

Study Group – Aryadeva’s 400 Verses

༄༅། །བསྐྱེད་ལོ་རྒྱུ་བཞུགས་ཀྱི་ལཱ་ལྷན་གྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུ་བཞུགས་ཀྱི་ལཱ་ལྷན་གྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུ་བཞུགས་ཀྱི་ལཱ་ལྷན་།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

21 November 2006

As usual we can sit in an upright and comfortable position, and generate a good motivation for receiving the teachings, such as, ‘In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will listen to the Dharma and put it into practice as best as I can.’

1.2.3. Actual mode of training in the deeds (cont.)

1.2.3.5. WHY THE BODHISATTVAS CAN COMPLETE THEIR DEEDS

This is subdivided into five:

1.2.3.5.1. Why they take special delight in generosity

1.2.3.5.2. Criticism of inferior generosity

1.2.3.5.3. Why they can accomplish all deeds

1.2.3.5.4. Why they do not strive just for their own happiness

1.2.3.5.5. Why they can take special physical forms or manifestations

1.2.3.5.1. WHY THEY TAKE SPECIAL DELIGHT IN GENEROSITY

This heading corresponds to the explanation of other Madhyamika texts, which say that the bliss experienced by a bodhisattva from merely hearing someone asking for something, is much greater than the bliss experienced by an arhat who has reached non-abiding Nirvana.

Assertion: The life stories of the Buddha and so forth say that talk of ethical conduct does not interest bodhisattvas to the same extent as talk of giving.

*The word ‘giving’ indicates
Death, practice and other existences.
That is why the word ‘giving’ always
Is of interest to bodhisattvas* 119

The assertion arises from the general explanation that bodhisattvas are the basis of many qualities. That being so, why is there particular reference to bodhisattvas feeling greater joy in the act of generosity.

The Sanskrit word for giving is *dana*. The literal meaning of the word can also have different meanings according to the context.

1. The etymology of the root word *dana* can be used to indicate dying or death, and thus it indicates impermanence. So one meaning of the word is death and impermanence.

2. Another meaning that it indicates is the practice of what we call generosity, and within the three types of generosity, it can include all of the six perfections as well.

The three types of generosity are:

- the generosity of giving material needs
- the generosity of giving of protection

- the generosity of teaching the Dharma.

The manner of how the three divisions of generosity include the practice of the six perfections can be understood as follows:

- The first of the six perfections, which is generosity, is included in the generosity of material wealth.
- The perfections of moral ethics and patience are included in the generosity of giving protection.
- The perfections of concentration and wisdom are included in the generosity of Dharma.
- The perfection of joyous effort is included in all three acts of generosity, as any practice of the Dharma needs joyous effort or enthusiasm.

3. The connotation of *dana* can also refer to the desire for a better rebirth, which is achieved by guarding the three doors and thus maintaining the purity of speech, the purity of one’s physical actions and the purity of mind. So, guarding and controlling our speech, physical actions and the mind, serves as the basis for attaining what we call higher rebirths in future lifetimes. That is how *dana* has the connotation of practices for other existences.

The commentary explains why the word giving or *dana* is of special interest:

...since the word ‘giving’ denotes death, practices of certain dharmas and other existences [meaning serving causes for obtaining other higher existences in future lifetimes], it is always of interest to bodhisattvas who therefore take special delight in giving.

The analogy that is given is that it is like a man, who is condemned to death, hearing he is to be spared. When a person who is condemned to death hears that he is spared from that sentence, no other words could be sweeter to his ears. Similarly the very sound of the words ‘giving’ and ‘generosity’ are the most pleasing for a bodhisattva’s ears. As the commentary further explains, because the word generosity (or *dana* in Sanskrit) connotes the purposes of accumulating extensive merit, and has a further connotation of death and impermanence, as well as a connotation of attaining higher rebirth in future existences, ‘giving’ is the highest, most pleasing word that is heard by the giver as well as the receiver. That is why the bodhisattva delights in the practice of generosity.

The main point that we can reflect on is how the division of the three types of generosity includes all of the practices of the six perfections. Then we can understand that there is no higher practice than that which includes all of the six perfections.

1.2.3.5.2. CRITICISM OF INFERIOR GENEROSITY

Assertion or question: Is it only a bodhisattva’s generosity, and not that of others, that is boundless?

*When one thinks that by giving gifts now
There will be a great result,
Receiving and giving are like trade
For profit, which will be criticised.* 120

As the commentary explains:

To receive and give away things thinking that giving gifts in this life will result in great prosperity is like trade for profit and will therefore be criticised by the excellent.

The main point being made here is that generosity done with an intention to receive benefit for oneself is just like trading to receive something back in return. Generosity with such an attitude is an inferior generosity. Why? Because it is seen as inferior act of generosity, by superior beings.

The analogy that is given here is that 'it is like the profit from selling one's goods'. The analogy should be understood in the context of how, if you sell goods for a certain price with an intention to receive a profit, you don't obtain any more than whatever profit you have received from the trade. That means one does not receive any merit from it.

The merit of a generous act, made with an attitude of receiving something in return, such as wealth and so forth for future lifetimes, will be exhausted when good wealth and so forth are achieved in the future life. That is what we call the extended effect of an act of generosity, yet it is not a cause to obtain liberation.

Why is such an act of generosity not a cause for liberation? As explained in the commentary it is because the very attitude of achieving some material gain in this or future lifetimes becomes a cause to tighten the noose of samsara. Grasping at material wealth, and attachment or a desire for material wealth, are causes to remain in samsara rather than the means to be free from samsara. So the very aim of achieving that goal of material wealth is a cause to strengthen or tighten the noose of samsara.

As explained here, a bodhisattva's generosity is an act of generosity with the sole aim of benefiting other sentient beings. So that act of generosity becomes the ultimate means for achieving liberation and ultimate enlightenment. It is said that the merits from an act of generosity made with a bodhicitta attitude are not exhausted, but in fact increase.

Having understood that, it is good that we should try to avoid inferior acts of generosity. This means that when we engage in any kind of act of generosity we should try to generate an attitude of real love and compassion towards other sentient beings, wishing them to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment. Then we should dedicate it towards the ultimate state of enlightenment, in order to benefit sentient beings. With that sort of attitude, whatever we actively engage in becomes a superior act of generosity.

1.2.3.3. WHY THE BODHISATTVAS CAN ACCOMPLISH ALL DEEDS

For such a one, even previously 121
Performed ill deeds will have no (effect)
There is nothing one with virtue
Considers should not be accomplished

In explaining the meaning of the verse the commentary reads:

Though bodhisattvas who create limitless merit may even have performed a few ill deeds previously [i.e. when they were ordinary beings] these would not be able to produce an effect.

Because of the limitless merit that bodhisattvas, and in particular superior bodhisattvas, have accumulated over long periods of time, they have such vast merit that there couldn't be any trace of negative karmas left. Even if there were some traces of negative karmic imprints left, such as a residue from the negative karmas that they created as ordinary beings, that would not serve as a cause to bring a fully ripened effect.

It is said:

A few grams of salt can change the taste
Of a little water, but not of the Ganges.
Understand it is likewise with small ill deeds
And expansive roots of virtue.

This analogy illustrates the meaning of what was explained earlier. If we put a few grams of salt into a small amount of water we can immediately taste its effect - the water will be salty. But if a few grams of salt were to be put in a vast amount of water such as the Ganges, then one would not notice the effect at all.

It is said that even if there were some small negative deed by a bodhisattva, it would be like a small spoonful of salt in the river Ganges. Because of the vast amount of merit that the bodhisattva has accumulated, the bodhisattva would not experience a negative result. Therefore, because of their great store of merit even a negative residue of an ill deed cannot cause a bodhisattva to experience a negative result.

There is nothing that bodhisattvas, whose virtuous activity is powerful, consider should not be done for others' benefit.

The main point being explained here is that because what we call the vast merit and virtuous activity of a bodhisattva is so powerful, the residue of small negative deeds or imprints cannot hinder their virtuous activities of benefiting other sentient beings.

The analogy can be understood from the earlier quotation about salt and the Ganges, which was quite vivid and clear.

1.2.3.4. WHY THE BODHISATTVAS DO NOT STRIVE JUST FOR THEIR OWN HAPPINESS

Question: Since superior bodhisattvas have a mind that is completely virtuous, and hence they will not be reborn out of delusions and karma, why wouldn't such a bodhisattva become completely engrossed in meditative equipoise on the bliss of peace and nirvana?

Answer:

Even here nothing harms 122
One with a powerful mind, and thus
For such a one, worldly existence
And nirvana are no different.

Hearers and solitary realisers are striving towards the ultimate goal of achieving what we call the bliss of nirvana, or the bliss of abiding in peace. As you would have heard before, when they achieve that state they will remain in blissful meditative equipoise for many eons on end. The question is that if the bodhisattva has also the ability to do so, why does a bodhisattva not engage in that blissful state of meditation? We have to consider and understand this well.

Bodhisattvas whose minds hold a special wish, and who do not create even the slightest ill deed though remaining in cyclic existence, are not tainted by its faults. Since even in cyclic existence nothing harms them, there is no difference, in terms of harm, whether they remain in cyclic existence or enter into nirvana.

As the commentary explains, superior bodhisattvas are constantly engaged in accumulating virtue. Their every deed and activity has the intention of benefiting sentient beings. Whatever activity they engage in is an act of virtue, so even though they remain in cyclic existence they are not tainted by its faults. What this means is that they do not have to experience the disadvantages of being in samsara like an ordinary being does. As was explained previously and extensively in the earlier part of the teaching, the faults of being in samsara are understood as the various types of suffering that a samsaric being has to undergo, such as the suffering of birth, the suffering of sickness, the suffering of old age and finally the suffering of death. We all have to experience those sufferings as a result of being born as ordinary human beings. Even though a superior bodhisattva may appear to us as having an ordinary body, they do not have to experience the sufferings of samsara that an ordinary being does. That is the main meaning of bodhisattvas not being tainted by samsaric faults.

Since even in cyclic existence nothing harms them, there is no difference in terms of harm, whether they remain in worldly existence or enter nirvana. Thus that they do not prefer one kind of peace to another.

What is being explained here is that for a superior bodhisattva there is no difference in terms of the bliss that is experienced in singled-pointed equipoise upon the bliss of nirvana or in helping sentient beings in cyclic existence. Because there is no difference in the bliss that they experience, they do not prefer one over the other, because even though they abide in the worldly samsaric existence, they are not bound by the sufferings of cyclic existence of birth, sickness, ageing and death. Even though they appear to us as ordinary beings, and it seems that they have to depend on food and clothing and get sick and even have to die, that does not, in fact, affect their mind, and they do not experience suffering. Wherever a superior bodhisattva abides they have a perpetual experience of bliss and happiness, so therefore they choose to remain and benefit sentient beings.

As explained in the teachings, there is no difference between the bliss that is experienced by an arhat or hearers and solitary realisers in a state of nirvana, and

that experienced by superior bodhisattvas who have attained the first ground. Even though it may appear that those who remain in what we call equipoise, or the bliss of peace, seem to experience more happiness, the bodhisattva experiences that same bliss. Therefore there is no hesitation and they remain in cyclic existence and benefit sentient beings. The difference lies in the different attitudes of the arhats or solitary realisers and hearers, compared with the attitude of a bodhisattva, whose only intention is to benefit other sentient beings.

We can understand how a bodhisattva has no hesitation and no difficulty in benefiting other sentient beings with the analogy of a mother's great love for an only child, especially when the child is sick. She will have no hesitation in helping her sick child. Similarly the bodhisattva has no hesitation in benefiting sentient beings.

There are only three verses left in this chapter, which we can cover in the next session.

*Transcribed from tape by Jenny Brooks
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© **Tara Institute**

Verses from *Yogic Deeds of Bodhisattvas* used with permission of Snow Lion Publications.