
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

༄༅། །བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་རྒྱུད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

4 April 2017

While maintaining the motivation generated during the prayers, we can now engage in our meditation practice. [meditation]

Generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings.

Our basic understanding of the bodhicitta motivation is a seed of bodhicitta, so it's a matter of further developing and enhancing it. Without putting some effort into increasing our level of bodhicitta it will not just suddenly and spontaneously develop within ourselves. Nourishing the seed of bodhicitta is our personal responsibility.

As explained many times previously, you have received the teachings and have an understanding of the different methods of developing bodhicitta, such as the sevenfold cause and effect sequence and the technique of exchanging self with others. Based on your understanding of these techniques, you need to familiarise yourself with them again and again; that is how you actually engage in the practice of developing bodhicitta.

The bodhisattvas who have already developed bodhicitta did done so by using these very techniques and are constantly increasing their bodhicitta by benefiting sentient beings, There's no other way to develop bodhicitta other than training your mind in the techniques presented.

If the bodhisattvas spontaneously generate the mind of bodhicitta without any effort, then we might also resolve to wait around for the day that we spontaneously generate it too. But since that is not possible, as I regularly emphasise, it is important for us to train our mind to become more compassionate and kind. For every effort we put into doing this, the benefits will definitely be reaped in this life, and in many future lives. So making every attempt in training our mind to cultivate bodhicitta is definitely of great benefit right now and in the long term.

If you wish to experience good results, then that is entirely dependent on generating positive and virtuous states of mind now. Likewise if we wish to avoid the experiences of suffering, then that is dependent on avoiding negative states of mind. What this shows is that we personally have the entire responsibility for securing a good future with positive results for ourselves, and avoiding negative results being experienced.

2.3.2.3.3. The reasoning refuting generation and cessation of existence and non-existence

This relates to refuting the effect and has three subdivisions:

2.3.2.3.3.1. Refuting inherent generation upon establishing the reason

2.3.2.3.3.2. Refuting this refutes inherent existence
2.3.2.3.3.3. Thus, establishing the equanimity of samsara and nirvana

2.3.2.3.3.1. Refuting inherent generation upon establishing the reason

With the earlier explanations from the text, the following passages should be easier to understand.

The first verse reads:

145. *For a functionality to come into existence
What need is there for a cause?
Even in the case that it does not exist,
What need is there for a cause?*

The commentary explains:

For a functionality to come into existence inherently, what need is there for a cause, for that which exists inherently does not need to be generated? Further, in the case that such a result does not exist, then what need is there for a cause as there is an inability to generate it? As all results are never generated at the time of the cause, this is not refuted, but what is refuted is that they are not generated at all.

The refutation of generation of an existing result, is the refutation of the result that exists at the time of the cause as asserted by the Enumerators, and results existing inherently as accepted by most others. But to say that since the effect is already generated it does not need to be generated, is a statement which is completely illogical. Thus, the non-inherently existing causes and effects are accepted to be like the illusion of a reflection.

Regarding establishing that a non-functionality is unsuitable to be created by a cause.

An argument is presented:

Argument: Although one does not need to generate something that is already generated, why should something non-existent not be generated?

The commentary explains, *for a functionality to come into existence inherently, what need is there for a cause? For that which exists inherently does not need to be generated.* This clearly explains that if a functionality comes into existence inherently, which means that it comes into existence independently, in and of itself then by default it would not depend on a cause since it does not have to depend upon anything for its generation.

The commentary continues, *in the case that such a result does not exist, then what need is there for a cause as there is an inability to generate it?* This is also quite clear: if such a result does not exist then there's no need for a cause. This relates to the refutation of generation and cessation of existence and non-existence, particularly in relation to causes and effects. The commentary explains, *as all results are never generated at the time of the cause, this is not refuted, but what is refuted is that they are not generated at all.* The commentary states that it is quite obvious that results are not generated at the time of the cause, therefore there is no need to refute what is quite obvious, but what is refuted is that they are not generated at all.

The *Prasangika* further explain, *The refutation of generation of an existing result, is the refutation of the result that exists at the time of the cause as asserted by the Enumerators, and results existing inherently as accepted by most others.* The Enumerators assert that the effect exists at the time of the

cause and this is what is being refuted. Also, most other Buddhist schools, which are the schools below the Prasangika, assert inherent existence, and thus they accept inherently existent causes and effects; this also what is being refuted.

The *Prasangika* make this comment, *But to say that since the effect is already generated it does not need to be generated, is a statement which is completely illogical.* They conclude by saying, *Thus, the non-inherently existing causes and effects are accepted to be like the illusion of a reflection,* explains that just as the reflexion of a face in a mirror is not the real face, and illusions conjured by a magician are not actual things, similarly although all causes and effects appear to be inherently existent, in fact they do not exist in that way in the slightest.

These analogies of illusions and reflections of a face in the mirror and so forth are very profound, as they can help you get a better understanding of what emptiness is. They are very good analogies to illustrate how although things appear to exist inherently that is not how they actually exist. Even if you don't immediately gain a profound understanding of the lack of inherent existence, at the very least it will help you to reduce strong afflictions like intense attachment and anger.

If you can bring to mind that although the object of attachment appears to be extremely attractive, in reality the beauty doesn't exist as it appears. When you spend some time reflecting on this, your attachment towards that object will definitely become reduced. Likewise, when an object of anger comes to mind, and you see it as being repulsive, if you were to recall that although it appears to be entirely repulsive, that repulsiveness doesn't exist in the way that it appears, then that will definitely help to reduce anger towards the object. These are very good trainings for our mind to see how things don't exist the way they appear to our mistaken consciousness; and thus helps to reduce the intensity of the afflictions.

If you actually contemplate in this way, an understanding of emptiness, on the basis of a lack of inherent existence of phenomena will dawn upon you, and the more you think about it and contemplate in this way, the more understanding you will develop. This is how it is of great benefit for you. The more you contemplate on emptiness to overcome the afflictions the more you will benefit by improving your life, which is only a gain. There is only great gain and no loss at all. Some seem to think that gaining an understanding of emptiness i.e. the lack of inherent existence, particularly in relation to reducing attachments, anger and so forth, will be some sort of loss in their lives. But you need not doubt that there is only gain. All the great masters of the past obtained their great realisations and achievements by overcoming the afflictions through these understandings.

As the teachings say, merely developing a doubt¹ about the validity of emptiness, will begin to shatter the very core of samsara.

The commentary continues to explain that, *regarding establishing that a non-functionality is unsuitable to be created by a cause, there's the argument that: Although one does not need to generate something that is already generated, why should something non-existent not be generated?* This leads onto the next verse.

What is being presented here is based on the earlier explanation and not too complicated to understand. The real essence of this whole presentation is presented in the following verses.

The next verse reads:

146. *Even through one billion causes
A non-functionality cannot be changed.
How can this status be functional?
What else is that which becomes functional?*

Then the commentary explains:

Madhyamaka: Even through one billion causes, a non-functionality cannot be changed into a functionality because a non-functionality cannot fulfil the function of any functionality. If it changes, does it change without giving up its non-functional status or upon giving it up? If we look at the first, how can the status of non-functionality be a functionality? The status of being able to perform a function and the status of not being able to perform a function are mutually exclusive. If we look at the second, what is the cause that changes into a functionality apart from being a functionality or non-functionality? There is no such thing.

This is quite clear, *Even through one billion causes, a non-functionality cannot be changed into a functionality,* means that any phenomena which by nature is non-functional, cannot be changed into something which is functional. That which is by its very nature non-functional cannot be transformed into something which is functional. This is quite clear.

A further question is asked to back up this statement, *If it changes, does it change without giving up its non-functional status or upon giving it up?* This is a reasonable question. In the first instance it says, *how can the status of non-functionality be a functionality?* If something which was non-functional gives up its status of being non-functional and changes into something functional, then how can the state of non-functionality be a functionality as they're mutually exclusive. Then, *If we look at the second,* this explains that, *what is the cause that changes into a functionality apart from being a functionality or non-functionality?* This indicates that something has to be either a functional thing or a non-functional thing, there is no third possibility. It is absurd to say that a non-functionality changes into a functionality, and there is no point asserting that a functionality changes into a functionality, because it is already a functional phenomenon. This is quite clear.

The verse reads:

147. *If an existent functionality is impossible when
non-existent,
When does functionality become existent?
Without having been generated as functionality
It does not become separated from this non-
functionality.*

148ab. *It is not separated from non-functionality
An occasion for the existence of functionality is
impossible?*

¹ Here 'doubt' has a positive connotation in the sense of suspecting that the teachings on emptiness are indeed valid.

Then the commentary explains:

Further, if it does not give up the status of non-functionality, and if it is not possible for a functionality to exist at a time when no functionality exists, when does functionality become existent? Functionality has not been generated at the time of non-functionality.

Further, if it becomes upon having abandoned the status of non-functionality: Without functionality having been generated it is impossible to become separated from non-functionality, and if it is not separated from non-functionality, then there is no chance for the existence of functionality, because these two types of status are mutually exclusive.

Again, this is quite clearly explained in the commentary so there's no need to elaborate further. What can be noted here is that the Vaibhashika assert that if it is existent phenomena it necessarily has to be a functional phenomenon – so even space is functional phenomenon. Their definition of functional phenomena is, that which can be conceived by a consciousness. So whatever can be conceived by a consciousness is what they would assert as a functional phenomenon. However according to the Prasangika system, functional phenomena relates to something which is produced by causes and effects, and thus cannot be permanent.

The next two lines of the verse read:

*148cd. Also, the functionality does not become non-existent
Because it would follow that it has two natures.*

Then the commentary explains:

Just as a non-functionality does not become a functionality, a functionality does not become a non-functionality because if it would be half functionality and half non-functionality, then the consequence would arise that merely one would have two natures.

These reasonings refute all generation from non-existence and non-functionality.

Take the subject 'sprout' – it is not generated inherently – because it is not inherently generated as existent, and it is not inherently generated as non-existent, e.g., like the child of a barren woman. Although its generation is refuted if non-existent at the time of the cause, it is a refutation of its inherent generation at the time of generation, even though it is non-existent at the time of the cause. Therefore, one needs to relate it to the object of negation.

What is being refuted in, *although its generation is refuted if non-existent at the time of the cause*, is that although the effect does not exist at the time of the cause, an inherently existent effect is generated from an inherently existent cause. Thus the commentary explains, *therefore, one needs to relate it to the object of negation*.

2.3.2.3.3.2. Refuting this also refutes cessation as being inherently existent

Having refuted inherently existent causes and inherently existent effects, this also refutes inherently existent cessation. That is what is being presented here.

The verse reads:

*149. Likewise cessation does not exist in such a way
And because functionalities also do not exist*

*All these migrators
Are never generated and never cease.*

The commentary explains:

If we look at the non-inherent existence of generation due to the reasoning explained above, cessation also does not exist inherently and because functionalities do not exist inherently, all these migrators are never inherently generated or inherently cease, they are primordially pacified and naturally liberated.

The main point being presented here is that when inherent generation is refuted by the earlier presented reasons, then inherently existent cessation is also refuted.

2.3.2.3.3.3 Thus, establishing the equanimity of samsara and nirvana

It was mentioned earlier that sentient beings are primordially pacified and naturally liberated, so this point establishes the equilibrium of samsara and nirvana.

The first two lines of the verse read:

*150. Migrators are like a dream
When investigated they are like banana trees*

The commentary explains:

The dream-like migrators of existence have not the slightest nature and they abide individually, without action and activity mixing. When analysed with the reasoning investigating suchness they are like a banana tree, they appear as if there is something identifiable but there is not the slightest inherent essence.

The demarcation that decides whether it becomes an analysis into suchness or not: If one is not satisfied with mere imputation by name and analyses on the basis of wanting to investigate how the basis exists, then it becomes an analysis into suchness, but if one is satisfied with mere imputation by name and investigates whether Devadatta comes and goes, then it is a nominal analysis.

The commentary explains, *the dream-like migrators of existence have not the slightest nature and they abide individually, without action and activity mixing*, which refers to the fact that migrators abide individually by performing actions and activities. When first analysed it appears to be like that but, *When analysed with the reasoning investigating suchness, they are like a banana tree*, means that although they appear like there's something identifiable, there is not the slightest inherent existence.

With the banana tree illustration, when you peel the trunk there is no solid core to be found. Similarly, sentient beings and migrators and their activities appear to exist from their own side, but in fact lack inherent existence. The word identifiable means that although they appear to exist from their own side, independently and in and of themselves, they actually do not exist in the slightest in that way.

The commentary now applies further reasoning with, *the demarcation that decides whether it becomes an analysis into suchness or not*, which is to point out the demarcation between the analyses of conventional reality and ultimate reality.

The statement, *if one is not satisfied with mere imputation by name and analyses on the basis of wanting to investigate how the basis exists*, highlights that when a name is imputed to

a person (e.g. Tom or *Devadatta*), if one is not satisfied with that mere label, and wants to investigate further on how the basis exists, this would be an investigation or analysis into suchness.

On the other hand, *but if one is satisfied with mere imputation by name*, meaning if you are satisfied with just the label that is given, *whether Devadatta comes and goes*, and you don't analyse further than that, *then it is a nominal analysis*. This was also explained previously.

The first two lines of the next verse read:

150cd. *Having gone beyond misery and having not gone
They do not have any distinction.*

The commentary states:

There is no difference in suchness between those gone beyond sorrow free from the bonds that bind them to existence, such as attachment, and those not gone beyond sorrow that are caught in the prison of cyclic existence, because both existence and peace are the same in being empty of inherent existence.

This highlights that as far as lacking inherent existence is concerned, there is no difference whatsoever between those gone beyond sorrow i.e. those gone beyond the deluded state and thus are liberated, with those still caught in samsara. Both are exactly the same in that they both lack inherent existence. It continues that, *because both existence and peace*, existence here referring to the cyclic existence, and peace referring to nirvana, *are the same in being empty of inherent existence*. This is the point.

The commentary then quotes from the *King of Concentration*:

The dream-like migrators of cyclic existence,
They are not born and neither do they die.

This is quite clear. Then from the *Sutra Requested by the Superior Upali*:

If one has comprehended the nature of phenomena,
then all results are non-existent and there is also no
result to be attained.

These again are in reference to phenomena being in the nature of emptiness.

3. ADVICE THAT IT IS SUITABLE TO STRIVE IN REALISING EMPTINESS

These following passages show why it is suitable, and the great advantages and benefits one would obtain by gaining the realisation of emptiness.

What is presented here in the following passages are meticulous and profound explanations. The heading here is sub-divided into three:

3.1. The actual advice

3.2. Showing the object of great compassion by showing the disadvantages of cyclic existence

3.3. Showing the mode of apprehension of the aspect of great compassion

3.1. The actual advice

That is then divided into two:

3.1.1. Showing the meaning of the mode of abiding

3.1.2. It is suitable to strive in realising that

3.1.1. Showing the meaning of the mode of abiding

The verse reads:

151. *How can functionalities thus empty
Be attained or lost?
How could one be praised?
How could one be criticised?*

The commentary then explains:

If one comprehends the actual nature of functionalities that are thus empty of inherent existence in the way explained earlier, then which gain does one attain and become attached? Through the loss of what gain does one generate anger? What is the benefit received by praise, and what is the harm received by criticism, and by whom?

What is presented here is one of the immediate benefits of gaining a realisation of emptiness: to overcome the eight worldly concerns. As previously explained, while the benefits of overcoming the eight worldly concerns are usually expressed as a way to overcome a strong sense of attachment, aversion etc. this passage relates to how the eight worldly concerns are developed, and how we are compounded by that, and how the eight worldly concerns are overcome by the actual understanding of emptiness.

You can do some research on what the eight worldly concerns are, and be prepared to answer questions if I ask you to list them. While the heading here specifically advises that it is suitable to strive to realise emptiness, headings in some other commentaries refer to the following passages as the actual results of realising emptiness.

We have nearly come to the end of chapter nine so I guess in the next few sessions we'll complete it, and then the tenth chapter is on dedication, which serves as a conclusion.

We might be able to start the teachings on the *Path to Enlightenment* in June.

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 Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute