
The Middle Length Lamrim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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As usual, it is important that we cultivate bodhicitta as the motivation for listening to the teaching. Not just here, but at all other times; whenever we engage in any activity it is important we get our motivation right. This is because it counteracts self-cherishing, the egocentric mind, which is the main cause of all the problems and trouble we face in our lives.

Self-cherishing isolates and distances us from others and society. We do not want to be alone or separated from others because being close to them is important for our wellbeing. In fact, a lot of our needs and interests very much depend on others. As a social being, we are not used to living all by ourselves. Therefore, having friends and support from others is important for us and we must overcome self-cherishing which only thinks of the 'I'. On the other hand, there are a lot of benefits to cultivating bodhicitta in our mind.

We will now continue reading from the Lama Tsongkhapa treatise on the Middling Stages of the Path. We are up to the heading:

B: Training in the cause of the mind generation not degenerating in this life.

This has four sub-headings:

1. *Training in remembering the advantages, so that the strength of one's delight in the mind generation increases*
2. *Training in generating it six times, so that the actual mind generation increases*
3. *Training in not mentally abandoning any sentient being for whose welfare the mind has been generated*
4. *Training in accumulating the accumulations of merit and wisdom*

We continue from the third subheading:

2B4B-2B3B-2C2A-3 Training in not mentally abandoning any sentient being for whose welfare the mind has been generated.

Regarding the measurement of mentally abandoning other sentient beings, the text says:

The measure for mentally abandoning a sentient being is the occurrence of the thought: "I will not work for his welfare now or ever after" depending on some condition, for example that he has done something unacceptable.

As it is said here, we are mentally forsaking other beings if we decide from the depths of our heart that we *will not work for their welfare, now or ever after*, because of whatever undesirable things they did to us. Here it is referring to specific sentient beings, not sentient beings in general. Especially if you have taken bodhisattva vows, mentally abandoning other sentient beings constitutes the breaking

of vows. Also, if you have generated bodhicitta then you aspire to benefit all sentient beings, so abandoning other beings goes against bodhicitta.

Abandoning other sentient beings refers to abandoning a specific sentient being, and even abandoning one sentient being equals abandoning other sentient beings. For example, without branches there cannot be the trunk. Likewise, if you abandon one sentient being, you are abandoning your vow to benefit all sentient beings because without that sentient being there cannot be all sentient beings.

Then the lamrim text reads:

2B4B-2B3B-2C2A-4 Training in accumulating the accumulations of merit and wisdom

Fourth: Having taken aspiring bodhicitta through a ritual, you should put effort into accumulating the accumulations through daily offerings to the Jewels and so forth as the cause for increasing bodhicitta.

We engage in the training in accumulating the accumulations of merit and wisdom to achieve complete enlightenment, which is comprised of the two perfect bodies - rupakaya or the Buddha's form body and dharmakaya or the Buddha's truth body.

The accumulation of merit is the main cause to achieve the form body and the accumulation of wisdom is to achieve the truth body. First, we generate an aspiring or wishing bodhicitta by relying on a certain ritual ceremony. However, when it says that after that you should put effort into accumulating, this is to imply that merely generating an aspiring bodhicitta is not sufficient. After generating it we must increase it and put it into practice through accumulating merit and wisdom by engaging in daily practices such as offering to the Three Jewels, practising giving to those who are in poverty, and so forth.

2B4B-2B3B-2C2B Training in the cause of not being separated from the mind generation again in future lives

Not only do we generate bodhicitta and engage in the subsequent bodhisattva deeds now, but we also ensure that we continuously develop it further so that we are never being separated from it in future lives. This is explained under two following sub-headings.

1. *Training in abandoning the four non-virtuous practices that cause it to degenerate*
2. *Training in adopting the four virtuous practices that do not allow it to degenerate*

The first set of the four negative or black actions are:

- a) *Deceiving one's abbot, master, guru, or those worthy of offerings*
- b) *Causing others to regret virtues that they do not regret*
- c) *Saying something uncomplimentary and the like about a sentient being who has entered the Mahāyāna*
- d) *Acting out of deceit and shiftiness but without the extraordinary attitude*

The two sets of the four black and four white actions are presented in the manner of identifying the objects towards who the actions are directed, and defining how the actions are called black or white.

Regarding the objects to whom you commit **the first black action**, the text says:

Among the four non-virtuous practices, with respect to that of deceiving one's abbot, master, guru, or those worthy of offerings, the objects that are one's abbot and master are easy to understand. Your guru is someone who wishes to benefit you, and those worthy of offerings are those endowed with excellent qualities, even though they do not belong to the previous two.

So, here the text specifies one's abbot, master, and guru, and then says that they are worthy of offerings as the objects for the first black action. Those worthy of offerings encompasses all those who are endowed with excellent qualities but do not belong to the previous two, meaning not one's abbot, master or guru.

The text continues:

If you wonder about what action becomes a non-virtuous practice with respect to them, to knowingly cheat them by any means is a non-virtuous practice.

So, deliberately or knowingly deceiving any one of the noble objects is called a black action. However, as the deceit and shiftiness that are not lies, as indicated below, here it has to be cheating through lying. This line clarifies that the act of deception in the context of the first black action must occur by verbally lying to the noble being, and other deceptions occurring through other means of concealment (shiftiness) and pretension (deceit) are explained separately.

Concealment is *yo* in Tibetan which means hiding one's faults, whereas pretension is *gyu*, meaning pretending to have qualities which you do not possess.

The text reads:

This is because in the Compendium of Trainings it is taught that abandoning a non-virtuous practice constitutes a virtuous practice and that the antidote of this non-virtuous practice is the first of the four virtuous practices.

Regarding the object and action of **the second black action** it says:

With respect to causing others to regret virtues that they do not regret, the object is another person without regrets about a virtue that he has done. What one does to him is that, with the intention of making him regret, one generates regret for that which is not an object of regret. As regards these two, it is the same whether or not the person is deceived and whether or not the person has regrets.

In the above last sentence, as *regards these two* refers to the first and the second black actions. The difference between the two is that of the object being deceived and made to regret, for example, in the case of the second black action, making the other person regret their virtue.

Regarding the object and action of **the third black action**, it says:

With respect to saying something uncomplimentary and the like about a sentient being who has entered the Mahāyāna, the object is someone who has generated bodhicitta and now possesses it. What one does to him is to say something unpleasant motivated by hatred. The object to whom it was said understands the meaning.

The object here is anyone who has generated bodhicitta and still possesses. The action is saying unpleasant remarks out of hatred, and they hear it. This black action is said to be particularly grave. Since we do not know who exactly is a bodhisattva, it is very easy to commit this black action unless we completely avoid harsh speech. So, we should learn how to always respect others, knowing that everyone possesses unique qualities, and never undermine and criticise any other being. To quote the text:

It is easy for this to occur and it is also a very great disadvantage. That has already been mentioned previously in brief. Furthermore it is taught in the Sūtra of the Magic of the Complete Certainty of Total Peace that if a bodhisattva generates a mind of contempt toward a bodhisattva, he must remain in hell for an eon, and that apart from deprecating a bodhisattva, nothing can make a bodhisattva fall into the lower rebirths.

If we say unpleasant things to others, we may be committing this black action which brings great disadvantage. Whereas if we speak pleasantly and admire them, it will be very beneficial. To point out the severity of this black action, it is saying here that the only cause for a bodhisattva to fall into a hell realm is disparaging another bodhisattva. This implies that if an ordinary person were to criticise a bodhisattva, there is no need to mention that they would fall into a hell realm.

The text continues:

How it takes you further away from enlightenment.

In the Verse Summary of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines it also says that if a bodhisattva who has not yet obtained a prophecy argues out of anger with a bodhisattva who has obtained a prophecy, for however long a mind of anger arises, he will have to spend that many eons longer on the path.

Although it is unlikely, it does say here that if a bodhisattva on a lower spiritual level argues with a bodhisattva on a higher level with anger, they will remain in hell equal to the instances of anger in their minds. It is also implied that if the bodhisattva was just about to proceed to the next path – that of preparation – instead of proceeding, they would have to start the path of accumulation all over again. This clearly implies the great shortcomings for us of feeling anger and hatred.

Normally we tend to point to other people saying, 'he is angry'. But before we point a finger, we should check in with ourselves to see if we have anger in our mind. Most probably we do. If so, we should fix our anger before criticising the other person who has anger.

Then it continues:

Because of that, it is also taught in the same text that you need to put an end to anger in all its aspects and put effort into confessing it and restraining it immediately whenever it arises.

It shows here how to counteract anger, because of which we criticise and harm other beings. As a result, we ourselves suffer. It says we must exert effort, if possible, to prevent anger from arising in the first place, or take immediate action to monitor and overcome it whenever it arises by being aware of all its shortcomings and the extent of harm it can cause.

The **fourth black action** is acting out of deceit and shiftiness but without the extraordinary attitude. The text says:

With respect to an activity done out of deceit and shiftiness but without the extraordinary attitude, the object is any other sentient being. What one does to him is to act with deceit and shiftiness.

The object with whom you commit this is any other sentient being. With this black action you deceive and cheat other beings without any pure intention of benefiting them.

Regarding the meaning of the words 'deceit' (pretension) and 'shiftiness' (concealment), it says:

In this regard, deceit and shiftiness are explained in terms of deceiving with respect to measures and weights and so forth and something like what Gyelwa Yechung did: In order to send someone off to Ragma, he caused him to be sent to Tölung first so afterwards he would freely accept Ragma. According to the Compendium of Trainings, deceit is to display qualities that actually do not exist, and shiftiness is to take measures for faults not to become evident.

Normally we use the means of shiftiness, cunningness or concealment for hiding our ulterior motives or faults, and deception or pretention in exhibiting any qualities which we do not possess to deceive others, for example, the way salespeople lie to others about the value, quality and quantity of goods to persuade others to buy their products and make profits.

Training in adopting the four virtuous practices that do not allow it to degenerate:

- a) *Abandoning lying knowingly*
- b) *Abiding with the extraordinary attitude without deceit or shiftiness*
- c) *Generating the perception that bodhisattvas are like the Teacher and praising them*
- d) *Ripening sentient beings*

The **first white action** is abandoning lying knowingly. Quote:

The object of the first virtuous practice is all sentient beings. The action is to abandon lying to them knowingly even for the sake of one's life or for as little as a joke. If you act in this way, you will be sure not to cheat special objects such as your abbot, master, and so forth through lies.

In short, this is advising us to always be honest with others, especially with noble objects.

The **second white action** is abiding with the extraordinary attitude without deceit or shiftiness. Quote:

The object of the second virtuous practice is all sentient beings. The action is to abide with the extraordinary attitude toward them without deceit or shiftiness, that is to abide with an honest attitude. It is the antidote to the fourth non-virtuous practice. So, this is an antidote to the fourth black action.

The **third white action** is generating the perception that bodhisattvas are like the teacher and praising them. Quote:

The object of the third virtuous practice is all bodhisattvas. The action is to generate the perception of them as resembling the Teacher and to proclaim truthful praise about them in the four

directions. Sharawa said that although we have been creating a little bit of something like virtue, there is no sign of its increase and many signs of its exhaustion. Virtue is exhausted through hatred toward bodhisattvas and our companions, disdain toward them, and through offending them. Therefore, if we are able to abandon offending them and bodhisattvas, we will no longer experience what is referred to in the Compendium of Trainings as "harm based on persons." Since we do not know in whom bodhicitta is present, we act from the perspective of training in pure appearances, generating the perception of all sentient beings as the Teacher in accordance with the Kāśyapa Chapter (Kāśyapaparivarta).

If there is an audience and an opportunity to express their excellent qualities, do so. However, if you do not go to all four directions and proclaim them, this is not a fault. This virtuous practice is the antidote to the third non-virtuous practice.

As explained here, since we do not know who is and is not a bodhisattva, we are urged to train our mind in the pure perception of whomever we meet, in accordance with the Kasyapa chapter, to recognise other beings as if they are our teachers. When speaking of others, we should speak only of their excellent qualities and never criticise and belittle them. This accords with the master Atisha's advice: 'reveal your fault but not of others'. This also means you rejoice in other beings' qualities and admire them.

The **fourth white action** is ripening sentient beings. Quote:

The object of the fourth virtuous practice is the sentient beings who are ripened by you. The action is to make them hold to complete enlightenment without wishing for a temporary vehicle. Moreover, while from your side you should cause your disciple to make a connection with it, if that thought does not arise in the disciple, it does not become a fault because you were unable to accomplish it.

It is quite amazing to see the detail in which the text explains what we need to do to benefit other beings, such as guiding our disciples to complete enlightenment. Despite our wholehearted effort, if others don't listen to us, it is not our fault if they don't achieve their goals. Quote:

By means of this virtuous practice you abandon the second non-virtuous practice, for if you wish, from the bottom of your heart, to establish others in the ultimate of all types of happiness, you do not accomplish it in order to connect them to the generation of mental unhappiness for the sake of generating mere regret which is still mental unhappiness.

The fourth white action is a remedy to the second black action of causing others to regret their virtues. With this fourth white action we wish others to achieve the highest enlightenment and we do not wish them to experience the slightest mental unhappiness, including and making them feel regret in their virtue, which is a cause of mental unhappiness for them.

*Transcript prepared by Judy Mayne
Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering
Edit 2 by Llysse Velez
Edited Version*

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