
Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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

Let us 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 engage in the practice of listening to the Mahayana teachings, and then put them into practice well.

Generating such a motivation, even for a few moments, will definitely establish very strong positive imprints in our mind.

Just as we have attempted in our short meditation session it is essential to incorporate meditation into our daily life.

Accumulating virtue and reducing familiarity with non-virtue through meditation¹

The literal meaning of meditation is to familiarise the mind with a virtuous object. So focusing on a virtuous object is the actual meditation practice. The reason why we find it so hard to actually engage in a proper meditation practice is because we are controlled by our thoughts, and these thoughts are in turn controlled by the delusions. That is why we find it very hard to maintain a focus on virtuous objects.

When we understand meditation practice in this way then we are able to incorporate the essential aspects of the path such as the four noble truths, the two truths and so forth into that practice. Indeed, when we realise how distracted our mind is, we can see how meditation practice reminds us of the first two noble truths – the truth of suffering and the truth of origination.

When we are able to maintain our focus on a virtuous object, then due to that familiarity we will be inclined to focus more and more on virtuous objects, even in our daily life. At a beginner's level however, we find that our minds are very easily influenced by non-virtuous objects, and that it is extremely difficult to maintain a focus on a virtuous object. Focussing on non-virtuous objects seems spontaneous and natural as it doesn't require any effort, and maintaining a focus on a virtuous object is very hard, like leading an old horse. This is because one's mind has become habituated to focussing on non-virtuous objects and distractions. That pattern has to be reversed, and the only way to do that is by putting an effort into really maintaining our focus on a virtuous object.

Then we will gradually find that our mind is more and more inclined to focus on virtuous objects as opposed to focusing on non-virtuous objects, and this indicates that the meditation practice has begun to take root within us. To reach our goal, we need to develop more and more familiarity with focussing on the virtuous objects at our everyday level. If someone has meditated for a long time and still finds it very hard to focus on virtuous objects, then

that goes to show that they have actually been missing the point, and there have not yet been any positive results from their meditation.

When we apply a correct understanding within the meditation practice itself, then it can serve as an optimum means to be able to accumulate more virtue and positive karma. That is what we really need to aim for. If we don't understand how meditation helps us to engage in virtue consistently, then even if we focus on an object for a certain period of time in meditation, we will find that when we come out of meditation we will go back to a completely distracted mind that is focussed on non-virtuous objects. Then the meditation practice really hasn't served much of a purpose.

Being able to maintain a focus on a virtuous object for even half an hour is very difficult now, because of our lack of true familiarity with the practice. And even if we are able to remain focused on an object without distraction for a while, we find ourselves still following distractions when we come out of our meditation. So our meditation practice hasn't served its ultimate purpose.

In simple terms, what we are intending to acquire for our wellbeing is the accumulation of virtue, and to reduce our familiarity with non-virtue and with creating non-virtuous karma. The way to achieve that is by becoming more and more familiar with focussing on virtue. When we are able to maintain a focus on virtue, then the conducive conditions for personal wellbeing will naturally be acquired. Of course we will see the benefit of this in this life, but we are also preparing for our future lives.

If we find ourselves engaging more and more in virtue, then we are naturally creating the causes to acquire favourable conditions in our future lives. Whereas if we find ourselves accumulating more non-virtue, then we are distancing ourselves from good conditions, not only in this life, but in our future lives as well. This, in simple terms, is what the outcome will be. Since we want good conditions, not only in this life but also in our future lives, we need to ensure that we actually engage in the ways and means to achieve that. This is how we need to understand meditation practice.

Incorporating understandings gained from the teachings into meditation practice

Understanding meditation in its entirety ensures that, from the very beginning, our meditation practice hits the mark of being an aid to accumulating virtue. On that basis we can then incorporate our meditation practice into all other aspects of our understanding of the teachings. When we understand that meditation practice encompasses the entire Dharma, then we will be able to relate to many other aspects of the teachings that we have studied to that practice. For those who have not done much study, meditation will be limited to focussing the mind on one object. Of course that in itself brings some solace to their mind as they get some peace and benefit from their meditation. But they will not be able to expand that understanding to the entire range of the teachings.

Whereas we here have all received many teachings, which encompass the entire range of the teachings on the extensive path, as well as the profound path. The extensive path of the teachings such as karma, the four noble truths, as well as the entire stages of the path can all be incorporated into our meditation practice. Likewise, when we incorporate into our meditation practice our understanding that, while practices such as the six perfections and so forth exist conventionally,

¹ These headings are not part of the structure of the headings in the commentary.

they lack inherent existence and are thus empty of true existence, then that includes the profound teachings of the Buddha.

When we keep in mind this really expansive view of how meditation practice ultimately encompasses the full range of the teachings, then we will see much more value in the meditation practice that we do. Also, when we familiarise ourselves with this practice and develop a more focussed mind, then that serves as the basis for achieving the highest level of concentration, which is calm abiding. As explained in the teachings, when calm abiding is achieved, then one is able to focus single-pointedly on any virtuous object for as long as one wishes. When the focus is placed on one virtuous object it will be as firm as a mountain, and when expanded one will be able to apply it to all virtuous objects.

This is how we need to understand the value of meditation practice.

Overcoming attachment and anger through meditation

Furthermore, if our meditation practice doesn't incorporate an understanding of karma, then we've completely missed the point of the teachings. Our practice is based on incorporating an understanding of how our karma works. If our meditation practice serves as a means to prevent one from acting upon non-virtuous negative states of mind such as anger, then it has taken root. But if one claims to be a meditator, and succumbs to anger as soon as the conditions for anger arise, then one has completely missed the point again. The teachings also explain that all the teachings of the Buddha can be incorporated into a means for overcoming negative states of mind such as anger, and attachment.

Likewise it is really essential that our meditation practice hits the mark of overcoming attachment. As the great masters have explained in very succinct and concise teachings, if one finds the meditation on seeing the imperfections of an object doesn't work to overcome attachment, then that is a sign that one is still holding onto the object of attachment from the depths of one's heart. If within the depths of one's heart one still grasps at the object as being appealing, then no matter how much one tries to focus on the imperfections of the object, one will find it doesn't work to overcome the attachment. If it doesn't take much at all to remember the object of attachment as being appealing, then that is a clear sign that one has been grasping at it for a very long time. That is why it doesn't take much effort for the attachment to surface. According to the advice of these great masters, when we meditate on the imperfections of an object, we need to attempt to really generate a true sense of understanding of the natural imperfections of the object, from the depths of our hearts. Only then does it become an antidote.

As I've mentioned previously, the very succinct advice that the Sakya Pandita offers is that attempting to meditate without hearing the teachings first is like trying to climb a rocky cliff without any fingers.

Both method and wisdom are necessary

Each of the five paths has two different stages; meditative equipoise and post-meditative equipoise. Why are both meditative equipoise and post-meditative equipoise stages needed?

As explained earlier, meditative equipoise is where one applies a particular antidote to overcome the delusions; whilst the post-meditative equipoise state is where one

applies the technique to other practices such as listening, and engaging in the practice of the remaining perfections as a way to purify negativities and accumulate merit. If only meditation were a sufficient cause for enlightenment, then there would be no need for a post-meditative state. Even on the tenth *bhumi* or ground, there is still the distinction between the state of meditative equipoise and post-meditative equipoise. That is because, even on the final ground, merit still has to be accumulated as a means to overcome the subtlest imprints of the delusions. Just as on the previous grounds, the bodhisattva on the tenth ground needs to come out of their meditative equipoise in order to accumulate further merit, and then finally goes back into meditative equipoise focussing on emptiness, and thus obtains enlightenment within that final state of meditative equipoise.

This clearly shows that both merit and wisdom are required in order to achieve the state of enlightenment. As Lama Tsong Khapa mentions in a text he composed, 'In the beginning I engaged in extensive listening, in the middle all the teachings appeared as instructions, and in the end I put them into practice day and night. I dedicate this to the flourishing of the Buddha's teachings'.

The great Kadampa masters have explained that the way to engage in practice is through extensive listening to the teachings, contemplating the meaning and then finally this is incorporated into the practice of meditation as a way to acquire wisdom. As mentioned earlier, without having received instructions through hearing it is futile to try to engage in a practice, as one will not be able to achieve much in the way of results. So we need to understand the importance of the combination of all of these aspects.

I've mentioned a few points that we need to really keep in mind. Essentially the practice one engages in should ultimately subdue one's mind and make it kinder and more gentle. That is why we engage in our studies and in personal practice. It is what I attempt to do regularly, and the message I'm giving to you is that I see it as being essential. The study that we are engaged in is really profound. As a technique to help subdue the mind, one could say that there's no greater text than the one we're studying. If it doesn't work to subdue your mind then I can safely say nothing else could.

I'm not implying that you are not already making attempts to put it into practice. All I'm doing is encouraging you to further enhance your intentions and practice to ensure that your study and practice is fruitful. That is all I am concerned about. So you should not think that I'm reprimanding you, or saying that you're not doing well. I'm just encouraging you. In presenting the teachings over all these years I feel that I have given you the material to work on. Now I'm encouraging you to actually use it as a way to gain some benefit from that.

As a way of complimenting you on your positive efforts I can tell you of the person who attended a seminar one or two years ago. He went to the morning session where he found that people were presenting in a very nice and gentle manner. People showed great understanding and knowledge, which they presented very clearly in a very kind manner. He was very impressed and very pleased with that, and when he shared that with me, that in turn made me feel very happy. The seminars have improved a lot in the way they've been conducted and how information is shared and so forth. That, in itself, shows that there have been positive improvements.

2.2.2.2.3.3. Refuting that other-knowers would be impossible if there were no self-knowers

This is subdivided into two:

2.2.2.2.3.3.1. Actual

2.2.2.2.3.3.2. Refuting that the illusory workings of the mind are inexpressible as being the very mind or other from it

2.2.2.2.3.3.1. Actual

This section begins with the argument:

Argument: If there is no self-knower, then there is no memory, and therefore the experience of objects and the consciousnesses of seeing, listening and the like become non-existent.

The argument that is presented here by the **Mind Only** school is an argument against the Madhyamika who do not assert a self-knower. The Mind Only argue that *if there is no self-knower, then there is no memory, and therefore the experience of objects and the consciousnesses of seeing, listening and the like, the five sense consciousnesses, would all be non-existent.* This is their argument.

25. *Just as the consciousnesses of seeing and listening,
Are not to be refuted here,
That which becomes the cause of suffering,
The formulation of true existence, is to be refuted.*

Then the commentary explains the verse, which serves as an answer by the **Madhyamikas**.

Answer: The reason conventionalities of sight by eye consciousness, hearing by ear consciousness and knowing by mental consciousness are not something to be abandoned is because they do not need to be abandoned as suffering is not generated merely through them, and also arhats possess these nominalities. They cannot be abandoned, because this would have to happen either through logic or through quotation, which would in turn also have to be refuted. If these are refuted, it is a mistake because one would adopt a nihilistic view.

Thus, because the formulation of these phenomena as truly existent is the cause of suffering, that becoming the cause of suffering is that which is to be abandoned, as it is the root of cyclic existence. If one does not reverse the root of cyclic existence, one does not stop cyclic existence, and because the true-grasping at forms, sounds and the like is shown to be the root of cyclic existence, it clearly shows that hearers and self-liberators realise the selflessness of phenomena.

The assertions made by the Karakpas and the like, that while the mere appearance to the sense consciousnesses are not objects of negation, but that if they are held as permanent or impermanent, existent or non-existent and so forth, then they are objects of negation, is a comeback response of the Chinese Abbot.

It first explains that *conventionalities of sight by eye consciousness, visual objects that are seen by the sight consciousness, hearing by ear consciousness and knowing by mental consciousness are not to be abandoned conventionally.* In other words, on a conventional level these consciousnesses are not to be abandoned. The reason, as Gyaltsab Je explains, is that *suffering is not generated merely through them, and also arhats possess these nominalities.* Saying that conventionalities of sight by eye consciousness, hearing and so forth are not to be abandoned carries the implication that they do need to be abandoned as truly existent. That is the point.

In saying that the *arhats possess these nominalities*, the commentary is explaining again that, on a conventional level, arhats have not abandoned a nominal eye consciousness, ear consciousness, and so forth, but that they have abandoned them as truly existent.

Then the commentary further says, *they cannot be abandoned, because this would have to happen either through logic or through quotation, which would in turn also have to be refuted.* What is being explained here is that if they are to be abandoned nominally, then it would have to be either through logic or through quotation. If they were abandoned *through either logic or quotation*, then the logic and the quotation themselves would also have to be abandoned because they are nominally existent. So this absurdity is being presented.

As explained further, *if these are refuted*, either conventionally or nominally, *it is a mistake because one would have to adopt a nihilistic view.* In other words, refuting the conventionalities of the sense consciousnesses would be adopting a nihilistic view.

If you relate this explanation to its context in the text, then you will derive an understanding of the logic being presented here.

The commentary further explains that *because the formulation of these phenomena as truly existent is the cause of suffering, that becoming the cause of suffering is that which is to be abandoned, as it is the root of cyclic existence.* This is the main point: it is the causes of cyclic existence that have to be abandoned.

The succinct point being presented here is that *if one does not reverse the root of cyclic existence, one does not stop cyclic existence.* Furthermore, *because true-grasping at forms, sounds and the like is shown to be the root of cyclic existence, it clearly shows that hearers and self-liberators realise the selflessness of phenomena.* These points were presented previously. The reason why hearers and self-liberators have to realise the selflessness of phenomena, is because without gaining that realisation they cannot overcome the very root of cyclic existence.

The reasons presented here are points to really think about, and apply on a personal level. That is *because the formulation of these phenomena as truly existent is the cause of suffering, and that becoming the cause of suffering is that which is to be abandoned.* If one wishes to overcome suffering, then the cause of suffering, which is grasping at true existence, has to be overcome. Cyclic existence is within the mental continuum of all living beings. So it is the grasping at true existence within one's own mental continuum that is the root cause of cyclic existence.

The way to overcome the root of cyclic existence within one's own mental continuum is by gaining the realisation of the lack of inherent existence, i.e. selflessness. As grasping at a true self is the root of cyclic existence, the realisation of selflessness within one's own mental continuum is the means to overcome the very root cause of cyclic existence.

This is really the essential point. As we gain a clearer understanding of what selflessness is, and as our correct understanding increases, then we move closer to achieving the goal of overcoming the root of cyclic existence. Conversely, if we befriend grasping at true existence within our own mental continuum, by making it feel welcome and comfortable, then we are never going to be able to overcome grasping at true existence. If we don't ensure that our practices become the means to overcome grasping at true existence, then they could actually strengthen that grasping. For some this actually happens – rather than reducing

grasping at a truly existent self, the grasping increases. So we need to be careful and protect ourselves from that.

I think the rest of the commentary can be understood without further explanation.

2.2.2.2.3.3.2. Refuting that the illusory workings of the mind are inexpressible as mind itself or other from it

The first two lines of verse relating to this read:

*26ab. If, 'There is no illusion apart from mind
And I do not hold them as not being separate'.*

Then the commentary presents the **Mind Only** assertion:

Mind Only: Because there is no outer existence there is no illusion, i.e., forms and the like, of different substance from the mind. And because of the earlier fault of 'at that time what is seen by what?', I do not hold them as not being separate.

The Mind Only say, *because there is no outer existence there is no illusion, i.e., forms and the like, of different substance from the mind.* So therefore they are not different substance from the mind, and *because of the earlier fault* which was raised as 'at that time what is seen by what?', I do not hold or assert them as not being separate as well.

Then the next four lines of verse present the **Madhyamika's** answer:

*26cd If it is a functionality, then how is it non-other?
If asserted to be non-other, then there is no functionality.*

*27ab. Just as illusions, though untrue, are
The perceived object, perceivers are too.*

The commentary says:

Madhyamaka: If forms and the like exist truly, they need to be true in the way they appear. In that case, as they appear as outer objects, they need to exist as outer objects. If they are outer functionalities, then how are they not of different substance from mind itself? It follows they are.

The **Mind Only** respond to that saying:

Mind Only: They are not of different substance.

Then the **Madhyamika** further reason:

Madhyamaka: It follows there is no true phenomenon because appearances are accepted to be false, and they do not exist in a different way. Although the illusions of forms and the like, which appear as outer objects but do not exist truly, are that perceived by the mind, and likewise, although the six consciousnesses are that which perceives, they are the same in not existing truly.

Therefore, the earlier fault of, 'If even the mistaken is non-existent' does not apply to the Madhyamaka, and this method would suit you, the Mind Only, well too.

The way of refuting the Mind Only assertions is by turning their own assertions back on them. The Mind Only school asserts that *forms and the like exist truly*, while the Madhyamika say that things lack true existence.

The Madhyamika counter the Mind Only argument by saying that if they do *exist truly*, they need to be true in the way that they appear. According to the Madhyamika, the criteria for something to be true is that it exists as it appears. If it does not exist in the way that it appears then it is false. So the Madhyamikas are reasoning with the Mind Only system, saying that *if form and the like exist truly*, they need to be true in the way they appear. In that case, because they appear as outer objects, they need to exist as outer objects. So the Madhyamikas

are saying: 'If you say that they are true, then it would have to exist in the way that they appear, and since they appear as outer objects, then they would have to be outer objects. And according to you, Mind Only, that would be an absurdity, because you assert them as being one with the mind.

Furthermore, *if they are outer functionalities, then how are they not of a different substance from the mind itself?* So the Madhyamikas are arguing that there is a contradiction in that if they are outer functionalities or outer phenomena, then how could they be one with the mind itself as you Mind Only assert. Because using your own logic it follows that they have to be separate.

Then the **Mind Only** respond saying, *they are not of different substance.*

The **Madhyamikas** say that *it follows there is no true phenomenon because appearances are accepted to be false, and they do not exist in a different way.*

Furthermore, *although the illusions of forms and the like, which appear as outer objects but do not exist truly, are that perceived by the mind, and likewise, although the six consciousnesses are that which perceives, they are the same in not existing truly.* The main point is that according to the Madhyamika both the perceiver and that which is perceived are the same in existing conventionally, and the same in not existing truly.

The concluding statement is that, *therefore, the earlier fault of, 'If even the mistaken is non-existent' does not apply to the Madhyamika, and this method would suit you, the Mind Only, well too.* So, the Madhyamika say, the fault, *if even the mistaken is non-existent*, does not apply to us in accordance with what we assert. Then the Madhyamikas conclude by saying to the Mind Only, 'It would actually suit you well if you were to adopt this understanding'.

2.2.2.2.4. Refuting that imputed objects are based on truly existent functionalities.

What is being refuted here is one of the fundamental assertions of the **Mind Only** school, which is that all imputed phenomena have to have a truly existent base. They say that without a truly existent base, other imputed objects such as space and so forth cannot exist. That is the assertion that is being refuted here.

What the Mind Only school assert is that dependent phenomena, also translated as other-powered phenomena, have to rely on a truly existent base for their existence.

The **Madhyamika** say that the very term *other-powered* or *dependent phenomena* itself indicates that they have to depend on others for their functionality. Therefore they cannot be truly existent.

Both schools are referring to the same basis, that of other-powered or dependent phenomena, which are all things within samsara and nirvana. The Mind Only school say that all things within samsara and nirvana are dependent on a basis which is truly existent, and that is what is being refuted or negated by the Madhyamika school in this part of the text.

The first lines of verse under this heading read:

*27cd. If, 'Cyclic existence is based on functionalities,
Otherwise it would become like space',*

28ab. If non-functionalities are based on functionalities

How can they perform an action? Then under this verse the Mind Only assertion is presented:

Mind Only. The false and imputed phenomena of cyclic existence and beyond are each based on a truly existent functionality, because everything deceptive is based on a truly existent basis. For example, even when a tree stump is mistaken for a human the tree stump itself exists truly. Likewise, cyclic existence is based on a truly existent basis. If it were not, then it would become a non-functionality, like space.

The meaning of this debate is put forth in the *Compendium of Trainings* like this, and to explain it in any other way is not the meaning.

Then the **Madhyamikas** respond to that:

Madhyamaka: If the false non-functionalities of samsara and nirvana depend on a truly existent basis of deception, then how could they produce the results of bondage and liberation? It follows they could not - because the truly existent basis does not exist. This reason is put forth in the *Compendium of Deeds*.

As quite clearly presented here, the **Mind Only** say that *the false and imputed phenomena of cyclic existence and beyond are each based on a truly existent functionality, because everything deceptive is based on a truly existent basis*. Even what is deceptive has to have a truly existent basis.

The example that they use to illustrate the point is: *even when a tree stump is mistaken for a human, the tree stump itself exists truly*. When you see a tree stump in the distance it may appear as if there is a human there, which is a deceptive appearance. However the basis of that deceptive appearance, which is a tree stump, actually does exist. They say that this is a sign that it exists truly. Another example that is also used in the teachings is a striped rope that appears to be a snake. Again, they say that while the appearance of a snake is deceptive the striped rope does actually exist. Therefore, they say, that is a reason why things exist truly.

With that illustration they then say, *likewise, cyclic existence is based on a truly existent basis. If it were not, then it would become a non-functionality, like space*. So they consider space as a non-functional phenomenon.

The **Madhyamikas** reply that *if the false non-functionalities of samsara and nirvana depend on a truly existent basis of deception, then how could they produce the results of bondage and liberation? It follows they could not - because the truly existent basis does not exist. This reason is put forth in the Compendium of Deeds*. So this meticulous reasoning is presented in the *Compendium of Deeds*.

Then come these two lines of verse:

*28cd. Your mind becomes completely isolated,
Without any support.*

This is the actual reasoning that is presented.

The commentary explains:

According to your Mind Only system the mind becomes an isolated self illuminating self-knower, without the supportive distortion into apprehender and apprehended and the like. This follows because, since you accept the appearance of object and object-possessor as being distant as not existing the way it appears, there is no outer existence, and because the appearances of forms and so forth as consciousness were refuted earlier. In this case the appearances of forms and such become objects distinct and unrelated to consciousness, and although the appearances of forms are tainted, they cannot taint the substance of consciousness.

This is actually quite a clear explanation if you go through it slowly. Basically, the **Mind Only** are saying that apprehender and apprehended are one and there is no distinction between them. However, according to the **Madhyamika** system of course there is a distinction. So that is what is being presented in this explanation.

So the next verse under the same heading is:

*29. When the mind is devoid of that perceived
Everyone will have gone thus.
In that case, what is the benefit
Of that imputed as mere mind?*

The commentary explains:

If this is accepted: It follows that when the mind is free from the dualistic appearance of apprehender and apprehended, then all sentient beings become thus gone ones and effortlessly attain liberation - because all minds are free from the appearances of apprehender and apprehended.

If however one accepts this position, then it follows that there is not the slightest need to comprehend the lack of apprehender and apprehended as being of different substance, which is labelled mere mind, in order to achieve the omniscient transcendental wisdom.

The explanation is that *it follows that when the mind is free from the dualistic appearance of apprehender and apprehended, then all sentient beings become thus gone ones and effortlessly attain liberation*. According to the **Mind Only** system the apprehension of form and the mind apprehending form being of different substance is the grasping to self of phenomena. So according to them, if things did exist externally then this is how it would have to exist, i.e. apprehender and apprehended being distinct and of different substance. Thus, they assert that the apprehender and apprehend are devoid of being distinct.

So the **Madhyamikas** are saying: at the time *when the mind is free from the dualistic appearance of apprehender and apprehended*, then all sentient beings by default would already be *thus gone ones* or enlightened buddhas *effortlessly*, and *attain liberation - because, according to you, Mind Only, all minds would have be free from the appearances of apprehender and apprehended*. Since, according to you *all minds are free from the appearances of apprehender and apprehended*, then this would mean that sentient beings are effortlessly and spontaneously liberated. Again according to the Mind Only, form and the apprehension of form being devoid of being different substance, is the selflessness of phenomena. Thus the **Madhyamikas** conclude: *then it follows that there is not the slightest need to comprehend the lack of apprehender and apprehended as being of different substance, which is labelled mere mind, in order to achieve the omniscient transcendental wisdom*.

We can conclude here for the evening. Once you are able to apply the logical reasoning in its proper place then it will be easy to understand and read the text. It just requires the application of logic.

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

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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