
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

10 October 2017

Evening devoted to prayers for Ven. Geshe Dawo.

Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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17 October 2017

As usual let us spend some time in our meditation practice. [Meditation]

As we all have an understanding of the bodhicitta motivation, it is important that we develop that motivation prior to receiving a teaching or engaging in any practice.

THE EXPLANATION OF THE PERFECT METHOD

Aspirational instructions

The preliminary

Training in the three minds (cont.)

Loving kindness

In our last session we left off at this passage in the commentary:

Again, Langri Tangpa said, "Although one doesn't know which of the six rebirths one will take rebirth, it doesn't matter where one is born as long as one doesn't forget to benefiting other sentient beings."

Then the commentary explains:

One needs to be like that (not losing the thought of benefiting sentient beings). Upon the cultivation of loving kindness, a sense of endearment is felt strongly at one's heart through reflecting on - recognition of all beings as one's mother, remembering their kindness and wanting to repaying their kindness, one is moved to meditate on compassion.

In the text, the emphasis is on this loving kindness as being a strong and heartfelt experience, rather than just a mere intellectual understanding. As stated, this sense of endearment must reside *strongly at one's heart*. So, the emphasis is on a really deep feeling of loving kindness, followed by developing strong compassion. Holding all sentient beings as being very dear to one's heart and feeling strong affection for them has to be on an experiential level. This is in line with the tradition of receiving an experiential commentary on the lam-rim. First, one recognises that all beings have been one's mother. Then one meditates on that until one actually has that feeling in the depths of one's heart. Then one moves on to remembering their kindness, and after generating that experience in one's mind, one then moves on to generating the mind of wishing to repay their kindness. This is how it is to be practised.

The key point is that *loving kindness, a sense of endearment* has to precede the development of compassion, because without first developing this loving kindness of endearment one cannot develop compassion. Therefore, from the very outset one needs to ensure that one really understands the loving kindness with a sense of endearment, before contemplating and meditating on it. You would be missing the point if you were to just skim over this and then try to develop compassion. The main point is that you cannot develop compassion if it has not

been preceded with cultivating the loving kindness that has that sense of endearment.

This is how we need to actually incorporate our understanding into our practice in all topics, such as those presented in the lam-rim. Prior to engaging in the actual practice of the three scopes, we need to contemplate the rarity of the precious human rebirth and the difficulty of obtaining it. When that is developed strongly one moves onto the next topic of death and impermanence which, as a result of the previous contemplation, becomes really relevant and develops with great strength as a result of this contemplation. Paying careful attention and taking the time to really cultivate an earlier thought before preceding onto the next level is crucial for every practice that we do.

With single-pointed meditation, for example, if one is not able to focus for one minute on a chosen object then it is not possible to assume that we can meditate single-pointedly on an object for three or four minutes, leading up to an hour. How is it possible to assume that we are focusing on an object single-pointedly for an hour, if that has not been preceded by actually being able to meditate single-pointedly on the object for a minute?

The instruction is to begin with maintaining a single-pointed focus on a chosen object beginning with one minute, then there is a hope of being able to proceed to focusing on it for two minutes, and then three and four minutes and so forth. Being able to focus single-pointedly on a chosen object for two minutes is dependent on having first been able to focus on it for one minute. This is the systematic and logical way to proceed. Sometimes we take a wrong turn and assume that we can meditate single-pointedly on an object for a long period of time, when in fact we have not really paid attention to developing a proper attention and focus from the very beginning. When our approach is like that, then whether it is single-pointed meditation or the cultivation of the meditation topics in the lam-rim, our understanding will remain very superficial. Since this point is emphasised in the teachings, we need to really pay attention to it.

The objects of compassion

This refers to great compassion. As mentioned earlier, the loving kindness that has the sense of endearment specifically refers to the love that focuses on all beings, without discrimination, and this is the type of love that has to be cultivated in order to develop great compassion. If we make a genuine attempt to develop this loving kindness and follow that by contemplating and making an effort to develop compassion, then it can definitely move our mind. We may not be able to generate actual bodhicitta just yet, as generating bodhicitta is dependent on having first developed calm abiding. And in order to develop calm abiding we need to have the basic condition of overcoming the afflictions of the desire realm. Although at our level right now that might be a bit difficult, nevertheless we can begin by making a genuine effort with the causes of developing bodhicitta. This consists of meditating on loving kindness with the sense of endearment, followed by meditating on compassion. We can definitely make genuine attempts to develop this at our level. As mentioned earlier, there is no question that meditating on love and compassion

makes the mind more at ease, more joyous, and happier. Indeed, with every attempt we make to develop love and compassion, we are creating the causes and conditions to get closer and closer to enlightenment. So, we really need to pay attention to practices like the *tong-len* meditation that we did earlier.

Having attempted to meditate on, for example, the *tong-len* practice, we need to see if it has made any difference in our minds. What differences are there in our mind prior to engaging in it and after having engaged in the practice? If we can see significant differences in our mind where some transformation is taking place, then that is a good sign that the practice has been fruitful.

We can also assess whether any long-term transformation is taking place, by comparing our state of mind this year to that of last year. Has our mind become more imbued with kindness? Having engaged in the *tong-len* practice, is there a bit more compassion now compared to last year? If there has been no change at all then that is a sign that we have not really paid careful attention to the practice. We need to check our mind periodically, to see if any changes are taking place? Are there any significant changes or not? These are very important instructions which are very good to incorporate into our practice.

As presented in the commentary, the objects of compassion are:

- The beings of the three lower rebirths are tormented over an extended period by a strong wave of suffering
- The human world is plagued with the sufferings of birth, ageing, sickness, death, meeting, separation and not finding. In short, the acquired aggregates (life) are miserable.
- Gods of the desire realm are subjected to the suffering of dying and falling into a lower rebirth
- Gods of the Upper realms (of Form and Formless) are subject to the suffering or intoxication of concentrative stabilisation, depriving them of any thought of Dharma and self-freedom.

Then the commentary goes on to explain:

In short, through the eyes of compassion one gazes upon all sentient beings being subjected to any of the three types of sufferings, such as the beings in the lower rebirths are subject to the suffering of suffering, whereas the Gods in the desire realm and humans are subject to the suffering of change and the Gods in the upper realm are subject to the all pervasive suffering of conditioning. Hence, with compassion one wishes all migrating sentient beings to be liberated from these sufferings together with the causes of suffering which are karma and delusions.

As the commentary indicates, by focusing on the various sufferings of sentient beings one generates a strong unbiased compassion for all sentient beings regardless of their status. If we meditate by focusing on all sentient beings in a general sense it might seem that we are cultivating such compassion. However, if one were to focus on someone who one dislikes then one might find some difficulties in feeling compassion for them. It might seem that there is a sense of compassion for all beings in general, but when it comes to a particular individual then

one might find it is actually difficult to genuinely wish them to be happy and free from suffering.

That is why the teachings emphasise the instructions of particular masters who mention that one needs to intentionally focus on an object for whom it is difficult to feel compassion, and really make a genuine attempt to feel compassion for them. Otherwise at our level, because of our unruly mind, the danger is that when we see a particular person who we dislike experiencing suffering we might actually start feeling glad – ‘Oh good, it serves them right! They deserve it’ – rather than wishing them to be free from suffering. This sort of attitude would be the complete opposite of compassion.

Therefore, you really need to make a genuine attempt to develop compassion for others regardless of whether they are close to you or not, or whether you favour them or not. Focus on all beings in an unbiased manner, and pay particular attention to those beings that you have difficulty with and who you dislike. Then gradually, through familiarisation as a result of meditating in this way again and again, you can definitely reach a point where you comfortably feel compassion for those you dislike or of have had conflicts with in the past and so forth. This is how we need to train our mind to develop genuine compassion.

We need to check our own mind regularly to see whether that genuine wish and intention to benefit others is increasing. If the wish to benefit others is increasing and the intention to harm is decreasing, then that is a true mark of progress.

I don’t need to give a detailed explanation of the commentary, as we have covered the topic of suffering in detail in the past. The main point is that when one has a good understanding of the sufferings of all of the six realms then one will be able to develop an unbiased compassion for all. From a normal, limited worldly perspective, it is easy to develop feelings of compassion for those who are poor or destitute, but when it comes to rich and wealthy people we might feel, ‘Oh, I don’t need to feel compassion for them!’.

This is especially the case with the gods. When we hear about the mighty gods such as Brahma and so forth who are extremely wealthy, we might feel, ‘Oh, I don’t need to feel compassion for them, as they have got everything they want’. At this point we need to remember the teachings; despite all their wealth and achievements, they have not yet abandoned delusions and karma and so they are experiencing the all-pervasive suffering that is the very cause for being in samsara. Because of that they are an object of compassion as well. This is what we need to understand.

As presented in the *Four Hundred Verses*, which we studied in the past, the suffering of the lowly is mostly physical suffering, while those of the higher status mostly experience mental suffering. Thus, all beings within cyclic existence experience some level of suffering. These are succinctly stated points for reflection.

The commentary further reads:

As noted by Rom po, the root cause from which suffering arises is karma and the condition of karma are the delusions. Driven by that, (compassion) one

should then also undergo training in cultivating an aspiration to achieve enlightenment.

Driven by compassion, one should then also undergo training and cultivating an aspiration to achieve enlightenment. This incorporates the detailed explanation of the six causes for cultivating bodhicitta that we have gone through previously. As you will recall, first meditate on recognition of all beings as one's mother, followed by remembering their kindness, and following that the wish to repay their kindness. Then one cultivates great affectionate love or loving kindness with a sense of endearment, followed by generating great compassion.

Having developed and strengthened that very strong love and the compassion that is the spontaneous and very strong wish for all beings to be endowed in happiness and to be free from all suffering, then one will naturally come to a point where one cannot bear to see beings being deprived of happiness and see them experiencing great suffering. At that point, one will be moved to feeling that it is not enough just to wish for other beings to be happy and free from suffering, but that one needs to take full responsibility for bringing that about. 'I need to do everything possible to lead all beings to happiness and free them from all suffering.' At that point, one is cultivating the mind of superior intention. When superior intention is further developed it becomes the immediate preceding cause for developing bodhicitta, and the stronger that mind of superior intention, the closer one is to actually developing bodhicitta.

When one reaches the level of generating that superior intention, one has come to the point where one is not satisfied with only the wish for beings to be placed in happiness and be free from suffering. Rather one is moved to the point where one is adamant that one has to take full personal responsibility to ensure that all beings are placed in happiness and free from all suffering. After that genuine wish has been developed, then one naturally ponders as to whether one has the ability to lead all beings to the state of happiness and freedom from suffering right now. One comes to the recognition that one doesn't have that ability. So who does have that ability. Do foe-destroyers or arhats have that ability? Do hearers and solitary realisers have that ability? No, they don't have that ability because they have not yet reached the ultimate state of enlightenment themselves. From this investigation comes the clear recognition that only a fully enlightened being, an omniscient buddha, has that capacity.

When one develops a heartfelt aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, then one has developed what is called 'aspiring bodhicitta'. This is what *training in cultivating an aspiration to achieve enlightenment* means. When that initial aspiring bodhicitta is further developed through this logical reasoning and specific steps of contemplation, it develops into what is called 'contrived bodhicitta'. As it is still based on having to put in a lot of effort and work through many reasons, it is not yet actual bodhicitta. Then through that familiarity one reaches the stage where one spontaneously and unceasingly has that wish of aspiring to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings at all times. That is when one actually develops

the mind of uncontrived bodhicitta, and becomes a bodhisattva.

At this point, one actually enters into the Mahayana path and from then on one's activities will be to engage in the six perfections. When one's activities while engaging in the six perfections are based on the cultivation of that spontaneous and effortless aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, then the practice of the six perfections actually becomes a means to benefit sentient beings, and are therefore deeds of a bodhisattva, and a cause for enlightenment. Without bodhicitta any practice of generosity and so forth will not be a practice of a bodhisattva. This is how we need to understand the distinction between the practices of generosity and so forth in general, and the six perfections practised by a bodhisattva.

If we incorporate this into our practice, then our meditation will be fruitful. We can be assured that half an hour spent meditating on these reasons is time spent in virtue. We might focus single-pointedly on an object, but if it is devoid of meditating on love and compassion then we cannot be certain that our mind is in a virtuous state. However, if we incorporate the bodhicitta attitude into our meditation we can be certain that we are in a virtuous frame of mind. We definitely have the capacity to meditate in this way for half an hour, and even up to an hour.

I was once in hospital in India for a long time and to pass the time I would go over the outline of the lam-rim which I had memorised. I found that was very, very helpful as it really moved my mind. From my limited experience, I have found that spending half an hour or an hour in meditation, going over the outline of the lam-rim and thinking in this way, makes my mind much clearer and less prone to anger or attachment when I come out of that session. The when I go about my normal activities my mind is much more at ease.

On the basis of this experience I feel that the instructions given in the teachings are very compelling. There are two types of meditation: analytical meditation and placement meditation. It is explained that analytical meditation is much more important for beginners. If too much attention is placed on placement meditation at the beginning, there is a danger of spending a lot of time in it without gaining any significant result and transformation of our mind.

The commentary now quotes a sutra:

As Gathering the True Qualities Sutra (Pagpa Cho Yang Dagma Dupa) states: "Bodhisattvas should not learn many instructions but should uphold one teaching and realise it. What is that one teaching? It is this: Great Compassion," ...

This is a very significant point. The emphasis here really is on how the cultivation of compassion is the most essential practice as it forms the basis for all other practices. Even practices such as renunciation can be encompassed by meditating on love and compassion. Then the commentary continues:

... it then says, "also whoever has a head, has (the demand of) livelihood; whoever has great compassion, has the complete state of Buddhahood."

What is being emphasised here is that without cultivating compassion, one cannot possibly achieve buddhahood. The example used here is that anyone *who has a head* has to depend on a *livelihood*; likewise, whoever *has compassion* will naturally develop the conditions for achieving buddhahood. This is also emphasised with this quote from Chandrakirti:

Chandrakirti mentioned that the completion of the cause, the path and the effect of Mahayana is dependent on compassion.

It is explained in detail in the teachings on the *Madhyamaka* or *Middle Way* text that compassion is important at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. This is supported with the analogy that to obtain a good crop seeds, soil and water are essential. Likewise, compassion is essential at the beginning of a practice of the path, in the middle and at the end.

As explained in the teachings, without having developed strong compassion one will face a lot of adverse conditions in one's practice. The number of sentient beings is vast and some of them are very unruly, ungrateful, and unappreciative. If one has not cultivated strong compassion at the beginning, then in the middle, when one is engaging in ways to benefit sentient beings, there is a great danger of giving up when one encounters such beings. In order to engage in the accumulation of merit and wisdom, which is the main cause for achieving enlightenment, one needs to have compassion to help these beings. Then, at the very end when one has achieved buddhahood, the ability to spontaneously and effortlessly engage in virtuous activities as a way to benefit sentient beings is a result of having developed and perfected compassion. This is how we need to understand that compassion is important in the beginning, in the middle and at the end.

Therefore, one should whole-heartedly make concerted effort to meditate on compassion.

The Actual¹

This refers to the actual of way of generating aspiring bodhicitta. The commentary begins by quoting the last two lines of verse 11 in the root text.

The text says, "Arouse immutably the resolve, to attain enlightenment."

Then the commentary explains:

Having trained oneself well in meditating upon the mental observation and aspect (attitude) of loving kindness and compassion, one should generate the precious mind of enlightenment.

A more literal translation of the root text is 'generate the mind of enlightenment', which refers to actually generating bodhicitta, and this is explained first.

Having trained oneself well in meditating upon the mental observation and aspect (attitude) of loving kindness and compassion, one should generate the precious mind of enlightenment.

How does one generate the precious mind of enlightenment?

This is where the commentary explains the first line of the root text:

One generates it by arousing immutably the resolve.

At this point, one takes the precepts of aspiring bodhicitta, and the commentary then goes on to present the way to take these precepts.

Generally speaking, it is not necessary to depend on the ceremonial ritual formula to generate aspirational bodhicitta.

However, one should generate aspirational bodhicitta through the ritual by resolving never to waver from this precious mind, and never to forsake it even for a second until achieving the state of enlightenment. This must be then followed by practising the five precepts as explained below.

As explained earlier, when one initially develops the wish to achieve enlightenment, it is called aspiring bodhicitta because it is just an aspiration. There is no pledge, and one is not necessarily making any promise or taking any precepts. This is like, for example, bestowing a subsequent initiation (or *jenang*). At the point where aspirational bodhicitta is developed, one can just generate that aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of sentient beings, and leave it as just an aspiration without taking any precepts.

The precepts are taken following the generation of aspirational bodhicitta. As explained:

This must be then followed by practising the five precepts as explained below. Nonetheless, the All-Knowing Je Tsongkhapa said in the lam rim that if one has simply generated an aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of sentient beings through the ritual ceremony, but do not take the five precepts, one is not committing any downfall.

The main point to be understood here is that if one is just generating aspirational bodhicitta then one does not have to keep the five precepts. If, however, following the aspirational bodhicitta one resolves or makes a pledge to keep the precepts then one needs to practice the five precepts.

This can be related to the Six Session Guru Yoga practice that many of you do on daily basis. As you are aware, the practice includes the generation of aspirational bodhicitta, and if one has made the pledge then one goes over that point there. In fact, the Six Session Guru Yoga practice really encompasses the main points of the entire path to enlightenment.

Just as in the Six Session Guru Yoga practice, the resolve in the ritual is to generate aspirational bodhicitta, followed by the actual bodhisattva vows. Specifically, after generating the four immeasurables it is followed by the resolve to generate aspirational bodhicitta, which is followed by taking the bodhisattva vows and going over the commitments.

The commentary further explains:

Despite this, the main point in this text is in accordance with the former statement because immediately after that (generating the precious mind through the ritual), the text goes on to present the practice of the precepts.

¹ This heading is the second part of the Aspirational Instructions. See teaching of 12 September 2017 for the full structure of headings.

The text then explains the precepts that one needs to observe when making the pledge following the generation of aspiring bodhicitta.

Regarding the details of the actual manual for generating aspirational bodhicitta through the ritual ceremony, one should refer to the extensive lam rim which is indeed explained in great detail. Nartangpa's root text and the commentary on the Supreme Path.

Here the commentary explains that this is a general explanation and indicates where more details can be found.

Next the commentary explains the ritual ceremony for making the pledge of aspirational bodhicitta.

First, make an offering of whatever objects are at one's disposal to the Refuge Objects and Lamas.

This refers to making offerings to the actual objects of refuge themselves, and the lama who will be the ritual master or preceptor. The commentary explains:

Then, say the following lines to accumulate merit, purify negativities, and make a supplication by engaging in the elaborate seven limb practice.

As explained here, after presenting the offering one makes a *supplication* following *the seven limb practice*. The supplication is:

"Just as past Tathagata-Arhat-Samyaksam-Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas on the great level, first produce the mind of unsurpassable, perfect and complete enlightenment, I, named such and such shall also produce the mind of unsurpassable, perfect and complete enlightenment. Please Preceptor, help me." Repeat this request three times.

Here, we need to understand that *the past Tathagata Arhat, Samyaksam Buddhas and Bodhisattvas on the great level, first produce the mind of unsurpassable perfect and complete enlightenment*, does not mean that actual tathagatas are in the process of generating bodhicitta, because tathagatas and bodhisattvas have already generated bodhicitta. Rather it relates to the time when they were engaged in their training on the path. Just as these supreme beings first developed bodhicitta when they were training on the path, one makes the pledge to follow their example. So that is what one needs to understand. This understanding should be incorporated when taking the eight Mahayana precepts, for example when doing Nyung Nye or any other practice that begins with taking the eight Mahayana precepts.

Then the commentary explains that one needs to generate extraordinary refuge.

Then repeat the following, three times to take Extraordinary Refuge.

If there is a preceptor the supplication is made to the preceptor, but if there is no preceptor then one makes the supplication in front of the visualised objects of refuge in front of oneself. The presentation here is based on a preceptor being present.

"Preceptor, please pay attention to me. I, named so and so, from now until achieving the essence of enlightenment, I go for refuge to the Bhagawan Buddhas, who are the supreme amongst all those with two legs. Please pay attention and so forth is the same as before. I go for refuge to the Dharma, which is the peace, the supreme amongst dharmas

(phenomena) without desire. I go for refuge to the sangha, the assembly of arya sangha Bodhisattvas on irreversible levels, the supreme amongst all the assemblies."

After that the preceptor explains the precepts for taking refuge. Since we have already covered the precepts we don't need to explain them in detail here.

Extraordinary refuge is basically the Mahayana refuge. Going for *refuge to Bhagawan Buddhas* basically refers to the same buddhas as in the Mahayana refuge. Going for *refuge to Dharma* is which the peace and the supreme amongst Dharmas without desire relates to the Mahayana cessation and path. Going for *refuge to the assembly of arya Sangha Bodhisattvas on irreversible* path refers specifically to the arya bodhisattva Sangha. Taking refuge in these three objects is the Mahayana refuge.

The *sangha bodhisattvas* refers to the arya bodhisattvas while, as mentioned earlier, the Dharma is the Mahayana path and cessation. As explained in the teachings, the Sangha referred to here as *being the supreme amongst all the assemblies*, are really supreme objects and thus making offerings to the Sangha is one of the great means to accumulate merit. The teachings actually explain that in comparison to the Buddha Jewel and Dharma Jewel, one accumulates greater merit by making offerings to the Sangha Jewel. This makes sense as the Sangha Jewels are the ones who are upholding and preserving the doctrine of Buddhadharma.

One needs to understand the completely exalted perfected qualities of the Buddha and that which is dependent on the Dharma, the path and the cessation is cultivated by the Sangha Jewel. So it is the Sangha Jewel who are actually the cause to achieve this exalted state of a buddha. This is how we can understand the Sangha as being supreme.

The commentary further explains that:

The preceptor explains the precepts of taking refuge. Once again, offer the seven limbs such as the limb of offering in accordance with the verses from Samantabhadra's aspirational prayer which is The King of Prayers or Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life

Then, as explained here,

Recognising the Lama as the Teacher or the supreme teacher, the Buddha, and regarding all sentient beings with love and compassion ...

As presented here, *recognizing the Lama as the Teacher* refers to recognising the lama as being the actual Buddha. Therefore, as the lama is the preceptor, one needs to regard this preceptor as being the actual Buddha, and *regard all sentient beings with great love and compassion*. One needs to have the mind of love and compassion towards all sentient beings.

Then the commentary adds:

... and oneself as a dream or an illusion, ...

This refers to the need to incorporate the understanding of emptiness, that oneself is like an illusion; while appearing to exist inherently in fact there is not even an atom of inherent existence. So one needs to recognise the lack of inherent existence of oneself.

The commentary further explains:

... one should hold bodhicitta by repeating the following lines three times. “Buddhas and Bodhisattvas residing in the ten directions, please pay attention to me; Preceptor, please pay attention to me.

After that one’s own name is proclaimed, with:

I, named so and so ...

This is the point where one makes the personal pledge.

... in this life, and in all other lives, whatever root virtues of the nature of generosity, the nature of morality and the nature of meditation that I have created, caused others to create or rejoiced in those created by others; ...

Here we can also recall that one needs to encompass both the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. This reminds us of how His Holiness mentions that in the refuge and generating bodhicitta prayer when we say, ‘through the act of generosity and so forth’ we should be saying, ‘through the act of accumulation and so forth’ which includes the accumulation of both merit and wisdom. If we only say, generosity and so forth, then the only explicit reference is to generosity, or the accumulation of merit. This is one point that he often mentions.

What is being incorporated into the ritual is the recollection of the root of one’s virtue, because one can only generate aspirational bodhicitta on the basis of a virtuous mind. So at this point one brings to mind the virtues one has accumulated.

From the roots of virtue that one has accumulated, one then pledges that:

... just as the past Tathagata-Arhat-Samyaksam-Buddhas, and the great Bodhisattvas dwelling on the great ground, at the outset generated their holy minds into the Unsurpassed Perfect Enlightenment; likewise, I, named so and so, from now until achieving the essence of enlightenment, will generate my mind into the Unsurpassed Perfect Enlightenment.

The next part of the ritual indicates the purpose of generating that mind of enlightenment. Why does one generate that mind of *unsurpassed perfect enlightenment*? What activity would one engage in to generate that mind? This is followed by the next part of the ritual, which is the pledge.

I pledge to ferry sentient beings who are stranded, release those who are bound, revive those who are breathless, and lead those who have not yet gone, to the state beyond sorrow.”

This is the actual pledge that one makes. Then the commentary says:

Repeat this three times.

Next, the commentary explains:

If you do not have a preceptor, then you should make prostrations and offerings to the holy objects (on the altar), skip the word “preceptor” but follow all the other parts of the ritual as instructed earlier, this is mentioned in the ritual also.

Then there is a specific explanation about the meaning of leading those who are not liberated to liberation, which we can leave for our next session.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen is used with the kind permission of Samdup Tsering.

Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version

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'Alisha's Lamp for The Path

Study Group 2017

Homework

(17 October 2017) *Assigned:* 24/10/2017

1. List the objects of compassion.

2. Give the explanation of the six causes for cultivating Bodhicitta.

3. Explain superior intention

4. How does one develop the mind of uncontrived Bodhicitta?

5. Explain the distinction between the practices of generosity and so forth in general, and the six perfections practised by a bodhisattva.

Homework**Answers**(17 October 2017) *Assigned:* 24/10/2017**1. Give an example of why paying careful attention and taking the time to really cultivate an earlier thought before preceding onto the next level is crucial for every practice that we do.**

The key point is that *loving kindness, a sense of endearment* has to precede the development of compassion, because without first developing this loving kindness of endearment one cannot develop compassion. Therefore, from the very outset one needs to ensure that one really understands the loving kindness with a sense of endearment, before contemplating and meditating on it. You would be missing the point if you were to just skim over this and then try to develop compassion. The main point is that you cannot develop compassion if it has not been preceded with cultivating the loving kindness that has that sense of endearment.

This is how we need to actually incorporate our understanding into our practice in all topics, such as those presented in the lam-rim. Prior to engaging in the actual practice of the three scopes, we need to contemplate the rarity of the precious human rebirth and the difficulty of obtaining it. When that is developed strongly one moves onto the next topic of death and impermanence which, as a result of the previous contemplation, becomes really relevant develops with great strength as a result of this contemplation. Paying careful attention and taking the time to really cultivate an earlier thought before preceding onto the next level is crucial for every practice that we do.

2. List the objects of compassion.

As presented in the commentary, the objects of compassion are:

- The beings of the three lower rebirths are tormented over an extended period of by a strong wave of suffering
- The human world is plagued with the sufferings of birth, ageing, sickness, death, meeting, separation and not finding. In short, the acquired aggregates (life) are miserable.
- Gods of the desire realm are subjected to the suffering of dying and falling into a lower rebirth
- Gods of the Upper realms (of Form and Formless) are subject to the suffering or intoxication of concentrative stabilisation, depriving them of any thought of Dharma and self-freedom.

Therefore, you really need to make a genuine attempt to develop a compassion for others regardless of whether they are close to you or not, or whether you favour them or not. Focus on all beings in an unbiased manner, and pay particular attention to those beings that you have difficulty with and who you dislike. Then gradually, through familiarisation as a result of meditating in this way again and again, you can definitely reach a point where you comfortably feel compassion for those whom you dislike or of have had conflicts with in the past and so forth. This is how we need to train our mind to develop genuine compassion.

We need to check our own mind regularly to see whether that genuine wish and intention to benefit others is increasing. If the wish to benefit others is increasing and the intention to harm is decreasing, then that is a true mark of progress.

3. Give the explanation of the six causes for cultivating Bodhicitta.

Driven by compassion, one should then also undergo training and cultivating an aspiration to achieve enlightenment. This incorporates the detailed explanation of the six causes for cultivating bodhicitta that we have gone through previously. As you will recall, first meditate on recognition of all beings as one's mother, followed by remembering their kindness, and following that the wish to repay their kindness. Then one cultivates great affectionate love or loving kindness with sense of endearment, followed by generating great compassion.

Having developed and strengthened that very strong love and the compassion that is the spontaneous and very strong wish for all beings to be endowed in happiness and be free from all suffering, then one will naturally come to a point where one cannot bear to see beings being deprived of happiness and see them experiencing great suffering. At that point, one will be moved to feeling that it is not enough just to wish for other beings to be happy and free from suffering but that one needs to take full responsibility for bringing that about. 'I need to do everything possible to lead all beings to happiness and free them from all suffering.' At that point, one is cultivating the mind of superior intention. When superior intention is further developed it becomes the immediate preceding cause for developing bodhicitta, and the stronger that mind of superior intention, the closer one is to actually developing bodhicitta.

4.Explain superior intention

When one reaches the level of generating that superior intention, one has come to the point where one is not satisfied with only the wish for beings to be placed in happiness and be free from suffering. Rather one is moved to the point where one is adamant that one has to take full personal responsibility to ensure that all beings are placed in happiness and free from all suffering. After that genuine wish has been developed, then one naturally ponders as to whether one has the ability to lead all beings to the state of happiness and freedom from suffering right now. One comes to the recognition that one doesn't have that ability. So who does have that ability. Do foe-destroyers or arhats have that ability? Do hearers and solitary realisers have that ability? No, they don't have that ability because they have not yet reached the ultimate state of enlightenment themselves. From this investigation, comes the clear recognition that only a fully enlightened being, an omniscient buddha, has that capacity.

5.How does one develop the mind of uncontrived Bodhicitta?

When one develops a heartfelt aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, then one has developed what is called 'aspiring bodhicitta'. This is what *training in cultivating an aspiration to achieve enlightenment* means. When that initial aspiring bodhicitta is further developed through this logical reasoning and specific steps of contemplation, it develops into what is called 'contrived bodhicitta'. As it is still based on having to put in a lot of effort and work through many reasons, it is not yet actual bodhicitta. Then through that familiarity one reaches the stage where one spontaneously and unceasingly has that wish of aspiring to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings at all times. That is when one actually develops the mind of uncontrived bodhicitta, and becomes a bodhisattva.

6.Explain the distinction between the practices of generosity and so forth in general, and the six perfections practised by a bodhisattva.

At this point one actually enters into the Mahayana path and from then on one's activities will be to engage in the six perfections. When one's activities while engaging in the six perfections are based on the cultivation of that spontaneous and effortless aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, then the practice of the six perfections actually becomes a means to benefit sentient beings, and are therefore deeds of a bodhisattva, and a cause for enlightenment. Without bodhicitta any practice of generosity and so forth will not be a practice of a bodhisattva. This is how we need to understand the distinction between the practices of generosity and so forth in general, and the six perfections practised by a bodhisattva.

Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

24 October 2017

As usual let us spend some time in our meditation practice. Since we can all consider ourselves meditators here, we rightly need to engage in meditation. [*Tong-len meditation*]

Let us now generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings.

The meaning of the pledge

In our last session, we covered the pledge that accompanies aspiring bodhicitta.

In the ritual of taking the aspiring bodhicitta pledge, as mentioned in the text, one says:

I pledge to ferry sentient beings who are stranded, release those who are bound, revive those who are breathless, and lead those who have not yet gone, to the state beyond sorrow.

By reciting this three times, the pledge is made.

Different texts, such as Nagarjuna's *Commentary on Bodhicitta*, have different explanations for the meaning of these words. Here, the text gives yet another explanation. One needs to understand that these different explanations apply in different contexts. This understanding will protect one from thinking, 'This explanation must be wrong, because I saw different explanations in another text'.

In fact, this should be generally understood in regard to different explanations in various texts and teachings. We often find certain people are adamant that they have understood something, or have found an explanation in a text that they think should be the only way, and then refuse to accept other explanations. When other explanations are presented, they are adamant about their own point of view, saying, 'Oh, your way of explaining it is wrong'. This would be a wrong approach, because it is possible that one might have seen a certain explanation, but not seen another, and so feel unable to accept the other – just because one has not seen it!

Also explained in our last session was this passage:

If you do not find a preceptor, then you should make prostrations and offerings to the holy objects (on the altar), and then skip the word "preceptor" ...

As mentioned earlier, this is a ritual where one makes pledges to generate aspiring bodhicitta. Now the commentary goes on to explain the meaning of the four different pledges.

Regarding the meaning of the four pledges (in conjunction with generating aspiring bodhicitta) such as ferrying those who are stranded etc., the Great Geshe Sharawa explained these from the point of view of the four fruits of the Sravakayana (Hearer's vehicle)

The first explanation is in relation to *the four fruits of the Sravakayana* or the *Hearer's vehicle*.

As explained here:

From the point of view of Sravakayana, the four pledges correspond to the four fruits subsequently, ...

The *four fruits* presented here relate to what is called 'going beyond the mundane', which refers to the arya stage. Once hearers, for example, attain the path of seeing – thus becoming hearer aryas – from then on they are 'beyond the mundane' world.

The four fruits of the hearer grounds

As I have also explained previously, the word 'arya' is from the Tibetan word *phak-pa* which literally means to surpass, the connotation being that once the state of an arya has been attained, henceforth these noble beings surpass mundane or ordinary existence. What is being presented here relates to the *four fruits* obtained on the hearers' grounds, which are stream enterers, once returners, never-returners, and arhats or foe-destroyers.

As explained here:

... the attainment of the fruit of Stream Abiding/Enterer signifies ferrying beings to the other shore of all the mundane worlds, then the attainment of the state of Returner signifies release from almost all of the desire realm defilements ...

The term *desire realm defilements* here refers to the six root delusions within the beings of the desire realm. So, the six root delusions within us are called *desire realm defilements* because we abide in the desire realms.

The term *the state of Returner* means an arya being at that level will not attain arhatship or reach the goal of a foe-destroyer in that life, but will have to be reborn again in cyclic existence. That is why he or she is called a 'once returner'.

Then the attainment of the Non-Returner state signifies the reviving of the breath of having abandoned all the defilements of the desire realm, ...

Here, the term *Non-Returner* applies to aryas who will definitely attain arhatship in that very lifetime, and so will not have to return again. The *reviving of the breath* refers to being placed in the state of a non-returner. The last of the four fruits is:

... the attainment of liberation signifies the state beyond the sorrow of the defilements of the three realms.

This explanation is in relation to the hearers' vehicle.

The four Mahayana pledges

As the commentary further explains:

From the point of view of the bhumis of the Mahayana, the attainment of the first bhumi signifies ferrying beings to the other shore of the world, ...

This has been explained previously. Then:

... the attainment of the seventh bhumi signifies release from the bondage of the sign, the attainment of the three pure bhumis signifies being able to breathe having attained the state of signlessness and spontaneity, and the attainment of Buddhahood signifies the attainment of the state beyond sorrow of all the objects of abandonment.

Here there is another citation from the *All-Knower Chim*, which refers to Master Chim, who had great knowledge of all the treatises. This particular master composed a widely renowned commentary to the Abhidharma, and many refer to that commentary.

According to the *All-Knower Chim*, these four pledges relate to the four noble truths. As the commentary explains:

... the All-Knower Chim, related (the four pledges) to four noble truths, namely ferrying those stranded in

the river of suffering to the other shore, releasing beings from the bondage of the true Origin (of suffering), ...

In relation to *true Origin*, we have already gone into some detail explaining how true origin encompasses karma and delusions, so we don't have to go into any further detail on that now.

The third truth is:

... reviving those suffocated with self-grasping with the breath of the true Path ...

Then the fourth is:

... leading those who have not gone beyond sorrow due to conceptual thoughts to the state beyond sorrow through true Cessation.

This refers to the 'four pledges', previously explained as ... *to ferry sentient beings who are stranded, release those who are bound, revive those who are breathless, and lead those who have not yet gone to the state beyond sorrow.* These are the four pledges that correspond to the explanation.

A key point to note is that one does not need to take these pledges when engaging in the ritual of generating aspiring bodhicitta, the mere aspiration to achieve enlightenment. However, if one generates aspiring bodhicitta with the ritual of making these pledges, then one has to actually observe them. These are points to remember at all times.

Just to further clarify, the pledge one makes with aspiring bodhicitta is not to be considered as a vow. It is not called a 'vow'. Rather, it is a state of mind that is likened to a 'non-vow' state. Nevertheless, one does make a pledge. That needs to be understood, so that one doesn't get confused. For example, if we have made a pledge with aspiring bodhicitta, we may think, 'Oh, now I've received bodhisattva vows'. We need to understand that distinction.

Conclusion¹

Here, in the third section, the commentary explains observing the five precepts in relation to making the pledge:

The third section is the conclusion, which is presented under five sub-headings.

The first sub-heading is the instruction on remembering the benefits.

Remembering the benefits refers to remembering the benefits of bodhicitta. One needs to recall these after having made the pledges. Even for those who have taken bodhisattva vows, the way to uphold these pledges and vows is by remembering the benefits of bodhicitta again and again. The teachings explain the benefits in great detail; we need to try to bring the benefits of bodhicitta to mind and then constantly recall them as a way to restore our aspiration to achieve bodhicitta and revive our bodhisattva vows.

In a teaching at Bodhgaya some years ago, His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, explained it in a way that I have found to be extremely beneficial for my own mind. We simply recall that: 'I will not intentionally engage in harming sentient beings, in any way, and I will only engage in the means to benefit them'. As His Holiness mentioned, at our ordinary level this would be a good substitute for actual bodhicitta. It is manageable for our minds to generate, and is not too complicated. So these are two really important lines to remember on a daily basis.

At our level, while we may not have yet generated bodhicitta, many of us have already taken the pledge of aspiring bodhicitta, and have also taken the bodhisattva vows. In relation to upholding and increasing our bodhicitta mind at our level, we should remember the benefits of bodhicitta. Reciting these two lines, as mentioned earlier, is a way to remind ourselves of the bodhicitta attitude on a daily basis.

At our level, we need to relate to what we might call the 'seed' of bodhicitta, whereby we aspire to achieve enlightenment, and along with that aspiration, we generate the thought: 'I will not intentionally harm any sentient beings, and I will benefit them as best as I can'. These three things - the aspiration we developed earlier, the pledges we've made, and the vows we've taken - together become the seed of actually developing bodhicitta. It is this state of mind which, when further developed and increased, will then transform into actual bodhicitta.

We need to keep that in mind, lest we have the doubt: 'Why would I need to uphold bodhicitta if I haven't even developed it yet?' or 'How can I even think about increasing bodhicitta if I haven't even developed it yet?' These are unnecessary doubts that can prevent us from further development and hinder our practice; they are irrelevant and not conducive to our practice. They can be removed by thinking: 'I *do* have the seed of bodhicitta, which is what I need to practice on further developing'.

Although we may not have actually developed bodhicitta yet, we do have the wish to benefit others. Based on that, we can develop the strong mind of determining that we will put all of our energy into benefiting others and not hurting them. That, as mentioned earlier, is the seed-cause for developing bodhicitta in the future. As we bring that to mind and really practise it to the best of our ability on a daily basis, we will come to notice for ourselves that our mind will naturally become gentler and happier. It definitely helps to transform one's unhappy and unruly mind into a more joyous and happy one. I regularly emphasise that we can all manage to generate the intention to benefit others and show kindness towards them. We have the ability to generate this state of mind, which is why we must work on it and remember it.

We should also note that the teachings don't explicitly mention the benefits that we could experience now, in this life; instead, they mostly emphasise the benefits that we could gain in future lives. This is because the benefits in this life would be experienced 'on the side'. They do not have to be mentioned specifically, because we will experience them as we practise. Through our own experience, we will be able to gauge the benefits.

That is another point we need to keep in mind; otherwise, we may think, 'There may not be any benefits for us now, as the teachings don't really mention that. The benefits emphasised are mainly for future lifetimes.' Again, we need to remove that doubt.

Whatever practice we do with the intention to benefit our future lives will naturally become a cause for gaining benefit in this life as well. Naturally, when our practice is focused on benefit for a future life, that strong intent for a future life will naturally reduce strong grasping to this life's affairs. And when strong grasping and attachment to this life's affairs is reduced, one's life now will naturally become much more at ease, and much more relaxed. This is how we need to understand it.

¹ This is the third part of the section Aspirational Instructions that was introduced on 12 September 2017.

The next verse is Verse 12:

*The qualities of developing
Such an aspiration are
Fully explained by Maitreya
In the Array of Trunks Sutra.*

Where the verse says *fully explained*, the commentary tells us:

What is “Fully explained” here is the quality or benefit of an aspirational mind of enlightenment which is mentioned earlier, generated through the ritual ceremony.

Where is it (fully explained)?

The Intelligent Maitreya explained the infinite benefit to Norsang (Sudhana) in the *Array of Trunks Sutra (Gandavyuha-sutra)*. The sutra says, “Noble One, bodhicitta is like the seed of all the Dharmas of enlightenment and the ground for growing the wholesome Dharma of all the migrating beings.” The Sutra described the benefits through over two hundred analogies.

“Labtu” (Compendium of Training, Shikshasamucchaya) by Shantideva uses sixteen analogies.

Four benefits

Now, we are at the explanation from the commentary, which says:

According to Sharawa these benefits are subsumed into four.

As the commentary explains:

The analogies of the ‘seed’ and ‘ground’ respectively indicate the qualities for self-purpose and others’ purpose. Saying that bodhicitta is like a ‘short spear’ is to indicate the counter force of the remedy, and then saying it is like the ‘jewel of all the jewels’ is to indicate the quality of all-wish-fulfilment.

In short, Great Drolungpa said that even all the immeasurable and inconceivable resultant qualities of a Buddha also reflect the qualities of (bodhicitta) for this is the primary cause (of Buddha’s qualities).

As presented here, the *Great Drolungpa* was a great master who also composed a great treasury or encyclopaedia of Buddhist terms. This great master very succinctly presents the main point, which is that the *resultant qualities of a Buddha also reflect the qualities of (bodhicitta) for this is the primary cause (of Buddha’s qualities)*. This is a very succinct presentation of the benefits of bodhicitta.

The second sub-heading is the instruction of training in bodhicitta.

The related verse, Verse 13, reads:

*Having learned about the infinite benefits
Of the intention to gain full enlightenment
By reading the sutra or listening to a teacher,
Arouse it repeatedly to make it steadfast.*

The commentary explains:

Hence, bodhicitta is what one needs to generate. How does one generate it? One generates it through: ...

The emphasis here is on *how to generate bodhicitta*. As mentioned here, one might generate that mind, and then wonder, *how does one generate it?* As presented in the root text, ‘*Arouse it repeatedly to make it steadfast*’, which means one has to think of the benefits and generate the mind of awakening again and again. As the commentary presents:

- engaging in the ritual ceremony

- reading them oneself or thoroughly listening to a lama explain sutras ...

We previously explained *engaging in the ritual ceremony*. Then, in relation to the benefits of that, *reading it oneself thoroughly, or thoroughly listening to a lama explain it from the sutras* such as the following:

- sutras such as *Gandavyuhasutra*, and their commentaries such as ‘*Jangsa* (Grounds of Bodhisattva) by Asanga relating to the infinite and inconceivable qualities of an aspirational bodhicitta aimed at complete enlightenment.

We can see here that the *Grounds of the Bodhisattva* is a text that is referred to repeatedly as a reference on ways of developing and maintaining bodhicitta.

The commentary further explains:

Having gained a decisive understanding (of the infinite qualities of bodhicitta), generate it over and over again, or generate it at least three times each during the day and at night so that the Bodhi-mind within one’s continuum sustains; never to decline but to increase further more.

As mentioned in Maitreya’s teachings, the infinite and inconceivable qualities of an aspirational bodhicitta aimed at complete enlightenment is what one refers to as the benefits of enlightenment.

The instruction for training in bodhicitta explains how one needs to remember, again and again, the actual bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment; one has to remember it again and again, reciting it thrice in the morning and thrice in the evening. The advice and instructions here are integrated into the six session guru yoga practice.

If one were to strictly follow this practice of reciting the prayer as a way to generate bodhicitta three times each day and three times at night, this would mean generating it three times throughout the day and then three times throughout night. However, in the six session guru yoga practice, it is presented in a way that makes it manageable for you to generate bodhicitta: three times in the morning, when you do the six session guru yoga practice; then, when the six session guru practice is recited in the evening, as it is recited three times, it suffices for generating bodhicitta three times in the evening. That is how the practice is presented.

As explained here, we need not confine generating bodhicitta only to the morning and evening practice of six session guru yoga – throughout the day, we can repeatedly remind ourselves to recite that verse three times.

Then the commentary explains:

If one doesn’t rely [or does not have time to engage] in the ritual ceremony as described earlier (to generate aspirational bodhicitta), then one can recite the (Refuge prayer),

This prayer is one that we recite regularly:

I go for refuge until I am enlightened
To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Supreme Assembly.
By the merit I create by practicing giving and other perfections,
May I become a buddha for the sake of all sentient beings.

As we recite it regularly, it is good to understand that this verse will suffice for actually generating the aspirational bodhicitta mind in our daily practice.

To go over the main points of the prayer: *I go for refuge until I am enlightened to the Buddha, the Dharma and Supreme Assembly* indicates the objects of refuge. When the prayer says, *I go for refuge ...* this refers to the individual person who is taking refuge.

The perfections referred to in *By the merit I create by practicing giving and other perfections* are morality, patience, meditation, and so forth. These practices are like the substance we need to generate bodhicitta. The substance we need is merit, and these are the means to generate merit. From the merit that one has thus generated, the aspiration here is: *May I become a buddha for the sake of all sentient beings.* This is presented as an aspiration or dedication. One needs to understand that this aspiration or dedication refers to generating the wish to achieve enlightenment oneself.

The commentary then specifies that:

This is found in the Jowo's own scripture.

Prior to Atisha coming to Tibet, this particular verse was not prevalent. However, after Atisha came to Tibet, this particular verse became common, and was used widely as part of the practice.

Further, the commentary explains:

Now, it is said in (Verse 13) "the infinite benefits of the intention to gain full enlightenment." If we ask, where is this mentioned? To answer this question the root text says ...

So the verse says that there's *infinite benefits of the intention* or the aspiration *to gain full enlightenment.* If one were to ask, 'Where is this mentioned?' the root text answers that question by citing from *The Sutra requested by Viradatta.*

The root verse reads:

(Verses 14-17)

*The Sutra Requested by Viradatta
Fully explains the merit therein.
At this point, in summary,
I will cite just three verses.*

The three verses are:

*If it possessed physical form,
The merit of the altruistic intention
Would completely fill the whole of space
And exceed even that.
If someone were to fill with jewels
As many Buddha fields, as there are grains
Of sand in the Ganges,
To offer to the Protector of the World,
This would be surpassed by
The gift of folding one's hands
And inclining one's mind to enlightenment,
For such is limitless.*

The commentary then explains that:

The text summarises the infinite merits and benefits of bodhicitta spirit by citing three verses from *the Sutra requested by Viradatta*, and thereby creating a scriptural link (to the sutra).

It then raises this hypothetical question:

... what kinds of benefits are mentioned in the sutra?

The commentary explains:

The benefits of bodhicitta as presented here are enormously great. Obviously, these benefits are not physical form but suppose if they were physical forms and we fill up the entire space within ten directions with them, we would run out of the space

for the space is not enough to contain them. These (verse 14-15) show the extensiveness and the latter two (verse 16-17) show the immeasurable and limitlessness (of the merit of generating the bodhicitta mind).

The commentary further explains that:

Furthermore, the extent of merit in generating bodhicitta is limitless and beyond measurement.

The analogy used here is:

Imagine a special environment - numbers of pure lands of Buddha as many as there are grains on the banks of Ganges river or grains of sand equal to the numbers of water atoms of Ganges river. If a faithful devotee filled it up with special offering substances of heavenly precious jewels, the best of all jewels, and offered this to the special object (of veneration), Lord of the World, Bhagawan Buddha. Greater merits than this is the merit created by a Mahayana follower who, out of faith, holds his/her hands in prayer gesture and makes an offering through cultivating Bodhi-mind in front of the Refuge Objects or lamas. This illustrates the surpassing quality of the offering of generating Bodhi-mind.

Next is the third sub-heading:

Instruction of training in accumulating two accumulations.

So the first and second sub-headings were explained earlier, then the third and the fourth explain the means to sustain the aspiring bodhicitta that has now been developed. The fifth sub-division is about abandoning the four dark black dharmas and absorbing the four white dharmas. These are the means for our aspiring bodhicitta not to decline in the future.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltzen is used with the kind permission of Samdup Tsering.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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Homework

(24/10/2017) Assigned: 31/10/2017

1. 'This explanation must be wrong, because I saw different explanation in another text'.

What significant point did Geshe Doga make in relation to this statement?

Answer

Different texts, such as Nagarjuna's *Commentary on Bodhicitta*, have different explanations for the meaning of the words.

I pledge to ferry sentient beings who are stranded, release those who are bound, revive those who are breathless, and lead those who have not yet gone, to the state beyond sorrow.

One needs to understand that these different explanations apply in different contexts. This understanding will protect one from thinking, 'This explanation must be wrong, because I saw different explanation in another text'. We often find certain people are adamant that they have understood something, or have found an explanation in a text that they think should be the only way, and then refuse to accept other explanations. When other explanations are presented, they are adamant about their own point of view, saying, 'Oh, your way of explaining it is wrong'. This would be a wrong approach, because it is possible that one might have seen a certain explanation, but not seen another, and so feel unable to accept the other – just because one has not seen it!

2. Explain the term 'arya'.

Answer

The word 'arya' is from the Tibetan word *phak-pa* which literally means to surpass, the connotation being that once the state of an arya has been attained, henceforth these noble beings surpass mundane or ordinary existence.

3. Explain the *four fruits* obtained on the hearers' grounds in relation to stream enterers, once returners, never-returners, and arhats or foe-destroyers.

Answer

As explained here:

... the attainment of the fruit of Stream Abiding/Enterer signifies ferrying beings to the other shore of all the mundane worlds, then the attainment of the state of Returner signifies release from almost all of the desire realm defilements ...

The term desire realm defilements here refers to the six root delusions within the beings of the desire realm. So, the six root delusions within us are called desire realm defilements because we abide in the desire realms.

The term *the state of Returner* means an arya being at that level will not attain arhatship or reach the goal of a foe-destroyer in that life, but will have to be reborn again in cyclic existence. That is why he or she is called a 'once returner'.

Then the attainment of the Non-Returner state signifies the reviving of the breath of having abandoned all the defilements of the desire realm, ...

Here, the term Non-Returner applies to aryas who will definitely attain arhatship in that very lifetime, and so will not have to return again. The reviving of the breath refers to being placed in the state of a non-returner.

The last of the four fruits is:

... the attainment of liberation signifies the state beyond the sorrow of the defilements of the three realms.

4. What do the words 'Remembering the benefits' relate to?
What did His Holiness the Dalai Lama say would be a good substitute for actual bodhicitta at our ordinary level?

Answer

Remembering the benefits refers to remembering the benefits of bodhicitta. One needs to recall these after having made the pledges. Even for those who have taken bodhisattva vows, the way to uphold these pledges and vows is by remembering the benefits of bodhicitta again and again. The teachings explain the benefits in great detail; we need to try to bring the benefits of bodhicitta to mind and then constantly recall them, as a way to restore our aspiration to achieve bodhicitta and revive our bodhisattva vows.

In a teaching at Bodhgaya some years ago, His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, explained it in a way that I have found to be extremely beneficial for my own mind. We simply recall that: 'I will not intentionally engage in harming sentient beings, in any way, and I will only engage in the means to benefit them'. As His Holiness mentioned, at our ordinary level this would be a good substitute for actual bodhicitta. It is manageable for our minds to generate, and is not too complicated. So these are two really important lines to remember on a daily basis.

At our level, while we may not have yet generated bodhicitta, many of us have already taken the pledge of aspiring bodhicitta, and have also taken the bodhisattva vows. In relation to upholding and increasing our bodhicitta mind at our level, we should remember the benefits of bodhicitta.

Reciting these two lines, as mentioned earlier, is a way to remind ourselves of the bodhicitta attitude on a daily basis.

5. 'Why would I need to uphold bodhicitta if I haven't even developed it yet?'

What did Geshe Doga have to say about this statement and how did his explanation incorporate what is known as the 'seed' of bodhicitta?

Answer

At our level, we need to relate to what we might call the 'seed' of bodhicitta, whereby we aspire to achieve enlightenment, and along with that aspiration, we generate the thought: 'I will not intentionally harm any sentient beings, and I will benefit them as best as I can'. These three things – the aspiration we developed earlier, the pledges we've made, and the vows we've taken – together become the seed of actually developing bodhicitta. It is this state of mind which, when further developed and increased, will then transform into actual bodhicitta.

We need to keep that in mind, lest we have the doubt: 'Why would I need to uphold bodhicitta if I haven't even developed it yet?' or 'How can I even think about increasing bodhicitta if I haven't even developed it yet?' These are unnecessary doubts that can prevent us from further development and hinder our practice; they are irrelevant and not conducive to our practice. They can be removed by thinking: 'I *do* have the seed of bodhicitta, which is what I need to practice on further developing'.

Although we may not have actually developed bodhicitta yet, we do have the wish to benefit others. Based on that, we can develop the strong mind of determining that we will put all of our energy into benefiting others and not hurting them. That, as mentioned earlier, is the seed-cause for developing bodhicitta in the future. As we bring that to mind and really practise it to the best of our ability on a daily basis, we will come to notice for ourselves that our mind will naturally become gentler and happier. It definitely helps to transform one's unhappy and unruly mind into a more joyous and happy one. I regularly emphasise that we can all manage to generate the intention to benefit others and show kindness towards them. We have the ability to generate this state of mind, which is why we must work on it and remember it.

We should also note that the teachings don't explicitly mention the benefits that we could experience now, in this life; instead, they mostly emphasise the benefits that we could gain in future lives. This is because the benefits in this life would be experienced 'on the side'. They do not have to be mentioned specifically, because we will experience them as we practise. Through our own experience, we will be able to gauge the benefits.

That is another point we need to keep in mind; otherwise, we may think, 'There may not be any benefits for us now, as the teachings don't really mention that. The benefits emphasised are mainly for future lifetimes.' Again, we need to remove that doubt.

Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

༄༅། བྱང་ཆུབ་ལམ་གྱི་སྒྲོན་མ་བཟུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

31 October 2017

As usual, let us engage in our meditation practice. [*tong-len meditation*]

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

In generating your motivation along these lines, understand that it encompasses both the aspiring bodhicitta attitude and the engaging bodhicitta attitude. Generating the mind that thinks 'I need to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all mother sentient beings,' is an aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, which is the aspiring bodhicitta attitude. Then generating the mind that thinks 'for that purpose, I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well' encompasses the essence of the engaging bodhicitta attitude. If you incorporate this understanding into your practice then it becomes more profound when generating this motivation. Similarly, when doing any other practices, like a deity yoga practice, first aspiring bodhicitta is generated, followed by engaging bodhicitta. This practice states, 'I need to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all mother sentient beings, and for that purpose I'll now engage in this deity yoga practice'.

It is not sufficient just to have the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, you need to actually engage in the methods and means to achieve it. Thus, when you take active initiative to engage in the practices they become very meaningful.

Understand that by generating such a positive motivation, really taking it to heart, and regularly familiarising yourself with I, definitely brings about a transformation, particularly when you take the personal responsibility to put it into practice. Otherwise, when you generate the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, as noble as that aspiration may be, sentient beings are still in samsara and nothing has changed. But when you take personal responsibility to engage in the methods to help sentient beings to be free from their suffering, that will then bring about a great transformation in your own mind, and you will actually be able to benefit other sentient beings.

As the text explains this in great detail, it is appropriate for us to incorporate it in our practice. Following the pledges of aspirational bodhicitta, the text explains the ritual of the engaging bodhisattva vows. How to protect the vows is presented further.

THE EXPLANATION OF THE PERFECT METHOD

Aspirational instructions

Conclusion

If just generating the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, you do not have to engage in the practices of the pledges. However, when you generate the aspirational bodhicitta with an actual pledge, then you need to practise the five pledges.

We have already covered two pledges. The first pledge is to think about the benefits of bodhicitta again and again. The second is ensuring that the aspiration to achieve enlightenment does not decline, by generating that mind three times in the day and three times at night.

The third sub-heading is the instruction of training in accumulating two accumulations

This third subdivision is training in the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. Note that these two accumulations are the main causes for obtaining the two bodies of a buddha. More specifically, the accumulation of merit is the cause for obtaining the form body of a buddha, and the accumulation of wisdom is the main cause for obtaining the wisdom truth body of a buddha. While engaging in either of the two accumulations becomes the cause to obtain enlightenment, the more specific causes are now presented. When the teachings explain that you need to combine both accumulations, this means combining both method and wisdom.

The primary means for accumulating merit is generating bodhicitta, based on developing love and compassion.

Of the six perfections, the perfections of generosity, morality, patience, and concentration relate to the accumulations of merit. The perfection of wisdom refers particularly to the accumulation of wisdom, while the perfection of joyous effort is subsumed into both merit and wisdom.

The commentary presents the first half of verse 18 under this heading:

*18 ab. Having developed the aspiration for enlightenment,
Constantly enhance it through concerted effort.*

The commentary then quotes from Potowa to explain this verse.

Potowa advises, "Effort put in gathering the two accumulations should be induced by this."

What should we understand by the word 'this'? It refers to bodhicitta, so effort put into gathering the two accumulations should be induced by bodhicitta. That's how we need to understand it.

The commentary continues:

One trains oneself in generating aspirational bodhicitta through two means, which are remembering its benefit, and training in it six times (every day).

In relation to the meaning of the verse, the commentary continues:

After having generated it one can then enhance and develop it through making concerted effort in gathering the two accumulations of merit and wisdom by offering to the Refuge Objects ...

The refuge objects generally encompasses all three objects of the Buddha refuge, the Dharma refuge and the Sangha refuge. The commentary further presents:

... services to the sangha community, offering tormacake to harmful spirits, giving to the impoverished etc.

This is a specific presentation of how to accumulate merit. Having generated the aspirational bodhicitta, remembering the benefits, training in it by reciting the prayer three times through the day and three times in the evening, one then enhances it by making a concerted effort to gather the accumulation of merit. This refers to making offerings *to the*

Refuge Objects, services to the sangha community, offering tormacake to harmful spirits, giving to the impoverished, i.e. giving food to those who need food, and giving clothing to those who need clothing, and so forth.

In presenting the accumulations of merit and wisdom, the commentary does not specify the accumulation of wisdom, but the intent of the words is to incorporate into virtuous activities the understanding and realisation of emptiness, which is actually wisdom. The commentary emphasises that one enhances and develops it through making a *concerted effort*. So, just thinking about the benefits and engaging in the practice once or twice is not enough; you actually have to engage in them again and again, which of course requires some effort. The root verse says *constantly enhance it through concerted effort*, where *constantly* means practising it again and again throughout the day.

Next the commentary quotes from:

Advice on Collections (*Sambharaparikatha*) by Vasubhandu

“A Bodhisattva must always think:
Today I will accumulate merit and wisdom
And bring benefits to all beings”.

This is a very potent verse, which gives very succinct advice. The words are very meaningful and we need to apply this advice ourselves. It would be good if you could memorise this verse and particularly cultivate this intention; generating the thought, ‘today I will accumulate merit and wisdom and bring benefit to all beings’. The advice here is for bodhisattvas to always think in this way, and since we aspire to become a bodhisattva, it is important to train our mind with this altruistic intention.

The fourth sub-heading is the instruction of training one’s mind in not abandoning sentient beings.

The particular instruction in this practice is not to abandon sentient beings, as this would be a cause for giving up bodhicitta, which is a root downfall of the bodhisattva vows. To protect your bodhicitta from degenerating, you need to understand that the advice is not to abandon sentient beings. What does this mean? An example using an ordinary situation may reveal that when you have a disagreement and conflict with someone, you may be inclined to develop a mind that thinks ‘I’ll have nothing more to do with this person’. If you generate such a thought, you are abandoning their welfare because you give up on them. This is when you are generating the mind of abandoning them.

If a bodhisattva generated a mind not to benefit a particular person or being any longer, that would be a cause for their bodhicitta to degenerate, because it is giving up the welfare of sentient beings. Giving up on even one sentient being is giving up on all sentient beings. This is what you should understand.

The commentary presents the explanation:

According to Shangrom, the word ‘also’ (in the below verse) implies the causes for the mind generation of bodhicitta not to decline, needs to be practiced in this life; while mentally abandoning sentient beings means relinquishing bodhicitta. This explanation is considered to be very good by some [earlier masters].

The main point being presented here is that one needs to engage in practices to ensure that the causes for bodhicitta do not decline in this life, and that mentally abandoning sentient beings means relinquishing or giving up bodhicitta. This is the point that I was explaining earlier. The

commentary emphasises that the explanation presented by earlier masters is the best way to understand the meaning of the lines in the verse.

The first four practices are the means by which bodhicitta does not degenerate in this lifetime. To incorporate this into your own practice, keep these four practices in mind: think about the benefits of bodhicitta again and again, reciting it three times day and night (as in the Six Session Guru Yoga) etc.; engage in the practice of accumulating merit to the best of your ability by making offerings to the objects of refuge, offering service or offerings to the sangha community, offering tormacakes or ritual offerings to the harmful spirits and so forth; and engage in the practices of morality, patience, joyous effort and concentration. That encompasses the practice of merit. For the accumulation of wisdom, generate an understanding of emptiness to the best of your ability, bring it to mind again and again, and incorporate it into your practices.

This will serve as a means to enhance your aspirations to achieve enlightenment at your own level. You may not yet have developed the actual aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, but you have the seed of it based on love and compassion at your own level, and you have a genuine aspiration to achieve enlightenment. Likewise, your wish to benefit others is also a seed that can be improved and further developed by these practices.

Many of us have also taken bodhisattva vows, perhaps several times. So, engaging in these practices becomes a means to uphold and further strengthen those bodhisattva vows. These are the ways we can incorporate this into our own daily practices, which makes it very meaningful.

The fifth sub-heading is the instruction of training in abandoning four black dharmas and adopting four white dharmas.

This relates to the following verse:

*18cd. To remember it in this and also in other lives,
Keep the precepts properly as explained.*

If you practice adopting the four white dharmas the four black dharmas are naturally overcome.

The four black dharmas (dark practices) are:

- Deceiving abbots, masters, gurus and those worthy of offerings.
- Making others feel regret about something that is not regrettable.
- Speaking disparagingly etc. to beings who have correctly entered the Mahayana.
- In the absence of sincerity, using deceit and misrepresentation to get the service of others.

The four white dharmas (light practices) are:

- Forsaking consciously lying to any living being whatsoever, even in jest, or even for the sake of your life.
- Not deceiving but remaining sincere with all living beings.
- Developing the thought that all bodhisattvas are the Teacher.
- Causing the living beings that you are helping to mature, to not want the modest vehicle but to adhere to perfect enlightenment.¹

¹ Source: *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Vol. 2, p. 76.

The explanation of these dharmas are clearly presented in the lam-rim. The abbot refers to abbots of monasteries, the master refers here to a lama or abbot from whom you have received vows and precepts. These are actually presented in a very detailed manner in the lam-rim. 'Deceiving' here means misleading abbots, preceptors, teachers, and so forth, through lies or falsehood.

Leading others to regret their virtuous deeds, means influencing them to regret their virtuous deeds, which would be a misdeed from one's side.

The lam-rim explains speaking disparagingly etc. to beings who have correctly entered the Mahayana and refers to criticising a bodhisattva out of anger.

You can refer to the lam-rim for a detailed explanation of the other white and black dharmas.

Then the commentary raises a hypothetical question:

Is it enough just to train oneself in the above-mentioned four causes to prevent the ceremonially generated aspirational Bodhi-mind from declining in this life?

It continues:

... it is not enough because one must not forget, but remember it (Bodhi-mind) in other lives too. Relating to this the 'Kashyapa requested sutra' stated that, as it is said, 'the two sets of four practices should be completely guarded and applied'.

The point here is that if you merely generate the aspiration to achieve enlightenment without making a pledge, then there's no fault if you do not practice the advice contained in the five pledges. However, if you generate the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, and make a pledge to do so, then you need to practise in accordance with the explanation of the five pledges.

You need to incorporate this understanding when you take a subsequent initiation or *je-nang*. If attending one of these initiations, you need to be mindful of whether you are making a pledge or just generating aspirational bodhicitta. There are specific indications during the ceremony as to whether the focus is to just generate the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, or whether it is to make a pledge along with that aspiration to achieve enlightenment. You need to understand that distinction.

The commentary further explains:

As to the question of whether or not the Bodhi-mind newly arises within the continuum of an ordinary being or not, the commentary does not provide a clear answer. However, declining of Bodhi-mind due to the cause of four black dharmas and mentally abandoning sentient beings happens only to ordinary beings. This implicitly suggests that the arising of the Bodhi-mind within it (the continuum of ordinary beings) is a fact.

The commentary states that, *mentally abandoning sentient beings happens only to ordinary beings*. In other words, giving up bodhicitta only happens at the level of ordinary beings. There are three levels on the path of accumulation: on the small path of accumulation degeneration of bodhicitta is possible; on the medium path of accumulation and beyond there is no decline. That is why the commentary says abandoning sentient beings only happens to ordinary beings.

Consider the full explanation, *however, declining of Bodhi-mind due to the cause of four black dharmas and mentally*

abandoning sentient beings happens only to ordinary beings. According to the teachings, the commentary explains this implicitly suggests that the arising of the Bodhi-mind within the continuum of an ordinary being is a fact, meaning that it is possible for an ordinary being to generate bodhicitta. The main point here is that bodhicitta can only decline on the level of an ordinary being.

Engaging instructions

The commentary presents the second subdivision from the earlier category²:

The second is the explanation of engaging (bodhisattva) precepts and so forth, which has three presentations:

- [by making a connection with the earlier part,] taking engaging vows
- Manner of taking engaging vows
- Training in the precepts after having taken the engaging vows.

Taking engaging vows

To understand engaging vows, you need a clear understanding of the distinction between aspiring bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta. This has been presented many times. In *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* the analogy used to distinguish between them is that someone who has a wish to go is analogous to aspiring bodhicitta, and someone who is actually engaged in the act of going is analogous to engaging bodhicitta.

One specific definition states that the mind of bodhicitta that is not accompanied by the actions of the bodhisattva deeds is aspiring bodhicitta, while bodhicitta that is accompanied by the actual deeds of the bodhisattva e.g. the six perfections, is called engaging bodhicitta.

To further understand this, beings who encompass these two levels of bodhicitta on the path - for example, bodhisattvas in single-pointed meditative equipoise on emptiness - would be bodhisattvas who have aspiring bodhicitta in their mental continuum. As they are in meditative equipoise, they are not actively engaging in the deeds, therefore they are not practising engaging bodhicitta. When in the post-meditative state, the bodhisattvas actively engage in the bodhisattva deeds (such as the six perfections) and are therefore practising engaging bodhicitta.

The commentary further explains:

It is impossible to achieve enlightenment without engaging in the bodhisattva deeds, even if one has produced bodhicitta mind. One may engage in the practice of giving and so forth however, they do not become bodhisattva deeds unless one has taken bodhisattva vows. Hence, to imply that one should hold bodhisattva vows as a basis of bodhisattva's deeds, it says here.

This implies that to hold the bodhisattva vows as a basis for bodhisattva deeds, you have to have the basis of morality in order to actually take the bodhisattva vows, and then engage in the bodhisattva deeds.

The commentary refers to the verse:

**19. Without the vow of the engaged intention,
Perfect aspiration will not grow.
Make effort definitely to take it,
Since you want the wish
For enlightenment to grow.**

² This is the second part of the heading Explanation of the Perfect Method. It was introduced in the teachings of 12 September 2017.

The first two lines explain that the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, which is generated first, will not develop further if one does not take the vow.

The next line, *make effort definitely to take it*, states you must definitely make effort to take the vow, *since you want the wish for enlightenment to grow*. In other words, if those who aspire for enlightenment want this aspiration to grow and develop further, they must definitely take the bodhisattva vows.

The commentary presents the meaning of this verse:

Having generated a firm aspirational mind through a ritual, one must take engaging vows with strenuous effort without procrastination and without being disheartened.

As already explained, first you take the aspirational mind through the ritual of generating the aspirational mind to achieve enlightenment. Then one must further back that up by taking engaging vows *with strenuous effort without procrastination and without being disheartened*.

Taking bodhisattva vows entails a lot of promises, with a lot of vows to uphold, and so involves much more practice. This verse emphasises that you should not be disheartened by that practice.

The commentary further explains:

Since the engaging vow is aimed at achieving the awakened state, it is called an awakening vow (Tibetan; *byang sdom*³) which is a case of labelling the name of result to the cause. The purpose of taking up the engaging vow is to develop and perfect an aspirational mind.

From this you can appreciate the sequence of the Six Session Guru Yoga practice. It begins with generating refuge, then generating the four immeasurable thoughts, followed by generating the aspirational bodhicitta with a pledge. Following that is generating the engaging bodhisattva vows, and going over the engaging bodhisattva vows.

The commentary further explains:

The development of an aspirational mind is dependent on the engaging vow because there is no other way to develop an aspirational mind to its perfect and excellent state other than holding the vows, which are by nature characterised by engaging mind.

The development of an aspirational mind is dependent on the engaging vow. That is because there is no other way to develop an aspirational mind to its perfect and excellent state other than by holding the vows that are by nature characterised by engaging mind.

This basically re-emphasises the points explained earlier. To back this up the commentary presents the quotation:

Hence, it is said in 'Nyingpo Ngepar Duwa' by Atisha. "Endowed with superior intention, generate engaging mind, then the very aspirational mind previously cultivated will increase extensively.

The commentary clarifies that:

Some early masters such as Geshe Yungwapa interpreted the cultivation of aspiration mind as a form of vow, however most others said that the term vow is simply implied for Atisha himself.

To clarify the point, some may call generating the aspiration of bodhicitta a vow. This is incorrect, and this is the point being clarified.

To back this up, the commentary then quotes (as it says) from Atisha himself:

Having generated bodhicitta mind first, one then takes the Bodhisattva vows.

Here the bodhicitta mind refers to the aspirational bodhicitta mind. Atisha himself says that one first generates the aspiring bodhicitta mind, and following that, one takes the vows. The bodhicitta and bodhisattva vows are mentioned separately, with the bodhisattva vows being presented next.

Before we conclude our session this evening, we will recite the *King of Prayers* for Joyce Cameron who passed away recently. Some might have known her in the past. We will also make dedications for Sue Fotheringham, who has recently had surgery, wishing her to have a quick recovery. For Venerable Tsepel's mother, who is currently unwell and hospitalised, to have a speedy recovery. And also for Vicki who has not been well.

Make your dedications in accord with the explanations I've given previously. On a practical level, after doing our practices for them, notify them, as this will give them some solace and so they will feel they're being looked after by the Centre. They normally support the Centre, and now when they're going through some difficulties, offering our prayers and dedicating our practices will be a good service to them, and their minds will be happy.

Of course, it is important to expand your dedications and practice to encompass all sentient beings. In summary, we are doing the practices to benefit all sentient beings so they are free from suffering and obtain ultimate happiness. By doing these practices sincerely you will, in fact, be the immediate beneficiary.

As Lama Tsongkhapa says - who His Holiness the Dalai Lama quotes regularly - if one engages wholeheartedly to benefit other beings, one's own welfare will be fulfilled on the side. His Holiness has stressed that this is a very potent instruction. When you benefit others, you need not have to worry about your own welfare, as that is automatically accomplished on the side.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen is used with the kind permission of Samdup Tsering.

Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Jill Lancashire
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version

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³ *byang chub sems dpa'i sdom pa*

Homework

(31/10/2017) Assigned: 6/11/2017

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

Explain how this line encompasses both the aspiring bodhicitta attitude, and the engaging bodhicitta attitude.

Answer

Generating the mind that thinks 'I need to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all mother sentient beings,' is an aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, which is the aspiring bodhicitta attitude. Then generating the mind that thinks 'for that purpose, I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well' encompasses the essence of the engaging bodhicitta attitude. If you incorporate this understanding into your practice then it becomes more profound when generating this motivation. Similarly, when doing any other practices, like a deity yoga practice, first aspiring bodhicitta is generated followed by engaging bodhicitta. This practice states, 'I need to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all mother sentient beings, and for that purpose I'll now engage in this deity yoga practice'.

It is not sufficient just to have the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, you need to actually engage in the methods and means to achieve it. Thus, when you take active initiative to engage in the practices they become very meaningful.

Understand that by generating such a positive motivation, really taking it to heart, and regularly familiarising yourself with it, definitely brings about a transformation, particularly when you take the personal responsibility to put it into practice. Otherwise, when you generate the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, as noble as that aspiration may be, sentient beings are still in samsara and nothing has changed. But when you take personal responsibility to engage in the methods to help sentient beings to be free from their suffering, that will then bring about a great transformation in your own mind. And you will be able to actually benefit other sentient beings.

As the text explains this in great detail, it is appropriate for us to incorporate it in our practice.

2. *18ab. Having developed the aspiration for enlightenment, Constantly enhance it through concerted effort.*

Explain how the commentary for this line is a specific presentation of how to accumulate merit.

Answer

The commentary then quotes from Potowa to explain this verse.

Potowa advises, "Effort put in gathering the two accumulations should be induced by this."

What should we understand by the word 'this'? It refers to bodhicitta, so effort put into gathering the two accumulations should be induced by bodhicitta. That's how we need to understand it.

The commentary continues:

One trains oneself in generating aspirational bodhicitta through two means, which are remembering its benefit, and training in it six times (everyday).

In relation to the meaning of the verse, the commentary continues:

After having generated it one can then enhance and develop it through making concerted effort in gathering the two accumulations of merit and wisdom by offering to the Refuge Objects...

The refuge objects generally encompasses all three objects of the Buddha refuge, the Dharma refuge and the Sangha refuge. The commentary further presents:

...services to the sangha community, offering tormas to harmful spirits, giving to the impoverished etc. This is a specific presentation of how to accumulate merit. Having generated the aspirational bodhicitta, remembering the benefits, training in it by reciting the prayer three times through the day and three times in the evening, one then enhances it by making a concerted effort to gather the accumulation of the merit. This refers to making offerings *to the Refuge Objects, services to the sangha community, offering tormas to harmful spirits, giving to the impoverished*, i.e. giving food to those who need food, and giving clothing to those who need clothing, and so forth.

In presenting the accumulations of merit and wisdom, the commentary does not specify the accumulation of wisdom, but the intent of the words is to incorporate into virtuous activities the understanding and realisation of emptiness, which is actually wisdom. The commentary emphasises that one enhances and develops it through making a *concerted effort*. So, just thinking about the benefits and engaging in the practice once or twice is not enough; you actually have to engage in them again and again, which of course requires some effort. The root verse says *constantly enhance it through concerted effort*, where *constantly* means practising it again and again throughout the day.

3. To protect your bodhicitta from degenerating, you need to understand that the advice is not to abandon sentient beings. What does this mean?

Answer

An example using an ordinary situation may reveal that when you have a disagreement and conflict with someone, you may be inclined to develop a mind that thinks 'I'll have nothing more to do with this person'. If you generate such a thought, you are abandoning their welfare because you give up on them. This is when you are generating the mind of abandoning them.

If a bodhisattva generated a mind not to benefit a particular person or being any longer, that would be a cause for their bodhicitta to degenerate, because it is giving up the welfare of sentient beings. Giving up on even one sentient being is giving up on all sentient beings. This is what you should understand.

4. Explain the four white dharmas the four black dharmas.

Answer

The four black dharmas (dark practices) are:

- Deceiving abbots, masters, gurus and those worthy of offerings.
- Making others feel regret about something that is not regrettable.
- Speaking disparagingly etc. to beings who have correctly entered the Mahayana.
- In absence of sincerity, using deceit and misrepresentation to get the service of others.

The four white dharmas (light practices) are:

- Forsaking consciously lying to any living being whatsoever, even in jest, or even for the sake of your life.
- Not deceiving but remaining sincere with all living beings.
- Developing the thought that all bodhisattvas are the Teacher.
- Causing the living beings that you are helping to mature, to not want the modest vehicle but to adhere to perfect enlightenment.¹

5. Can the Bodhi-mind newly arise within the continuum of an ordinary being?

Answer

As to the question of whether or not the Bodhi-mind newly arises within the continuum of an ordinary being or not, the commentary does not provide a clear answer. However, declining of Bodhi-mind due to the cause of four black dharmas and mentally abandoning sentient beings happens only to ordinary beings. This implicitly suggests that the arising of the Bodhi-mind within it (the continuum of ordinary being) is a fact.
