
Study Group - Bodhicharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་དབའི་སྣོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ

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As usual please generate a virtuous motivation thinking, 'I have to attain complete enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings. In order to do so, I am now going to listen to this profound teaching, and then I am going to put it into practice as much as possible'.

2.4. The function of realising emptiness

We have started with the outline of what one should do with the realisation of emptiness, which comes in two parts.

2.4.1. To achieve the purpose of self

2.4.2. Meditating on great compassion to achieve the purpose of others.

2.4.1. TO ACHIEVE THE PURPOSE OF SELF

This refers to subduing the eight worldly dharmas.

*How can functionalities thus empty
Be attained or lost?* [151]

*How could one be praised?
How could one be criticised?*

*Where do happiness and suffering come from?
Why does one like and dislike?
Having investigated this very nature
Who craves, and for what?* [152]

*When analysed, this life's worldly being,
How can it pass away here?
What will arise, what arose?
What is a relative or friend?* [153]

The eight worldly dharmas are the eight attitudes of worldly beings:

- ❖ a liking for gain and a dislike for loss;
- ❖ a liking for praise and dislike for criticism;
- ❖ a liking for being spoken to pleasantly and a dislike for being spoken to unpleasantly;
- ❖ a liking for happiness and a dislike for unhappiness.

It is important to know that the actual worldly dharma is that one generates happiness on receiving gain. Just receiving gain by itself is not a worldly dharma, as there are many superior bodhisattvas who possess great riches. The worldly dharma is that one is happy with gain and dislikes loss. Here dislike is anger. In *Letter to a King*, Nagarjuna told the king that he had to abandon the likes and dislikes of a worldly being.

As was the case in earlier investigations the eight worldly dharmas are empty of inherent existence. After meditating on the emptiness of the eight worldly dharmas, how could one have a liking for gain and a dislike for loss? How could one have liking for praise and

a dislike of criticism? How could one have a like or dislike for the gain or loss of functionalities that are empty? Where could happiness and suffering come from when functionalities are empty? If, as was explained before, functionalities are empty then why should one generate any likes or dislikes?

These lines of the text obviously deal with subduing the eight worldly dharmas. Getting a grip on the eight worldly dharmas is similar to meditating on immeasurable equanimity. One generates a state of equanimity that is free from like and dislike for gain and loss, and one also realises the lack of inherent existence of the subject and object. By comprehending the actual nature of their existence one can apprehend all of existence as being like a dream, and therefore not generate any of the eight worldly dharmas.

If one has an understanding of emptiness, then it is very helpful for lessening one's attachment and anger. Ordinarily, what happens is that when one encounters something that one likes such as gain, one generates happiness and attachment for that. If one encounters something that one dislikes such as loss, then one generates anger. At those times, there is a perception of the object as being truly existent, and also of oneself as truly existent.

For example, when one is criticised, there is a strong perception of oneself as existing independently from one's own side. There is also the perception of the words as existing from their own side, and the person criticising as existing from their own side and so forth. If one meditates on emptiness, seeing that the words, oneself and the other person are merely imputed by conception, then that is of enormous help in lessening and avoiding anger.

Similarly when one meditates on the emptiness of the pleasant appearance of the object, remembering that it is merely imputed by mind, then that helps to lessen one's attachment. Attachment is based on the appearance of intrinsic reality of the object and oneself. If one can overcome this perception, then one can greatly lessen one's attachment.

The generation of attachment and anger is based on the true appearance of the object. By perceiving an object as existing from its own side one generates attachment or anger for the object. Training one's mind in the meditation on emptiness - that the object lacks true existence, existence from its own side, inherent existence and so forth, and is therefore dream-like - will greatly help to lessen one's attachment and anger. The more the mind is consumed by the eight worldly dharmas, the less the person will be able to practice the Dharma.

As explained in the Lam Rim, one needs to subdue the eight worldly concerns in order to be able to practice the Dharma purely. Otherwise, one will not be able to free the mind from the likes and the dislikes of this life. The more the mind is consumed by the likes and dislikes for this life, the less the person is able to practice the Dharma, and the more difficulty the person encounters in this life. The more the eight worldly dharmas rule a person's mind, the more difficulty that person has in this life.

Emptiness is the antidote to all the afflictions. By meditating on emptiness one can counteract all afflictions. One should arrive at the awareness that it is essential to realise emptiness in order to be able to overcome the mental afflictions. Overcoming the mental afflictions will only happen relative to realising emptiness. So make a concerted effort to realise emptiness. Meditate on how the generation of the afflictions depends on the perception of true existence: then you can understand how overcoming the mental afflictions depends on an understanding of emptiness.

*Where do happiness and suffering come from? [152]
Why has one likes and dislikes?
Having investigated this very nature
Who craves, and for what?*

When one investigates the very nature of emptiness with ultimate analysis and reasoning, then one comes to an understanding that there is no ultimate person who craves, and neither is there an ultimately existing object of the craving.

*When analysed, this life worldly being, [153abc]
How can it pass away here?
What will arise, what arose?*

How can this worldly sentient being pass away in this life? What will arise in the next life? What arose in the past life? With such an analysis of the nature of the person, one realises that there is no intrinsic person. There is no inherently existent person who took rebirth in the past, who took rebirth in this life, or who will take rebirth in the next life.

*What is a relative or friend? [153d]
Everything is like space - [154ab]
That is how the likes of me should think of
everything!*

When investigated, there is no intrinsic relative or friend and everything is in the space-like nature of emptiness. As Shantideva says of himself, 'The likes of me should think of everything in this way'. Here, he is referring to himself from the point of view of an ordinary being. One should understand that the awareness of emptiness is the primary cause for the attainment of the qualities of liberation and enlightenment.

2.4.2. MEDITATING ON GREAT COMPASSION TO ACHIEVE THE PURPOSE OF OTHERS

*Those, who desire happiness, [154cd]
Through the causes of fighting and likening,
Are agitated or joyful; [155]
Are miserable, striving and arguing,
Cutting, stabbing, and creating negativity
With each other; It is a very difficult life!*

These lines explain the faults of cyclic existence as the focal object of compassion.

'Those, who desire happiness' refers to those who desire and crave happiness in this life. Despite desiring happiness, they are not beyond suffering. Why is that so?

Through attachment to the happiness of this life one regards the person who obstructs one's happiness and joy as an enemy. Then one starts fighting and arguing with them. One engages in all kinds of activities with one's

friends, which are supposed to bring joy, but they have the effect of agitating the mind and making the mind unhappy. In such a way, one is left in a situation where, regardless of what one does, one does not attain happiness, and becomes very miserable. This leads one to strive even further for happiness in those mistaken ways, and to start arguing with others out of frustration, and also to engage in physical fights, which can end up with stabbing.

One creates negativity by being negative verbally, and from one's mental non-virtuous attitudes towards each other. All of this causes lots of suffering and misery, therefore, looking at the situation of sentient beings, the sages don't generate any attachment for the happiness of this life. By reflecting on the situation of sentient beings in such a way, one can generate compassion for them.

Recognising this situation, those who are skilled don't generate any attachment for the four worldly perfections. Ordinarily, one spends a great amount of time accumulating and achieving worldly perfections. That is why one goes to work, earns money and so forth. But if one is proficient, one can recognise the fruitlessness of being attached to the worldly perfections and therefore give up attachment to them.

These points are very pertinent to one's life. How can one avoid generating happiness and suffering? With regards to the eight worldly dharmas, one can avoid generating attachment and aversion towards different objects. Reflecting on the sufferings of this life, and in this way trying to lessen the attachment to the perfections of this life is very relevant.

Everybody desires happiness, but ignorance always prevents the attainment of that happiness.

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