
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

༄༅། །སྤྱད་རྒྱུ་མེད་མེད་དཔའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འདུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

27 September 2016

As usual let us begin with our practice of meditation, based on the motivation that we had generated during the recitation of the refuge and bodhicitta prayer. Indeed, whenever one engages in meditation practice it would be good to first begin by generating refuge and bodhicitta.

That requires not just reciting the words but actually spending some time generating a strong mind of going for refuge and trying one's best to generate a bodhicitta motivation. If one regularly spends some time doing this, then with familiarity one's practice will surely improve.

If one goes straight into meditation without first generating a proper motivation, such as taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, then the practice will not have much effect. We have recited these prayers thousands of times, but if we have not taken much initiative to really understand the implication of taking refuge and what it really means to generate the bodhicitta motivation, thus gaining some affinity with this, then all the recitations we've done so far would not amount to much benefit. I have mentioned many times before that generating a proper mind of refuge should not be underestimated; it is a really essential practice that subsumes the essential points of the entire path.

To incorporate a real understanding of refuge, one needs to spend significant time thinking about the two causes of going for refuge. The first is generating a fear of the sufferings of cyclic existence in general, and the sufferings of the lower realms in particular. The second cause is to generate the mind of complete trust and reliance on the objects of refuge, the Three Jewels. If one takes the time to generate the first cause in one's mind, it will familiarise our mind with genuine renunciation. Then, when one contemplates the second cause, one sees that the object of refuge has the full potential to protect one from having to experience the sufferings of the lower realms and cyclic existence. When one places one's full confidence and reliance in the objects of refuge e.g. in the Buddha, by saying 'You have the full ability to protect me. I definitely don't want to experience unimaginable great sufferings, so please bless my mind to be able to engage in the practices of developing renunciation as a way to be free from all sufferings'. Contemplating how all beings are also suffering and have the equal right to be free from suffering, and generating bodhicitta right after this, is the means to ensure our refuge becomes the Mahayana refuge.

Therefore, we do not just wish for ourselves to be free from suffering but for all living beings to be free from all sufferings of the lower realms and cyclic existence. For that purpose, with the understanding that the objects of refuge have the full ability to free oneself and all beings from all suffering, one makes supplications to request

blessings for oneself and all beings to be free from all suffering.

To make this more meaningful it would be more effective at times adopt ordinary language, as if we were speaking to a close friend, saying for example, 'I know that you, the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha, have the full ability to help me and all sentient beings, so please grant me your blessings to subdue my mind.' When one thinks like this in ordinary terms, it can inspire us and have a stronger effect on our mind. At our ordinary level it's good to apply whatever means that work for our mind.

Another significant point about taking wholehearted refuge is that it is the foundation for receiving all other vows, e.g. pratimoksha or self-liberation vows. The teachings explain that the real foundation for receiving the vows is generating a mind of renunciation, and this in turn is based on refuge.

Going back to the two causes of generating refuge, when one wholeheartedly thinks about the suffering of cyclic existence, and particularly the suffering of the lower realms, one develops a strong sense of fear about having to experience that suffering; the greater the fear the stronger the determination to be free from the sufferings will naturally be. So when one develops that strong aspiration to be free from these sufferings, one naturally develops the second cause, one naturally develops the second cause, which is the mind that confidently understands that the objects of refuge have the ability to help one to be free. This in turn helps one to develop strong renunciation in one's mind.

More significantly, the causes for obtaining higher status in our next life involve the practice of ethics, which is to observe the vows that we have taken. This then protects one from being born in the lower realms. When one practises moral discipline and keeps the vows with the strong intention to be free from the lower realms, this becomes the cause for one to obtain a higher rebirth in the human or god realms in the next life. When one practices moral discipline with the intention that it be the cause to be free from cyclic existence in all the six realms, that then becomes the cause for one to attain liberation.

The teachings explain that when one incorporates these sentiments while taking refuge, it will ensure that the effects become really sound. Further, when taking refuge is preceded with the intention that it will be the cause for all living beings to be free from all suffering, then it becomes the specific Mahayana refuge, and a cause for enlightenment. In this way we can understand how the refuge practice incorporates the entire path. It is because refuge combines so many essential points of the path that His Holiness the Dalai Lama often emphasises that the act of going for refuge is an essential practice.

Actually, taking refuge is not unique to Buddhism. All religions have the practice of taking refuge that precedes whatever other practices or rituals they engage in. For example, before starting a ceremony Christians make the sign of the cross, representing the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Every tradition has an act of refuge essential to their faith. If we consider ourselves Buddhists then it is important to understand what our objects of refuge are, what they entail, what it actually means to take refuge

and so forth. As mentioned earlier, when we expand our understanding of going for refuge, it actually combines all the essential points of the path.

If our understanding of refuge is limited to just the recitation of the refuge prayer, then it would be not much more than that, just a recitation. If we fail to incorporate the actual understanding, then when we recite the prayer, it will be like 'Oh yes, I'll just recite this refuge prayer that I know from memory'. But then we will find that this doesn't really move our mind. If this happens, it's a sign we have not paid much attention to the actual meaning of refuge.

As mentioned earlier, the essential part of refuge is thinking about the two causes. If one takes time to contemplate the two causes of going for refuge in depth, it will move one's mind to the point where one really feels compelled to go for refuge wholeheartedly. This means one has contemplated the actual reality, not just imagined the sufferings of the lower realms and the suffering of cyclic existence in general, but contemplates the prospect of having to actually experience them personally.

Reflecting on this will move one's mind to the point where one feels the desperate urgency to be free from having to experience all those unimaginable sufferings, with the understanding that the objects of refuge have the full ability to help free oneself. Then the practice of going for refuge won't just be words, but a real act of going for refuge from the depths of one's heart.

I have noticed that Christian priests are also referred to as 'Father'. There might be different subtleties; grosser level and subtler level connotations of what 'Father' means. The priest himself can't be referred to as God so maybe it is more suitable for him if he refers to himself as 'Father'.

A student says that Christianity is patriarchal and all the higher positions go to men.

That seems to have changed in recent years. Now apparently women can also become priests. I noticed soon after I came to Australia that the gender discrimination was very prominent. Even in the same jobs men were paid much more and women were paid less. This must be true in other countries too, however I did notice that this was prevalent here. Equality and women's rights are significant issues to consider and will be beneficial for future generations.

(Meditation)

Now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I definitely need to achieve enlightenment, so for this purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice well.

The extent to which one makes this a commitment, prior to engaging in the teachings, will ensure the practice becomes more meaningful and purposeful.

2.2. Establishing that even just to attain liberation one needs to realise emptiness

There are two subdivisions:

2.2.1. Argument

2.2.2. Answer

2.2.1. Argument

The commentary begins by presenting the argument of a hearer opponent, who is a proponent of the Hinayana or Lower Vehicle tenets.

Firstly, it is good to understand the difference between a hearer who is a proponent of the Hinayana tenets and a hearer who has entered the path. A hearer who has entered the path doesn't necessarily have to be a proponent of the tenets of the Lower Vehicle, as there are also hearers who are proponents of the Mind Only School's tenets as well as the Middle Way School's tenets, i.e. the Svatantrika and Prasangika views. Hearers who are proponents of the Lower Vehicle tenets can, of course, definitely enter the path because they are able to develop renunciation. However, as they hold the views of Lower Vehicle tenets, they will not be able to advance further than the path of accumulation, because to attain the path of preparation and onwards one has to have the correct understanding of emptiness.

According to the Prasangika, all hearers and solitary realisers who are on the path of preparation, all the way up to becoming an arhat, have to necessarily be proponents of the Prasangika view because they would have gained the realisation of emptiness. That is because without the correct understanding of emptiness, followed by the actual realisation of emptiness, one could not possibly obtain the path of seeing and onwards. According to the Prasangika, anyone who realises emptiness would necessarily have to be a proponent of the Madhyamika Prasangika view.

So, a hearer who has realised emptiness would be a hearer who is on the Hinayana path and a proponent of the Mahayana tenet. This means that a proponent of the Mahayana tenets doesn't necessarily have to be a Mahayanist. Further, this means that someone who is a proponent of the Mahayana vehicle hasn't necessarily entered the Mahayana path.

We claim to hold the views of the Mahayana tenets, but we may not have entered the path of the Mahayana vehicle yet. The criterion for entering the Mahayana path is generating actual bodhicitta. Unless one has developed bodhicitta, which is the hallmark or doorway to the Mahayana path, there is no way one can enter the Mahayana path. Therefore one needs to know the distinction between a proponent of the Mahayana, and an actual Mahayanist who has entered the Mahayana path. This clarifies the distinction between hearers who are Hinayana proponents, and hearers who are proponents of Mahayana tenets.

One also needs to understand that there is a distinction between the uncommon Hinayana sutras and the common teachings shared by the Hinayana and the Mahayana. There are hearers who adhere only to the uncommon Hinayana teachings, and hearers who adhere to the shared teachings, which are common to both the Hinayana and the Mahayana. So, the hearer opponent

referred to in the commentary refers specifically to one who adheres to the Hinayana tenets.

Their argument is:

*40ab. One becomes liberated by seeing truth.
Why should one see emptiness?*

Hearer opponent: One will attain the result of a liberated arhat by meditating on the direct perception of the four noble truths' sixteen aspects of impermanence and so forth.

This opponent posits that by meditating on the direct perception of the four noble truths and the sixteen aspects, one becomes liberated. One needs to understand here that they are referring to the coarse understandings of the four noble truths.

For example, in relation to the four aspects of the truth of suffering i.e. impermanence, suffering, empty and selfless there is no specific difference in grossness and subtlety of impermanence between the Hinayana proponent's view and the Prasangika view. Impermanence is basically the same insofar that functional things are momentary – i.e. changing from moment to moment. So, there is no further subtlety than that.

With suffering, however, there some differences, but particularly in relation to emptiness and selflessness there is a huge difference of grossness and subtlety between the lower schools and the Prasangika. So this hearer proponent is essentially saying that by meditating on the direct perceptions of the four noble truths and the sixteen aspects, (which are only on the coarse level) one can become liberated. I have explained the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths in detail when we did the teachings on the Middle Way.¹

As further stated in the commentary:

Why should one realise the emptiness of true existence of all phenomena for that? It is without purpose and even unsuitable.

Here again we need to understand that the proponents of the Hinayana tenets, i.e. the Sautrantika and Vaibhashika, do not accept the selflessness of phenomena. Gyalsab Je further clarifies this in the comment relating to the opponents' views using the words of Lama Tsong Khapa.

2.2.2. Answer

The commentary beings by stating:

Answer: For this hearer opponent not only does one not need to realise emptiness to attain enlightenment, they do not even accept the concept of selflessness of phenomena. These, who do not accept the Mahayana sutras to be the words of the Buddha, are the main opponent.

As explained here, the main opponents are those who do not accept the Mahayana sutras. This implies that some proponents of the Lower Vehicle do not accept the Mahayana as the true words of the Buddha. The commentary further explains:

To refute them and to refute on the side also those who, while positing the Mahayana sutras as valid, assert that one does not need to realise the selflessness of phenomena to attain the result of an arhat.

Again, while some may assert the Mahayana sutras as the words of the Buddha, they do not, however, assert that one has to realise the selflessness of phenomena or emptiness to attain the result of becoming an arhat.

I state these sources which, refuting these opponents, establish that only the wisdom realising emptiness is the path to be liberated from existence.

The point here is that positing any sutra as valid (in this case a Mahayana sutra) means it has to be infallible in relation to the meaning that is presented. Hence, to present the Mahayana vehicle as valid requires accepting whatever is presented in the Mahayana vehicle to be infallible. Some may accept the Mahayana vehicle as valid on one hand, but then say that one doesn't need to realise the selflessness of phenomena to attain the result of an arhat to be liberated, which is a contradiction. These include not only the lower schools of the Sautrantika and Vaibhashika but also the Mind Only schools, and within the Middle Way school the Svatantrika as well, for they do not adhere to the correct understanding of the view of selflessness of phenomena.

The answer to the opponents' arguments is subdivided into three headings, which are meticulously presented.

2.2.2.1. Establishing that only the wisdom realising emptiness is the path to liberation from existence

That is, in order to be free from cyclic existence one cannot do without the wisdom realising emptiness.

2.2.2.2. Establishing it as the path to the non-abiding nirvana

Further, even to attain non-abiding nirvana i.e. full enlightenment, the realisation of emptiness is essential.

2.2.2.3. Advising that it is suitable for those wishing for liberation to meditate on emptiness

2.2.2.1. ESTABLISHING THAT ONLY THE WISDOM REALISING EMPTINESS IS THE PATH TO LIBERATION FROM EXISTENCE

This is divided into two:

2.2.2.1.1. Establishing it with Mahayana sutras

2.2.2.1.2. Establishing it with logic

The detailed explanation of this is presented in the Middle Way teachings that I have explained in the past.²

2.2.2.1.1. Establishing it with Mahayana sutras

*40cd. Because it is taught in scripture that
Without this path there is no enlightenment.*

It follows one definitely needs to realise emptiness to attain the result of a hearer or self-liberator arhat. For what reason? Because in the *Sutras of the Wisdom Gone Beyond* it teaches that without meditating on this chapter realising emptiness one cannot attain any of the three types of enlightenment.

In the *Great Commentary on the Introduction to the Bodhisattva Practices* it quotes the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras as saying that those with a recognition of functionalities cannot attain liberation, and that all those perfectly enlightened in the three times, as well as the results from a stream enterer up to a self-liberator are attained only in dependence on this perfection of wisdom. The scriptures refer not only to the highest enlightenment.

¹ See the teachings of June 2002.
Chapter 9

² See 2005 teachings.

Further: I am not going to cite the innumerable quotes from the sutras showing that hearers and self-liberators realise the selflessness of phenomena. In these two lines Mahayana sutras were stated as an argument out of an understanding that some of those following the hearer's path accept the reasons of Mahayana sutras.

If one thinks, 'Is it not devoid of reason to state arguments to those that do not accept Mahayana quotes as valid' then there is no fault. The opponent does not need to immediately establish the three modes of all arguments. The pervasion of the argument is also established here, just as it is below through the reason of similarity and normality.

It establishes the point of this reason that the wisdom realising emptiness is the path to attain the three types of enlightenment. Although it is not established as the word of the Buddha by establishing the pervasion, there is no fault in relating the proof to quotation. Master Shantideva cited these texts also because he knew it would refute the wrong conception of thinking of isolated Mahayana sutra as not the words of the Buddha.

The commentary opens with a response to the Lower Vehicle hearer opponent who states that one does not have to realise emptiness in order to attain liberation. It confirms that one definitely does need to realise emptiness to attain the result of hearer or self-liberator arhat.

It notes that if one were to ask the reason, it is explained in the *Sutras of the Wisdom Gone Beyond* which teach that without meditating on the path realising emptiness one cannot attain any of the three types of enlightenment i.e. the hearer's enlightenment, the self-liberator's enlightenment or the bodhisattva's enlightenment.

It further explains:

In the *Great Commentary on the Introduction to the Bodhisattva Practices* it quotes the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras as saying that those with a recognition of functionalities cannot attain liberation ...

What is referred to here as the 'recognition of functionalities' is the recognition of true existence or grasping at a self. Then the commentary further explains

... and that all those perfectly enlightened in the three times, as well as the results from a stream enterer up to a self-liberator are attained only in dependence on this perfection of wisdom.

This means that enlightened beings such as the buddhas and all those perfectly enlightened in the three times, as well as the results from a stream enterer up to a self-liberator, are attained only in dependence on this perfection of wisdom.

These include once returner, never returner and all the stages of the hearer's path, as well as the self-liberator's path all the way to the self-liberator arhat. All these are only attained in dependence on the perfection of wisdom, i.e. the realisation of emptiness.

The emphasis here is that the scriptures refer not only to the highest enlightenment. As quoted earlier, this refers to the Buddha of the three times, as well as the result of the stream enterer up to the self-liberator arhat. These are all mentioned in the teachings as those who depend on the perfection of wisdom, or the realisation of emptiness.

It does not just refer to the highest enlightenment as needing to understand the realisation of emptiness, but all of these earlier mentioned stages.

Then Gyaltsab Je mentions:

I am not going to cite the innumerable quotes from the sutras showing that hearers and self-liberators realise the selflessness of phenomena.

Here he is indicating that there are many citations from other texts as well.

In these two lines Mahayana sutras were stated as an argument out of an understanding that some of those following the hearer's path accept the reasons of Mahayana sutras.

In referring to the two lines from the root text, the commentary further mentions:

In these two lines Mahayana sutras were stated as an argument out of an understanding that some of those following the hearer's path accept the reasons of Mahayana sutras.

This indicates that some followers of the hearer's path do accept the reasons of the Mahayana sutras. As such it implies this argument is for those who do not accept the Mahayana as the Buddha's words. Of course those who accept that the Mahayana teachings are the Buddha's words do not need to use any of the arguments presented here.

The next is:

Is it not devoid of reason to state arguments to those that do not accept Mahayana quotes as valid, then there is no fault. The opponent does not need to immediately establish the three modes of all arguments. The pervasion of the argument is also established here, just as it is below through the reason of similarity and normality.

As an answer to that argument the commentary says:

The opponent does not need to immediately establish the three modes of all arguments.

In other words, the opponent does not need to have to completely accept all the valid reasons of that argument right away.

The pervasion of the argument is also established here, just as it is below through the reason of similarity and normality.

The reasons of similarity and normality are presented next, along with the pervasiveness of these reasons.

The commentary further explains:

It establishes the point of this reason that the wisdom realising emptiness is the path to attain the three types of enlightenment. Although it is not established as the word of the Buddha by establishing the pervasion, there is no fault in relating the proof to quotation.

The master [Shantideva] also cited these texts because he knew it would refute the wrong conception of thinking the Mahayana sutras are not the words of the Buddha. It establishes the point of this reason that the wisdom realising emptiness is the path to attain the three types of enlightenment. Although it is not established as the word of the Buddha by establishing the pervasion, there is no fault in relating the proof to quotation.

2.2.2.1.2. Establishing it with logic

This is subdivided into two:

2.2.2.1.2.1. Establishing it by way of similarity

2.2.2.1.2.2. Establishing it with common reason, which earlier mentioned normality.

2.2.2.1.2.1. Establishing it by way of similarity

*41ab. If the Mahayana is not established
Then how are your texts established?*

Argument: The Mahayana Sutras are not established for me because I do not regard them as the words of the Buddha, and I do not accept them to be valid. Stating them as an argument to establish that the realisation of emptiness is also the path for the hearers and self-liberators makes the argument equal to the proposition.

Answer: How do you establish the quotes belonging to the Hinayana basket, which you accept to be valid, as the words of the Buddha?

The reply to this by the opponent is as follows:

Reply: The Hinayana sutras are the words of the Buddha because we both accept them to be the words of the Buddha.

The opponent says here that presenting to me that the Mahayana sutras are valid, and quoting citations to prove it, doesn't work for me, because I don't even accept the Mahayana sutras as valid from the beginning.

The next lines of verse read:

*41cd. Since they are established for both of us.
Initially they are not established for you.*

This is the reasoning of similarity.

*42ab. The conditions through which you generate
faith
Are the same for the Mahayana.*

The commentary explains the meaning of these lines.

The reasons are exactly the same here because immediately upon birth, and before you established the meaning of the scriptures with logic, also the Hinayana basket was not established as valid for you. But later, through the condition of accepting them to be valid scriptures the *Great Treatise* and so forth, which shows the pure method within in the Vinaya and the Sutra, as well as not contradicting the Abhidharma, the method for comprehending the words and meanings, you generated faith in the sutras. The arguments with which you established that valid scripture as believable apply equally to the Mahayana Sutras.

The commentary states that the reasons presented are exactly the same as a Mahayana proponent refuting the Hinayana proponent who does not accept the Mahayana as the words of the Buddha, particularly *The Perfection of Wisdom*. Having asked 'How do you accept the baskets of the Hinayana as being the valid words of the Buddha?' they respond by saying 'because we both accept them'. Then the commentary mentions here:

Immediately upon birth, and before you established the meaning of the scriptures with logic, also the Hinayana basket was not established as valid for you.

What you state now as the Hinayana basket being valid words of the Buddha was not something you could establish right from the beginning. To see them as valid you had to go through a process of learning about them,

studying them, and then it dawned on you that they were actually valid. However, before engaging in studies to gain understanding, they would not have appeared to you as being valid.

How they accept them to be valid scriptures is done by:

Accepting them to be valid scriptures of the *Great Treatise* and so forth, which shows the pure method within in the Vinaya and the Sutra, as well as not contradicting the Abhidharma.

So in relation to the three baskets of the Hinayana sutra, it is related that the earliest disciples of the Buddha gathered as a council to establish that they had heard it from the Buddha themselves. Then due to that and further engaging in training, such as applying the training of the three higher trainings of morality, contemplation and meditation and wisdom in this way, they tested out the teachings, as mentioned here:

The method for comprehending the words and meanings through reason, you generated faith in the sutras.

They established the reasons for validity through earlier accounts of how the sutras came into being, as well as having tested out the treatises through reason and logic. Then they are accepted as valid.

'Just as that is the case for you', the Prasangika school says:

The arguments with which you established that valid scripture as believable apply equally to the Mahayana sutras.

This is equally true for the Mahayana sutras. When you engage in understanding and practice, test them out with reason and logic, then you'll establish the teachings of the Hinayana basket as valid words of the Buddha. It is exactly the same for the Mahayana sutras.

The next lines of verse read:

*42cd. If true because two others assert it, then
The Vedas and so forth also become true.*

43a. If you say, 'The Mahayana is in question',

The commentary explains here:

If this is not the case, and something becomes valid because two random people accept it, then it follows that also the Vedas and so forth are true, because there are two parties that accept them to be true.

Argument: Because you also accept the Hinayana sutras that I accept as the words of the Buddha, we do not have any dispute there. But because I do not accept the Mahayana sutras to be the words of the Buddha, we have a dispute in that regard.

The explanation here is quite clear. If it is not the case that something becomes valid because two random parties accept it, then it follows that the Vedas, which are non-Buddhist tenets, are also true because two parties accept them to be true.

The opponent presents the argument:

Argument: Because you also accept the Hinayana sutras that I accept as the words of the Buddha, we do not have any dispute there.

The opponent says that 'there is no dispute with the baskets of the Hinayana teachings because you accept it and I accept it. But because I do not accept the Mahayana

sutras as the words of the Buddha we have a dispute'. So what the opponent is presenting here is that the very fact that there is a dispute over the Mahayana teachings indicates that it is questionable whether they are the words of the Buddha.

What is being presented as an argument is that because there is a dispute that is a reason to say that they are not valid. The remaining part of the verse that reflects on this meaning is:

*43bcd. Non-Buddhists also question the texts,
And other texts are also questioned by
Self and other. Therefore they should be
abandoned.*

Answer: The Hinayana scriptures are questioned by non-Buddhists and Hinayanists alike. Also, while the Hinayana scriptures are accepted by all eighteen Hinayana schools as valid, there are individual quotes, such as the quotes that show the existence of an intermediate state, which are accepted by some Hinayana schools as the words of the Buddha, but are also not accepted by some Hinayana schools. It follows that the Hinayana baskets being valid is also something to give up, as they contain parts that are disputed by Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools.

The commentary explains the Hinayana response that if you cannot accept the Mahayana sutras as being valid words of the Buddha because there is a dispute, then it follows that the Hinayana scriptures are also questioned by both non-Buddhists and Hinayanists, on the same basis. Within the Hinayana scriptures some texts assert that there is a self, and others refute that saying that there is no self. Also in terms of permanence, there are texts that say some functional things are permanent, and other texts say they are not permanent and so forth. There are many points of disagreement and thus dispute.

The commentary further mentions here that while:

Hinayana scriptures are accepted by all eighteen Hinayana schools as valid, however there are individual quotes, such as the quotes that show the existence of an intermediate state, which are accepted by some Hinayana schools as the words of the Buddha, but are also not accepted by some Hinayana schools.

As such it further reasons that:

It follows that the Hinayana baskets being valid is also something to give up,

The earlier Hinayanist argument was that because there is a dispute it would not be valid. Leaving aside non-Buddhist schools even within the Hinayana subdivisions, where there are disputes and arguments about different points, this passage implies that since there is a dispute, then it would have to be considered as not valid and be given up:

As they contain parts that are disputed by Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools.

The commentary mentions an example of a Hinayana sutra about the existence of an intermediate state, which some Hinayana schools would accept as valid, while others do not. Another example is the *Vinaya Sutra*; the Tibetan system follows a particular system of the Vinaya from *mulasavastivda* tradition, whereas the Theravadin follow the school of the elders, which is a slightly different system that presents the Vinaya vows. There are

slight differences in terms of the numbers of the full ordination vows, with the system followed by the Tibetan tradition having slightly more in number, albeit subsumed into the main ones. So in fact, there is not much difference in that regard as well.

This reminds me of the time His Holiness the Dalai Lama spoke of meeting two Theravadin monks in a gathering somewhere; elder monks who His Holiness showed respect to and who in turn showed respect to him. When they sat down to have a little discussion he noted that one of the elder Theravadin monks said that 'we are the same in being followers of the Buddha, but there is a big difference between us'.

His Holiness was taken a little bit by surprise, then he actually started going through the vows in the *Vinaya Sutra* until it came to their notice that in terms of the Vinaya there was not much difference at all. His Holiness said that in terms of quoting and numbering the vows etc. he happened to have a better memory that day to quote even more recitations from the sutras. His Holiness commented that it made him feel good on that occasion to be able to quote the sutras well. That was in Tasmania.

Later, as a result of this encounter with the Theravadin elders, His Holiness the Dalai Lama made a particular proposal to have meetings with the monks from the Theravadin tradition to discuss these vows and the Vinaya sutras and other differences and the similarities between the different schools. Some meetings have taken place since.

In a recent teaching in Dharamsala, His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentioned that as a result of these meetings many Theravadin monks from the Thai tradition attended these teachings, as did the most senior abbot from that tradition. Apparently the abbot of the Theravadin monks was astonished at the Dalai Lama's depth of understanding and knowledge of the sutras.

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

*Transcript prepared by Judy Mayne
Edit 1 by Jill Lancashire
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*