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# Study Group - *Bodhicharyavatara*

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I'm very happy to start the year again with the Study Group. You are all familiar with the rules of the Study Group - it is a group where one has to study. For example, if one lives in Australia one has to follow the rules that govern Australia!

It is very fortunate to have the Study Group, and being able to study the text *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* by the great Shantideva is also very fortunate.

Shantideva is a very special being who has generated bodhicitta. Just hearing or remembering his name purifies non-virtuous karmas.

If one asks which of the three baskets of teachings does the *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* belong to, the answer is that it belongs to the sutra basket. Even though in general it covers all three baskets of teachings, it falls into the sutra basket, because it primarily concerns itself with the sutra basket of teachings.

We can always recognise the class to which a teaching belongs by looking at the homage. As we have said before, if the homage is to Manjushri then it falls into the abhidharma class of teachings, and if it is homage to the buddhas and bodhisattvas then it is a teaching that falls into the sutra class of teachings.

We should understand well that the teachings of the *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* have to be preceded by meditations that are common to the small and medium-capable being. It falls within the framework of the graduated path to enlightenment where the teachings concerning the Mahayana practices have to be preceded by meditation on the practices common to the small and medium-capable being.

The motivation of the Mahayana practices is the motivation of bodhicitta. The practices of the Mahayana being of great capacity are the six perfections.

## OUTLINE OF THE TEXT

*Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* is comprised of ten chapters.

1. The first chapter shows the benefits of bodhicitta. Why? Because by becoming aware of the benefits of bodhicitta then one is motivated to generate bodhicitta.

2. Just as one would first clean one's house if one were to invite the Wheel-Turning King to one's home, one first purifies the mind of negativities through confession before generating bodhicitta in one's mind. That is why the second chapter is called the chapter of confessing negativities.

3. After having confessed negativities and accumulated merits the third chapter deals with taking the mind of bodhicitta. This chapter also deals with the auxiliary limbs of the meditations common to the small and medium-capable being

The second and third chapter go through each of the seven limbs of practice such as taking refuge, offering prostrations,

making offerings, confessing with the four powers, asking the buddhas to remain and teach the Dharma, rejoicing, dedication and so forth.

One generates bodhicitta after going for refuge, offering prostrations, making offerings, confessing, rejoicing, asking the buddhas to remain and teach the Dharma, and then dedication. Then after doing each of these practices one generates bodhicitta. So one has all the practices there in the opening chapters.

4. After having generated bodhicitta one needs to look after it so that it doesn't degenerate. For that conscientiousness is needed, which is why the fourth chapter is the chapter on conscientiousness.

The next six chapters deal with the way the six perfections are practised.

5. The perfection of morality comes in the fifth chapter which shows how one practises morality with mindfulness and awareness.

6 - 9. The sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth chapters deal respectively with the perfections of patience, enthusiasm, mental stabilisation and wisdom.

10. The tenth chapter explains how to practise the perfection of generosity. It is the chapter that deals with the dedication of virtues, and it shows how one dedicates one's possessions, one's merits and one's body to others.

## THE NINTH CHAPTER: WISDOM

The ninth chapter is the chapter that deals with the perfection of wisdom. It has two main divisions: explaining the etymology of the title and the actual meaning of the text.

### A. EXPLAINING THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE TITLE

Explaining the title is done in two headings: the condensed explanation of the need to generate wisdom, and the elaborate explanation of the need to generate wisdom.

#### I. THE CONDENSED EXPLANATION OF THE NEED TO GENERATE WISDOM

The first verse explains the need for the generation of wisdom.

*The Able One explained all these different limbs [1]  
For the purpose of wisdom;  
Therefore those who wish to pacify suffering  
Should generate wisdom.*

There are two different explanations of the meaning of the first line. According to one explanation 'these different limbs' refers to the eighth chapter alone - the explanation of mental stabilisation. The other explanation is that the other five perfections such as generosity, morality, patience, enthusiasm are included. We will concern ourselves only with the second possibility.

When it says all these different limbs were taught by the Able One for the purpose of wisdom, it means that the other five perfections of generosity, morality, patience, enthusiasm and mental stabilisation are the supporting limbs for the generation of wisdom. So the final aim of all these different practices is to generate wisdom.

What it shows is that if one wants to attain a state of complete enlightenment then one needs to practise a path that combines method and wisdom. One needs a path that

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unifies method and wisdom on the basis of the Two Truths, through meditating on the Four Noble Truths in a way that combines method and wisdom. Then one can attain the two bodies of a Buddha. That is what is implied here - the first initial five perfections act as supporting limbs for the generation of wisdom.

Therefore, those who wish to attain mere liberation for themselves alone also need to rely on the generation of wisdom. So wisdom is indispensable, regardless of whether one wants to attain complete enlightenment, or mere solitary liberation.

It is important to understand that to attain mere individual liberation one also needs to generate wisdom. One could get the idea that it is only necessary to generate wisdom if one wants to attain complete enlightenment, but that it is not necessary for the attainment of individual liberation. There are certain debates in regard to that, but these are based on a misunderstanding. One needs to generate wisdom for the attainment of both complete enlightenment and individual liberation.

The question could arise, 'In order to realise emptiness does one need to engage in the bodhisattva practices of all the six perfections?'. The answer here is, 'No, one does not need to do this, because, for example, followers of the hearer path realise emptiness'. But one needs wisdom. That is why the last two lines state explicitly, 'therefore those who wish to pacify suffering should generate wisdom'. This states explicitly that those who want to attain individual liberation also need to generate wisdom. This was also mentioned by Nagarjuna when he said,

For as long as there is grasping at the aggregates  
There will also be 'I' grasping.  
If there is a self-grasping there is karma  
And from karma there is birth.  
Their three paths are in mutual causation;  
Without beginning, end or middle;  
The wheel of cyclic existence turns;  
Like the wheel of a firebrand;  
Because it isn't obtained from self, other  
or both and nowhere in the three times;  
The grasping at 'I' ceases;  
And from that karma and birth.

This directly shows that even the followers of the lesser vehicle need to realise emptiness in order to attain individual liberation.

Why does one need to realise emptiness to liberate oneself from cyclic existence.

*Student 1: Because ignorance is the root of cyclic existence.*

Why do you need to realise emptiness to overcome the root of cyclic existence?

*Student 1: Emptiness is the antidote to grasping at 'I' and 'mine'.*

You have to explain how the antidote actually counteracts the root of cyclic existence.

*Student 1: As long as there is grasping at the aggregates one continues to take rebirth.*

No, no. How does the antidote counteract the root of cyclic existence?

*Student 1: The wisdom realising emptiness eliminates grasping at the aggregates, which are the root of cyclic existence.*

Why do you need to realise emptiness in order to overcome

the true-grasping at the aggregates? When one says emptiness is needed there is a reason why that emptiness is needed.

*Student 1: Because it is the exact opposite to grasping at cyclic existence*

If they are the direct opposite then ...?

*Student 2: It is able to demolish the false perception of things existing from their own side.*

How does it eliminate the false perception?

*Student 2: Because grasping is dependent upon the appearance of things appearing from their own side.*

Geshe-la is asking how does the wisdom realising emptiness counteract true-grasping.

The wisdom that realises emptiness understands the non-existence of the apprehended object of true-grasping. So the grasped object of true-grasping is understood to be non-existence, and in such a way one stops the true-grasping. As I said to you previously, true-grasping cannot be removed from the mind in the same way as one pulls out a splinter from one's hand. It has to be counteracted by the counter-positive wisdom that realises the absence of the apprehended object.

The wisdom realising emptiness counteracts true-grasping by realising the non-existence of its apprehended object. By realising the non-existence of the apprehended object one counteracts the ignorance.

Antidotes such as love and so forth are mere temporary antidotes to delusions, because they don't realise the absence of the apprehended object of ignorance. For example, love is counter-positive to anger, but it does not realise the absence of the apprehended object of ignorance, and in such a way it cannot ultimately act as an antidote to afflictions. It can only be a temporary antidote to anger. However that doesn't take away any of its value - love is still very important to meditate on.

This first verse completes the first outline, the need to realise emptiness in short. This verse also shows very clearly that Nagarjuna and Shantideva are of one mind in their view as to the importance of realising emptiness. Both assert that it is essential to realise emptiness in order to attain complete enlightenment as well as individual liberation. It is good to keep in mind how these two are actually of one mind in their views.

## **II. THE ELABORATE EXPLANATION OF THE NEED TO GENERATE WISDOM**

This has four sub-outlines:

1. Understanding the view
2. Practising it through meditation
3. Cutting off the mental fabrications of true grasping
4. The function of realising emptiness

### **1. Understanding the view**

This heading has three sub-outlines:

- 1.1. An explanation of the Two Truths
- 1.2. Refuting different debates about the Two Truths
- 1.3. Establishing the Mahayana as supreme

#### **1.1. AN EXPLANATION OF THE TWO TRUTHS**

*The conventional and the ultimate [2]*

*Are asserted as the Two Truths;*

*The ultimate is not an object engaged by awareness,*

### *Awareness is stated to be conventional.*

The first two lines show the two-fold division of the Two Truths.

The category 'objects of knowledge' is posited as the basis for the two-fold division of the Two Truths. This adds a very profound meaning to the term 'object of knowledge'. We don't just talk about Two Truths in general, but the Two Truths are actually a division of objects of knowledge.

The Two Truths are the objects that are to be known. Here Shantideva gives the term 'objects of knowledge' a more specific meaning; he is not just referring to objects of knowledge in general. The Two Truths are the objects that are to be known.

This deeper meaning of the term 'objects of knowledge' is directly related to the meaning of omniscient consciousness. Omniscient consciousness is not called 'omniscient' because it knows a great variety of objects, but because it can comprehend the Two Truths directly at the same time. This is not possible if one has not abandoned the grasping that holds the two Truths to be of a different entity.

The first two lines, 'The conventional and the ultimate are asserted as the Two Truths' also eliminates the existence of a third truth. This concurs with the explanation given in the sutras.

## **1.2. DEFINITION OF TWO TRUTHS**

Lines three and four deal with the definition and the definiendum of conventional and ultimate truth. When it says 'the ultimate isn't an object engaged by awareness', 'the ultimate' shows the definiendum, ultimate truth; and 'isn't the object engaged by awareness' shows the definition of ultimate truth implicitly. In the last line 'awareness is stated to be conventional' the word 'awareness' shows the definiendum conventional truth, and 'is expressed to be conventional' explains the definition of conventional truth in an implicit manner.

In the first line the 'conventional' refers to the person and the aggregates, and the 'ultimate' refers to the lack of true existence of the person and the lack of true existence of the aggregates. Those two are asserted as the Two Truths.

So this first line shows that there are the Two Truths, which cuts off the existence of a third truth. The last two lines show the definition of the Two Truths as well as the two definiendums.

You probably have the definition of the Two Truths readily lying on your tongue now.

### **Definitions of conventional and ultimate truth**

#### **According to *Introduction to the Middle Way***

What it gives here very briefly as the definition, i.e. it isn't the engaged object of awareness, seems to be different from the definition that we learnt in *Introduction to the Middle Way*. There it said that *the meaning found by a valid cogniser engaged in nominal analysis, as well as being a nominal cogniser with regard to the found meaning*, is the definition of **conventional truth**.

*The meaning found by a valid cogniser engaged in ultimate analysis which becomes an valid cogniser engaged in ultimate analysis with regard to that object* is the definition of **ultimate truth**. The definition that is given here is a little bit different but in meaning they are the same.

#### **According to *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's way of Life***

Out of this third line a very popular misunderstanding arises where one says, 'Oh, emptiness is an object that is beyond comprehension, because it says here, similarly to the sutras, that the ultimate is not an engaged object of awareness'. It is very easy to misinterpret that statement and think, 'Oh that means that emptiness is simply beyond any type of understanding'. But that is obviously not correct, because we have the wisdom that realises emptiness, and the wisdom that realises emptiness is a type of awareness. So obviously emptiness is an object that is engaged by a certain type of awareness.

The meaning of this third line is that the ultimate is not an object that can be directly engaged by dualistic awareness. So the ultimate is never an object that could be directly engaged by a dualistic awareness. In other words one can say it is not an object that can be directly engaged by a mistaken awareness, which comes to the same thing.

The explicit statement the ultimate is not an object that is directly engaged by a dualistic awareness implicitly gives us the definition of **ultimate truth**, as *that which is realised in a non-dualistic manner by the direct valid cogniser that realises it directly*. Thus the definition of ultimate truth that is given here is the same definition that is used by the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka - that which is realised in a non-dualistic manner by direct valid cognition that realises it directly. That is the definition of ultimate truth - whatever is realised in a non-dual manner by direct valid cognition realising it directly is ultimate truth. That is implicitly asserted here by stating the ultimate is not an object that can be directly engaged or directly realised by dualistic awareness.

Similarly *that which is realised in a dualistic manner by a direct valid cogniser realising it directly* is the definition of **conventional truth**, which is shown in the fourth line.

This definition is according to the *Sutra of the Meeting of the Father and Son*. In this sutra one difference between the positing of the definition in the *Introduction to the Middle Way* and here in the *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, is that in the *Introduction to the Middle Way* the definition of the Two Truths is posited without making any specific distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual awareness. Here it specifically ties the definition to non-conceptual awareness, [which is also why 'intellect' is actually not a good translation].

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*Edited Version*

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