

# Study Group - Bodhicharyavatara

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

10 May 2005

As usual generate the virtuous motivation of bodhicitta thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings, and in order to accomplish that aim I am now going to listen to this profound teaching. Then I am going to put it into practice'.

## 2.1.2.3.2.2. Showing that it is valid to say that the wisdom realising emptiness can abandon the afflictions

### 2.1.2.3.2.2.2. In particular (cont.)

#### Objection

The Buddha cannot benefit sentient beings because he lacks conceptual motivational thought.

#### Refutation

*Through the power of prayer, [35cd]  
The body of the conqueror appears to the disciples*

**Objection:** 'But how could the prayers that a buddha made on the bodhisattva path benefit sentient beings since those prayers were made a long time ago before that person became enlightened?

This objection is refuted with an example:

*Even if having died after [36]  
Having made offerings to Garuda  
And a long time after that,  
It will still pacify the poison*

Even if a long time has passed since the death of a Brahmin who had established an offering tree to Garuda for the purpose of pacifying all poisons, the practice of Garuda will still pacify poisons.

The meaning of the example:

*Likewise offerings to the conqueror, [37]  
In accordance with the Bodhisattva practices  
Will achieve all purposes, though the Bodhisattva  
Has gone already beyond misery.*

Similarly, if bodhisattvas establish an 'offering tree' to the conquerors by building up the two accumulations of merit and wisdom in an extensive manner, the final result of that will be the two buddha bodies, i.e. the body for the purpose of self and the body for the purpose of others.

These will continue to benefit sentient beings even though the bodhisattva on becoming enlightened, has gone beyond misery into non-abiding nirvana. When the bodhisattvas pass away (in a figurative sense), and become enlightened, they are no longer bodhisattvas but buddhas. The power of the prayers that the bodhisattva made, such as, 'May I be able to benefit all sentient beings effortlessly' still carry on through the two bodies - the form body and the truth body - of a buddha. In such a way they continue to benefit all sentient beings.

One should also relate this to one's own practice, likewise making prayers to be able to effortlessly benefit sentient beings in the future. However, we don't have to be in any hurry to attain enlightenment. We can take our time - there is no need to become too uptight about it!

## 2.1.2.3.2.3. Showing that perfect abandonment will arise

### Objection

*How can a result be achieved [38]  
By offering to one lacking mind?  
Because it is taught that it does  
For both remaining and gone beyond misery.*

**Hearer practitioner:** 'How can a result be achieved by offering to one lacking mind?' The thought is that since a buddha doesn't have the conceptual thought, 'now I have received the offerings', how could the making of offerings to the Buddha be of any benefit.

**Madhyamaka:** Because it is taught by the Buddha himself in the sutras, such as the *Lion's Roar Sutra*, that merits are accumulated with regard to both the one remaining and the one gone beyond sorrow. This means that both accumulate merits, regardless of whether one makes offerings to the Buddha remaining directly in front of oneself, or to representations of the Buddha after his parinirvana.

The *Sutra Explaining the Benefits of Circumambulation of a Stupa* says the same: 'Regardless of whether it is an actual buddha or whether it is a representation of a buddha that has already gone beyond sorrow, there will no difference in the merits accumulated to a mind of equal faith in both.'

If one recognises the representation of a buddha who has already gone beyond sorrow as the actual buddha, and then makes offerings, circumambulations and so forth, the merit will be exactly the same as if the buddha were actually there.

*That it is possible to have a result nominally [39]  
And also ultimately, is taught in scripture.  
For example, like have a result  
Relative to a true buddha.*

This is saying that it is taught in the scriptures that the result of making offerings to a buddha does not depend on whether one recognises that buddha as being illusory, or whether one thinks of that buddha as existing ultimately. For example, it is taught that even if one believes that the Buddha exists truly, such as what the lower tenets do, and makes offerings to the Buddha on the basis of that belief, one will still accumulate vast merits because of the law of cause and effect will still apply.

### 2.1.3. Establishing the Mahayana as supreme

2.1.3.1. Establishing that all sutras are the advice of the Buddha

2.1.3.2. Establishing emptiness as the antidote

#### 2.1.3.1. ESTABLISHING THAT ALL SUTRAS ARE THE ADVICE OF THE BUDDHA

There are twelve verses that relate to these outlines, which we will go through slowly, one by one.

#### Objection

*One becomes liberated by seeing truth, [40ab]  
Why should one see emptiness?*

**Followers of the hearer vehicle** (Primary opponent): 'One can become liberated merely by realising directly, and meditating on, the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths, such as impermanence and so forth. Therefore, what need is there to see the emptiness that is the lack of true existence of all phenomena.' Not only do they not accept that one needs to realise emptiness to become enlightened, they completely refute the Mahayana teachings as being teachings of the Buddha, and do not accept the term *selflessness of phenomena* even on a figurative level. The selflessness that they associate with the Four Noble Truths is either the lack of a

permanent, isolated (partless), independent self, or the lack of a person that is a self-sufficient substantial existent<sup>1</sup>, which in the Prasangika system are only the coarse selflessness of person.

**Mind Only** (Secondary opponent): 'Though there is selflessness of phenomena, it is not necessary to realise it in order to go beyond misery (liberation).'

#### Response

*Because it is taught in scripture that [40cd]  
Without it one will not attain enlightenment.*

The task for the Madhyamaka here is to establish to the opponent that there is a purpose for realising the lack of inherent existence of phenomena. First they do so with the reason of scripture.

**Madhyamaka:** *Because it is taught in the scripture of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras that without the realisation of the selflessness of phenomena one will not attain the enlightenment of a hearer, or a self-liberator or of a buddha.'*

In the *Great Commentary on the Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* it gives quotes from the *Perfection of Wisdom sutras* such as 'those that have recognition of phenomena cannot attain liberation', and 'All the three-time buddhas, and all the other realisations from the attainment of a stream enterer up to the attainment of a self-liberator, are attained in dependence on the perfection of wisdom alone.'

**Hinayana:** 'This does not prove anything to me because I don't accept the perfection of wisdom scriptures as valid sutras'.

*If the Mahayana is not established [41]  
The how are your texts established?  
Since they are established for both.  
Initially it is not established for you.  
The conditions through which you generate faith [42ab]  
Are the same for the Mahayana.*

**Madhyamaka:** 'If you don't accept the Mahayana sutras to be authentic, then how do you establish the Hinayana sutras as valid scriptures?'

**Hinayana:** 'They are authentic because they are established as valid by both of us.'

**Madhyamaka:** 'But they were not valid for you initially, because at the time of your birth, or before you had investigated their meaning through listening and contemplation, they were not authentic scriptures for you.'

First you established with logic the *Great Treatise*, which identifies the three baskets of teachings, as valid scriptural reference. And then, in dependence on the *Great Treatise*, you identify the Hinayana sutras as valid scriptures. The *Great Treatise* shows how the teachings on the higher training of morality form the Vinaya basket; how the teachings on the higher training of concentration form the Sutra basket; and how the teachings on the higher training of wisdom form the Abhidharma basket.

This style of establishing faith is the same for us with the Mahayana sutras.'

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

If you do not use this system to identify whether a scripture is a sutra or not, and base your assertion of the validity of a sutra on whether it is accepted by two parties, then one would also have to say that the *Vedas* would be valid teachings, because they are accepted by two parties as valid'.

*If you say, 'The Mahayana is in question', [43]  
Non-buddhists also question the texts,  
And other texts are also questioned by  
Self and other, therefore they should be abandoned.*

**Hinayana:** 'Since the Hinayana scriptures we accept as authentic teachings by the Buddha are also accepted by you as such there is not argument between us about them. But there is debate regarding the Mahayana scriptures you accept as authentic teaching, because we do not accept them.'

**Mahayana:** 'If you deny the Mahayana sutras for the reason that they are being questioned, then you should also deny the Hinayana sutras. Firstly, the Hinayana sutras are questioned by non-Buddhists and Hinayanists alike. Secondly, while the authenticity of the Hinayana sutras is accepted by the eighteen Hinayana schools, there are certain teachings such as the *Sutra Explaining the Intermediate State* that are not accepted by all.'

**It is not possible to even attain nirvana without realising emptiness**

*If the root of the teachings is the essential bikkhu,[44]  
Even the essential bikkhu has a problem.  
The mind endowed with an object,  
Has difficulty even to abide beyond sorrow.*

The term 'essential bikkhu' refers to arhats. Arhats preserved in their perfect memory the Buddhas teachings, and that is why they are referred to as the root of the teachings. If the *root of the teachings* is the *essential bikkhu*, then *even the essential bikkhu has a problem*, because *the mind* that is *endowed with an object has difficulty even to abide beyond sorrow*.

This shows that even the attainment of liberation is impossible without the realisation of emptiness, and that those who do not accept the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena can not become arhats. The mind endowed with a truly existent object can not counteract true-grasping because it can not negate the apprehended object of true-grasping. It is true-grasping. Therefore, the realisation of mere coarse selflessness can not counteract true-grasping, because it does not realise the absence of the apprehended object of true-grasping.

*Even* because not only can one not become enlightened without the wisdom realising emptiness, one can not *even* attain liberation.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak  
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute

<sup>1</sup> According to the lower tenets these two views of the self are the subtle and coarse views of the selflessness of person: coarse being absence of a permanent partless and independent self, and subtle being the absence of a self-sufficient substantial existent.