perception of short, and likewise the perception of short is dependent on the perception of long. Whereas the perception of blue is not dependent on anything else, it perceives blue just as it naturally appears - blue.

The commentary doesn't explain the example further in detail, however I think that suffering is like the colour blue, i.e. just as blue is not dependent on another factor to be blue, suffering is not dependent on happiness. Whereas just like long depends on short and *vice versa*, worldly happiness is dependent on the alleviation of suffering.

As an introduction to the next verse the commentary states:

Presenting that craving is reversed, if one realises the non-existence of inherent feeling:

The verse reads:

98. *When there is no-one experiencing feeling,
And when the feeling does not exist as well,
Having seen this circumstance at that time,
Why should craving not be reversed?*

Then the commentary explains:

When there is comprehension that there is no inherent person experiencing feeling, and that the experienced feeling also does not exist inherently, then at this time, having seen this circumstance of no inherent experience and experiencer at the time, why should craving not be reversed? The craving wishing to attain happiness and the craving wishing to be separated from suffering are induced through the force of true-grasping.

As the commentary explains, *when one comprehends that there is no inherently existing person experiencing feeling, and that the experienced feeling also does not exist inherently then, as there is no inherently existing experience and experiencer, why should craving not be reversed?* The implication is that with this understanding of the lack of inherently existent experiences and inherently existent experiencers, craving would indeed be reversed.

The reason why craving can be reversed is that *the craving wishing to attain happiness and the craving wishing to be separated from suffering are induced through the force of true grasping*. It is this true grasping that causes these two

² There are a few typos in the Tibetan text at this point, which have been corrected in this transcript.

cravings of wishing to experience happiness and wanting to be separated from suffering.

When the inherent existence of craving itself is reversed, i.e. when one realises the emptiness of craving, then that understanding will overcome the misconception of inappropriate attention that causes the craving to arise in the first place. It is ignorance that is responsible for this inappropriate attention. So when that inappropriate attention is overcome through the realisation of the non-inherent existence of things, the craving itself will be reversed, or cease.

When we really investigate how attachment arises, we come to see that behind every attachment there is always a mind of ignorance. The mind of ignorance is the forerunner of attachment as well as aversion. This mind exaggerates the qualities of an object through inappropriate attention. So there's this combination of exaggerating qualities that is induced by inappropriate attention, which then develops into attachment to the object.

When there is strong attachment one sees qualities in the object that don't actually exist. And we can verify from our own experience that when strong attachment starts to subside, then one starts to see defects in the object that initially appeared to be so beautiful and desirable in the heat of attachment.

Likewise aversion is due to the exaggeration that is induced by an inappropriate attention that sees only faults in the object, and that is what causes anger. Again, we can verify from our own experience that when the fire of strong anger starts to subside, then one can start seeing qualities in that object. This shows how it is an underlying ignorance that drives craving.

Of the two types of craving, we relate more readily to the craving of wishing to attain happiness. That is because at the most basic level we want to experience happiness, and because we wish for happiness, craving naturally arises. We don't wish for any unpleasant experiences, and when we do actually experience something unpleasant, the craving of wanting to be separated from that unpleasantness arises. That is how we can relate craving to ourselves.

2.3.2.1.2.3. Refuting that the focal object exists inherently

The next two lines of the verse are:

*99ab. Whether seen or felt,
It is due to its dream-like illusory nature*

The commentary explains:

Regardless of whether it is seen by eye consciousness or felt by the body consciousness, because of the dream-like or illusory-like nature of the object empty of inherent existence generating the feeling, the feeling also does not exist inherently.

This is a very cogent explanation. *Regardless of whether it is seen by the eye consciousness or felt by the body consciousness* refers to either the beautiful forms that we see with our eye consciousness, or the pleasant sensations we experience from touching smooth tactile surfaces. Since these objects of the sensory consciousnesses *are like dreams or illusions, they are empty of inherent existence.*

When we see forms, they don't actually exist in the way they appear, so they are like dreams or illusions. When we relate this idea to emotions such as attachment, then these emotions will naturally subside. Attachment arises from thinking that what is perceived is real, and exists as it appears. The more we see and believe an object as being real and attractive, the more our attachment to that object increases. As soon as you see that the object lacks inherent existence, and that it does not exist as it appears to our eye consciousness, this understanding of the emptiness of the object will help cut through our delusions.

As explained in the teachings, while in meditative equipoise the mind of someone who has realised emptiness is completely absorbed in that emptiness. There is no conventional appearance and nothing but emptiness appears to their mind. As a consequence the delusions that arise in relation to conventional appearances naturally subside.

When that meditator comes out of their meditative equipoise into a post-meditative equipoise, they reflect on how things still appear as being inherently or truly existent when, in fact, they don't exist in that way. While in post-meditative equipoise, the trainee bodhisattva sees things as being like illusions or dreams, and thus not truly existent or inherently existent. Then strong negative emotions such as attachment or aversion will subside. This is a very significant point.

We need to understand that the analogies of dreams and illusions are very significant examples that illustrate how our mind is affected by ignorance, and thus misapprehends the things and events around us. In a dream, we believe that there are horses and elephants when in reality there are no such horses or elephants. That perception of horses and elephants is due to the mind being affected by the consciousness of sleep, which alters the mind so that it perceives things that don't actually exist and believes them to be real.

Another analogy given in the teachings is someone whose mind is affected by a spell during a magic show. When an illusionist conjures up horses and elephants, the people in the audience, who are under the spell of the illusionist, will see elephants and horses. Although there are actually no horses or elephants on the stage, they appear to the minds of the audience because their consciousnesses are affected by the spell.

Using these analogies we can understand that even though phenomena don't exist inherently, we perceive them as inherently or truly existent because our mind is affected by the ignorance that grasps at true existence and inherent existence, along with the imprints of that wrong perception.

For as long as one grasps at true existence due to the very imprints of that grasping at true existence, one will have mistaken perceptions, which will be followed by grasping at those mistaken perceptions. The only way to get rid of those mistaken perceptions is by removing their cause, which means removing that grasping at true existence and the imprints of grasping at true existence.

Someone who has completely removed not only grasping at true existence, but its very imprints from their mental

continuum is an enlightened being, a supreme being, who does not have mistaken conceptions and perceptions. A supreme being sees the world as illusory, and so does not have any mistaken conceptions and perceptions. Thus they are not affected by any of the falsities caused by those mistaken perceptions, and hence do not experience any of the sufferings of worldly existence.

If we see the Buddha as a supreme being who is free from mistaken conceptions, then we will be inspired to become like the Buddha. Otherwise we might see the Buddha just as someone sitting there who seems to be very peaceful. If we don't know what the Buddha is free of, we might not be inspired to achieve the same state.

All of the sufferings that we experience are said to arise from the misconceptions that we hold. In the *Lama Chopa* text, after the tsog offering, there's this one particular line that says may all beings be free from the mistaken conceptions. I find that to be a very powerful line because not only does it point out the suffering that sentient beings experience, but it also explains that the very cause of that suffering comes from mistaken conceptions.

When we recite the *Lama Chopa*, as we do regularly, it is good to reflect on that line when we come to it. When we relate it to ourselves rather than thinking about other sentient beings who are suffering because of their mistaken conceptions, it becomes much more profound. Our own mind is affected by misconceptions, and because of this we experience the shortcomings of worldly existence.

If we can actually incorporate more visualisations during the *Lama Chopa* practice it will become much more profound. The tsog you take out is not just to satisfy them by temporarily relieving the suffering of hunger. As the deity when ones visualises transforming oneself into the tsog, then merely coming into contact with sentient beings will help them to be free from all their sufferings, i.e. the sufferings arising from their misconceptions. This is indicated in the verse. That then becomes not only a temporary relief from suffering, but also relieves all the forms of suffering that have arisen from mistaken conceptions.

We will conclude the session for this evening and dedicate the Tara Praises we are going to recite to Helen's oldest son Martin who has undergone surgery today. I've already done my part of doing prayers and as a group we can do the Tara Praises and dedicate them for the success of that operation. As we wait for the results let us pray that everything goes well and that he will be relieved from all physical ailments and recover soon.

As many of you have experienced, there is a definite benefit from prayers.

When they arrived in Australia, some Tibetans lived here at Tara Institute for a while; one of them came to teachings once in a while, on special occasions. One day she came to me looking very anxious. She told me that her sister, who lives in Scotland, had been missing for two days and that the police were looking for her. So she was very, very anxious.

I said: "Don't worry too much. Maybe you will speak to your sister in the future. You can even say that she can

come here if she wanted. Her immediate response was: "Well how can I speak to her when she's missing? I've really come to see you hoping that you can do an observation, a *mo*, to see where she is". My response was: "Well I'm not someone who does *mos*, but I'll do prayers for her", but she didn't seem very pleased about that.

The next day I got a message from her saying that they had found her sister that morning. A year later she introduced me to her sister when they came here recently for a puja. I didn't mention anything then but it did remind me that when I'd suggested that she could bring her sister over she had said: "How could I ever bring her here? She's lost", and she hadn't seemed to relate to what I'd said about doing prayers at all. This is one instance of where prayers definitely seemed to help.

I have quite a few stories like that. Once I was asked to do prayers for a Kopan monk known as Cherok Lama (the older Cherok Lama). He had come to Australia and was in prison in Perth - I don't know what had happened. At that time Lama Zopa happened to be here, and he said to me: "Geshe-la we just got news that Cherok Lama has been imprisoned in Perth, maybe you can do some prayers?" Then the next day Rinpoche said to me: "Geshe-la I think your prayers have worked, because he's been released from prison".

The point is that prayers definitely seem to work if one does the prayers with a sincere mind, wishing to benefit the other, while making strong supplications to the gurus and the deities. The Kadampa masters said: don't rely on humans; rely on the deities. There's definitely a positive effect from prayer.

Your prayers will be very strong when you relate to deities such as Tara, thinking that you are the guru, you are the deity, you are all the protectors and dakas and dakinis, and that you are an unfailing friend and companion.

I have many stories from my days in Kopan when Lama Zopa Rinpoche would ask me to do prayers for certain things. Rinpoche could have done those prayers himself but he asked me, saying, "Oh, it's better for you to do them as they will be more beneficial". So I would do these prayers, and it seems that there were some benefits from them.

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

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Edited Version

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

20 December 2016

Based on the motivation that was generated with the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in our regular meditation practice.

[meditation]

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

It is good to set our motivation so that our practice incorporates both method and wisdom, which is the optimum means for creating the causes for enlightenment. Those who have gained the realisation of emptiness will set their motivation to achieve enlightenment for the benefit all mother sentient beings, prior to going into single-pointed meditative equipoise on emptiness. It is said that because their meditative equipoise is held with the bodhicitta motivation - which includes the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, they will be engaging in the practise of both method and wisdom throughout their meditative equipoise. Their single-pointed meditative equipoise on emptiness is not rendered to nothingness because of their bodhicitta motivation.

We need to relate this to all forms of our practice. Prior to engaging in the practice of prostration, for example, we can take a few moments to generate the bodhicitta motivation. Although we have not yet actually generated bodhicitta, we can develop a contrived bodhicitta motivation, and that similitude of the bodhicitta motivation, will help to secure a more meaningful practice. Combining simple practices with the bodhicitta motivation makes the practice really significant.

2.3.2.1.2. The close placement by mindfulness on feelings [cont.]

2.3.2.1.2.4. Refuting that the feelings of the object possessor exist inherently

Having refuted feelings as being inherently existent, we now turn to refuting that the feelings of an object possessor exist inherently.

The first lines of verse relating to this are:

99cd. *Because it is generated simultaneously with mind*

Feeling is not seen by it.

100ab. *Although generated earlier and later*
It is remembered but not experienced.

As the commentary explains:

Because feeling is generated simultaneously with mind, it is not seen inherently by the mind because those that are of different substance and simultaneous are unrelated. Although feelings are generated earlier

and later, they are remembered but not experienced because, at that time, they have ceased and are not generated.

First of all, even though *feelings are generated simultaneously with mind, they are not seen as being inherently existent by the mind*. That is because even though they are generated simultaneously they are of different substance and therefore unrelated. When the commentary states *although feelings are generated earlier and later*, it is referring to feelings that *are remembered but not experienced now because they have*, in fact, already ceased.

The main point to be understood is the lack of inherent existence of a mind that experiences feelings. This is then clarified in the following lines of verse.

100cd *It does not experience its own nature,*
And is also not experienced by others.

101a. *Since there is absolutely no one with feeling,*

As the commentary explains:

Summary: That feelings do not experience themselves is refuted with the refutation of self-knowers. They are also not experienced by an inherently existent another because that which is experienced and the experiencer are unrelated. Not only does that producing the feeling not exist inherently, there is also absolutely no inherently existent experiencer of feeling. This was already refuted at the time of refuting the self of person.

The commentary explains - that *feelings do not experience themselves is refuted with the refutation of self-knowers*. Earlier the text refuted self-knowers. From this it follows that feelings cannot experience themselves. In other words there are no inherently existing feelings that experience themselves.

Lest one has the doubt that there might be another factor that experiences feelings inherently, the text clarifies that *feelings are not experienced by an inherently existent other*. That is *because that which is experienced and the experiencer are unrelated*. Experiencing someone else's feeling is an absurdity because there is no relationship between the experiencer, and that which is experienced i.e. the feeling.

Further, as the commentary explains, not only does that producing the feeling not exist inherently, but *also there is absolutely no inherently existent experiencer of the feeling*. This further refutes any doubts that while the feeling does not exist inherently, the experiencer - the person who experiences that feeling - might exist inherently. *There is also absolutely no inherently existent experiencer of feeling as well*. As explained in the commentary *the self of a person was refuted earlier*.

The next few lines of the verse are presented:

101bcd. *Thus feeling is not suchness.*

In this way, how can this collection lacking self

Be harmed by this?

As the commentary explains:

Thus, just as feeling does not exist as suchness, how should the collection of aggregates, that lack an inherently existing self, be benefited by happiness and harmed by suffering? As there is no inherently existing suffering as well as no inherently existing feeling, it is suitable to apply every effort to meditate on the close placement of mindfulness on feeling.

Since *feelings* are not inherently existent, *how could the collection of aggregates, which lack an inherently existing self, be benefited by happiness and harmed by suffering?* This is similar to what was explained earlier. If feelings were to exist inherently and the person experiencing the feeling also exists inherently, then who is there to benefit from pleasurable, happy feelings? Who is there to be harmed by inherently existent feelings of pain and suffering? While feelings of happiness are beneficial and feelings of suffering are harmful, the point here is that inherently existent feelings of happiness cannot benefit anyone and inherently existent suffering cannot harm anyone. This point was also mentioned previously.

As further explained here, *as there is no inherently existing suffering as well as no inherently existing feeling, it is appropriate to apply every effort to meditate on the close placement of mindfulness on feeling.* This conclusion specifically relates to applying the close placement of mindfulness on the lack of inherent existence of feeling, or the emptiness of feeling.

The main point to be understood here is that if one perceives feelings as being inherently existent one will develop attachment to pleasant feelings, and aversion towards unpleasant feelings. It is through such feelings of attachment and aversion that one creates negative karmas. But when one perceives happy feelings as lacking inherent existence, then attachment will not arise, and when one views any feelings of suffering as lacking inherent existence, then one will not develop an aversion to discomfort. Through the correct understanding of the lack of inherent existence of phenomena in general, and the lack of inherent existence of feelings in particular, the delusions will be overcome. In this way we gain a glimpse of the importance of understanding the lack of inherent existence of phenomena.

When someone, who believes that things exist inherently, hears the teachings on emptiness, they might develop the thought that maybe these teachings on emptiness are valid. As the teachings mention, for those who are receptive, generating even a mere doubt¹ about the validity of emptiness in this way can begin to shatter the very core of cyclic existence. Through understanding the lack of inherent existence, and thus the emptiness of phenomena, the delusions are first weakened, then eventually completely eradicated. This is an essential point to understand.

In order to overcome attachment and craving, one needs to develop an understanding of the lack of inherent existence of feelings. That is the only way to overcome attachment and aversion. A quote in the teachings says that 'because love is not a direct opponent, it cannot overcome the delusion of craving'. The point is that while the unconditional love of bodhicitta in a bodhisattva's mind is an invaluable most precious state of mind, it nevertheless cannot in itself overcome the delusions, the reason is because it doesn't serve as a direct opponent to those delusions. Therefore, as the teachings further explain, in order to overcome the ignorance of grasping at true existence or inherent existence, the direct opposite of that mind needs to be developed as an antidote to

overcome that ignorance. This is really the point one needs to understand. So at our level, having this understanding, and applying it in practice means reflecting on these points again and again, and familiarise our mind with this understanding, as a way to get a better and clearer understanding of the lack of inherent existence, i.e. emptiness.

To apply this as a personal practice, we start by sitting quietly in a focused and a concentrated state of mind, and then look within and examine our feelings. How do feelings actually appear to us? Do they appear as independently existing from their own side? Is that actually the mode of existence of feelings? Or do feelings actually exist in dependence on other factors? When one contemplates in this way, one begins to clearly distinguish between the two different modes of existence. One is the erroneous view that perceives the mode of existence of feelings as existing inherently and independently, in and of themselves? The actual mode of existence, however, is that feelings rely on other factors for their existence, and hence do not exist inherently. When we contemplate these two perceptions, we see that they are the complete opposite of each other. So, which perception is the correct one? The perception of feelings as being inherently and truly existent, or feelings as lacking inherent existence, and which do not exist in and of themselves?

The object is the same, i.e. feeling, and there are two modes of apprehending that object of feeling. One is to apprehend it as being inherently existent, and the other is to see that it lacks inherent existence. Which of these two modes of apprehending feelings is true? When one further investigates in this way, one begins to find that the apprehension of feelings as existing inherently does not have any valid reason to support it. So it is based on a false perception rather than a true perception. The apprehension of feelings as lacking inherent existence is, on the other hand, based on a valid cognition, and is therefore true. It is in this way that one's understanding of the lack of inherent existence is enhanced, and this understanding can then be applied to all other phenomena.

Meditating on, and contemplating these points is essential for enhancing our understanding. Otherwise after receiving some teachings we will end up just parroting: "oh yes, the perception of grasping at true existence and inherent existence is false - it's a mistaken perception. It is mentioned in the teachings so must be true", and leave it at that. If we haven't really spent the time investigating it for ourselves, then it will be just another object of knowledge, and not an actual experience.

As it is our last session for the year, it will good to do an extensive dedication for the time that we have spent together throughout the year. It's important to dedicate the merits that we have accumulated collectively throughout the year, and we will do that by reciting the *King of Prayers*.

It is also good to incorporate an understanding of how, when one dedicates virtues, one is able to dedicate the virtues of the three times, which means the virtues that we have accumulated at any time in the past, the virtues

¹ Doubt in this context carries a positive connotation.

we are accumulating at this time and also the virtues that are yet to be accumulated in the future. I explained this in detail during my explanation of the practice of *tong-len* or the giving and taking practice. When we offer virtues to others we can offer the virtues of all three times. On the other hand we can only offer the body and possessions that we possess now. We can't offer the body and possessions of the past because that time is gone and we don't have them any more, and we can't offer our future body and possessions because we don't possess them yet. Thus, we can only offer the wealth and possessions that we have now.

With But we can give in the three times: Yesterday I gave, today I give, and tomorrow I will also give. The reason why one can offer virtues of the past is because we still have in our possession the positive imprints left upon our mental continuum in the past, and that's what we are actually offering - the positive imprints in our mind. That is how it should be understood.

During the recitation of *The King of Prayers* it is good to reflect upon all the virtues one has ever accumulated in the past since beginningless time: "Whatever positive deeds and virtues that I have created intentionally or otherwise, I dedicate for the benefit of all sentient beings, to relieve them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness". So dedicating our virtues to the ultimate state of enlightenment makes one's dedication much more powerful and meaningful.

I want to thank everyone for your participation in the teachings this year, which have gone very well. Thank-you!

After a short break over Christmas the program will resume on Monday evenings on January 2, and the Wednesday program will begin on January 11. Rather than just staying in your room doing nothing, coming along to meditation together would be good. I place great importance not only on practising together, but also on gathering together afterwards, and have tea together. This is a good way to promote good relationships between students. There have been many who have commented that they have found starting the year, and indeed starting any practice with meditation is very beneficial and meaningful.

In discussion with Ross he said that that he couldn't attend the Kalachakra Initiation this year, and also Tina is not going, so I suggested that you would derive the same benefit from watching a live-stream of the event together. It would be good for those who are around to come along, and perhaps bring something to eat and drink, and watch it together. That would be a really meaningful way to spend time together, again promoting good feelings between each other.

On a practical level, if even one hour spent together with good friends and like-minded people relieves feelings of loneliness, then it will have been worthwhile. If you are at home by yourself, your mind might not be content and go wandering off everywhere. If you are a meditator, of course, then that's different. But you might as well come to a gathering like this because it's more meaningful than sitting at home with a distracted mind. I consider a gathering of like-minded people promotes good feelings

and develops good relationships with each other. I personally take great pride in having a good relationship with others and I feel that it's a really important element of our existence.

Apparently not too long ago, the Kalachakra Initiation done in Ladakh was presented on the ABC's Compass program. Two weeks later when I went for my regular check-up with my doctor, he commented on having seen that program. He was very, very impressed and said "oh, it was really very good" Of course I couldn't understand everything he was saying, but what I gathered was that he said "His Holiness the Dalai Lama is doing really good work". The fact that it was presented by Geraldine Doogue, who is very well respected, was important, as having a well-known presenter seems to make a difference.

You don't need to feel that if you can't come to the live-stream every day that there's no point in coming. That's a narrow-minded way of looking at it. Even coming to one or two sessions will bring some benefit, so that's OK.

Of course my intention is that it will be of some benefit and help. I heard that last year over 100 people joined in the Tara Practice and Lama Tsong Khapa puja. It makes me happy when others take an interest and seem to benefit from these practices.

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

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