
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual, let us engage in our regular meditation practice.
[*tong-len meditation*]

It's important to generate a positive motivation for receiving the teaching, which can be along these lines: For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I'll engage into listening to these Mahayana teachings and put them into practice well.

Presenting the characteristics of the being of small scope (cont.)

We've mostly covered the small scope, but I will just mention a few more points.

The small scope is summed up in this quote, which I'm pretty sure is from Lama Tsongkhapa:

In brief you should adopt virtue and shun negativity.
Always hold the mind of benefitting others and avoid harming others. And by contemplating and meditating on the meaning of Dharma, subdue your mind.

This is really a core instruction, which gets right to the heart of the practice. As mentioned here, we need to take every opportunity to adopt virtue and refrain from engaging in negativity. Furthermore, we need to always acquaint our minds with the wish to benefit others and avoid causing any harm. And in order to subdue our mind we need to put into practice what we hear from the teachings. So by contemplating on the meaning of the teachings we hear, we need to meditate on it as a way to subdue our mind.

While this is presented as a summary of the small scope, we can clearly see that this is in fact an essential practice to be adopted on both the medium scope and the great scope as well. So it is a core practice for all three types of beings.

Presenting the characteristics of the being of medium scope

The commentary begins with a definition of a person of the medium scope by quoting verse 4.

4. *Those who seek peace for themselves alone
Turning away from worldly pleasures
And avoiding destructive actions
Are said to be of the middling capacity.*

As the commentary explains:

The person of the middling scope is defined in terms of the three characteristics; namely thought, deed, and goal. Having contemplated on the suffering nature of all of cyclic existence, from the hell without respite to the peak of existence through various reasons, not even in a dream do they desire to be born as a universal king, a Brahma or an Indra, hence their thought is characterised by a sense of repulsion or turning their back on the pleasures of cyclic existence.

Thought

What is explained here is that a being of the medium scope is one who is completely repulsed by cyclic existence. *Having contemplated the suffering nature of all cyclic existence,*

from the hell without respite, refers to the lowest or deepest of the hells, while *the peak of existence* refers to the realm in cyclic existence where the greatest worldly happiness is experienced.

By thinking with *various reasons, not even in a dream do they desire to be born as a universal king, or a Brahma, or an Indra,* indicates how renunciation has to be generated. If one wishes to be free from cyclic existence, one has to feel a strong, deep sense of wishing to become completely free from it, to the point of feeling strong repulsion towards all the pleasures of cyclic existence. Then based on that repulsion one seeks to attain liberation.

When I went to the Kalachakra initiation in Bodhgaya in 2003 there was a young geshe who was trying to test me. Although I didn't know him he seemed to recognise me, saying, 'Geshe Doga, tashi delek'. I asked Geshe Sonam Dhargye who he was, and found that he was a geshe from one of the houses of Sera Jey, called Lawa Khangtsen, and that he had been appointed to teach at the Namgyal Monastery in Dharamsala.

He had a book about the Kalachakra initiation with him, and he asked me, 'How many initiations are there in the Kalachakra?' I replied, telling him a particular sequence of the different stages of the Kalachakra initiation. Then he said, 'Oh, but aren't there fourteen initiations?' And I said, 'Well yes, there are fourteen in total, but they are subsumed into the ones that I have just listed'. When His Holiness actually bestowed the initiation he did so in accordance with how I had listed them. As this young geshe was close to me, I nudged him to indicate that I had been correct.

Then I asked him what does 'generating the mind of a yogi' mean? He didn't have an immediate answer for that. But because he was good at debate he said, 'Oh it must refer to those who are receiving the initiation'. As we became more acquainted with each other he asked me another question, 'Why does one eat meat when doing highest yoga tantra practice?' I gave my response and he seemed very pleased with my answer.

In our discussions back and forth he became very fond of me and later on he said, 'Geshe-la you don't have to go out and try to find a toilet in the crowd, I have access to the toilets in the administration building nearby, so you can use my pass to go there. He was really fond of me and said, 'If you need anything from Dharamsala just write to me'. That was the level of fondness that he showed to me.

Later on I had heard that he had disrobed and is now in Canada. Although His Holiness was very fond of him because of his knowledge and understanding of the texts, unfortunately he disrobed and was not able to maintain his position in Dharamsala. There were also some other geshe and others seated nearby, who also appreciated what I shared with him.

As presented here in the commentary, a being of medium scope is characterised by such strong repulsion that they turn *their back on the pleasures of cyclic existence*. This relates to the first line in the Tibetan verse, which is *turning away from worldly pleasures*.

This indicates that a being of medium scope has to develop a very strong sense of renunciation, being repulsed by all the pleasures of cyclic existence from the depths of their heart.

Deed

As I've mentioned previously, of the three types of sufferings, beings of the medium scope have a very strong

inclination to completely overcome all-pervasive compounded suffering from the depth of their heart. Then, based on that they seek to achieve liberation; I've explained previously what actual liberation connotes.

As further mentioned in the commentary:

Motivated by this thought that deeds are characterised by thoroughly engaging in any of the seven vows of self liberation, and abandoning negativities of the three doors.

This refers to the characteristics of their deeds. They involve engaging in any of the seven vows of self liberation, namely:

- The vows of a fully ordained monk and a fully ordained nun;
- The vows of a novice monk and novice nun;
- The vows of a layman and laywoman;
- The probationary nun's vows.

These constitute the seven self-liberation vows. They are known as self-liberation vows because by taking these vows and by practising morality based on these vows one engages in practices that liberate oneself from cyclic existence. Many of you might already have taken lay vows. Other texts mention keeping the morality of avoiding seven of the ten non-virtues, which refers to abandoning the three non-virtues of body and the four of speech. Abandoning these seven unwholesome negativities is also a practice of morality that will be explained further on.

Goal

Then the commentary states:

With these two characteristics of thought and deed, they aspire to merely achieve the goal of totally pacifying suffering and its causes, this is the characteristic of their goal. The person who possesses these three characteristics is called the person of a middling scope.

As explained in the commentary, a person *who possesses these characteristics of thought*, as explained previously, refers to having a deep sense of renunciation, *and the deeds* refers to engaging in the morality of avoiding unwholesome actions, with the goal of achieving liberation. Such a being is characterised as being one of medium scope.

As further explained in the commentary,

They are the reference of a person here because they engage in the noble Dharma correctly.

The reference of a person of the medium scope is a person who engages in the noble Dharma correctly, which was presented earlier.

They are superior to the person of the small scope because their mind is disgusted with the entirety of cyclic existence, they are however inferior to the person of a great scope because they lack the superior intention of taking upon the burden of the welfare of other beings.

While they are superior to the small scope being, they are inferior to the great scope being because they lack superior intention.

The commentary further explains:

Hence the first three lines in the verse indicate the characteristics of thought, deed, and goal, and the fourth line indicates the basis of these characteristics.

The verse in the root text says to avoid 'destructive actions', and on this, the commentary quotes the great master Sharawa.

'Destructive actions' here doesn't simply refer to the destructive actions as such, but also refers to any contaminated actions that result in high status rebirth because it indicates both the action and the delusion which are the cause of cyclic existence.

The point being made here is that within the class of 'destructive actions' which, as mentioned here, are to be avoided, there are also contaminated actions that result in a higher status rebirth. Therefore, not all destructive actions are necessarily abandonments, because if something is to be an abandonment then it has to be negativity in all respects. Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsan, who is the author of the Sera Jey texts, clarified this point, saying that the causes to achieve a high status are not an abandonment because they are virtue. So what is being explained here is that as virtue is something to be acquired, it cannot, by its very nature, be an abandonment. Another great master, Gung-tang Jam-pel- yang, praised this as being a brilliant clarification.

In summary, the person of medium scope is striving to overcome cyclic existence, and therefore they avoid the causes for that, which are the contaminated actions. Yet although the causes for the high status are ultimately to be avoided, they are not to be seen as an abandonment. That is the main point.

As Sharawa mentioned, '*destructive actions*' refers to any contaminated actions that result in higher status rebirth because it includes both the action and karma and delusion which are the causes of cyclic existence. For example, the causes for a human rebirth are the delusions and karma. While a human rebirth ultimately has to be avoided, in order to achieve liberation, we do need to achieve a human rebirth temporarily. What we wish to ultimately overcome is something to be sought temporarily, and a goal to be achieved in that sense. That is how this needs to be understood.

For example, the main motivational causes for obtaining a human rebirth are the delusions, specifically the grasping at a self that is clearly identified in the twelve interdependent links. The first (ignorance), eighth (craving) and the ninth (grasping) links are delusions, while the second (consciousness) and the tenth (compositional actions) are karma. The karma to take rebirth as a human has to be virtuous karma. So, although motivated by delusions, the propelling or throwing karma leading to the tenth link (a human rebirth) has to be a virtuous karma.

A human rebirth is brought about by the three links that are delusions, and the two that are karma. However, while the delusions are an abandonment, karma is not entirely an abandonment, as it has to be a virtuous karma in order to bring about a human rebirth. So due to the delusions and karma one obtains the contaminated appropriated aggregates of a human.

As I have explained many times, they are called 'contaminated' because their cause is the delusions. The contaminated aggregates are the result of the delusions, so here the name of the cause is given to the actual result. There are also instances when the result is used for the name of the cause. They are referred to as 'appropriated aggregates', or in some translations 'perpetuating aggregates', because they are a continuum that is linked from the past to the future.

We need to obtain the contaminated aggregates of a human rebirth so we can create the causes to be completely free from cyclic existence. Therefore, as explained in the teachings, we need to obtain the high status of a human

rebirth until we achieve liberation; once liberation is obtained the human rebirth is discarded. So, a human rebirth is something that we need to have at present, but it will be discarded at the end when we obtain liberation.

The three trainings

The commentary continues:

Also avoiding 'destructive actions' here indicates all three trainings as the antidote.

As explained here, the three trainings are of fundamental importance for cultivating the cause for liberation. Of the three trainings, **morality** is seen as the basis. At its best, morality is making a commitment to observe certain vows, and at its very least it is abandoning negativities.

Morality is seen as a basis for developing concentration. It is said that that very observance of morality overcomes what is known as the gross distractions, which refers to frivolous activities and other external distractions. By observing morality one actually abstains from engaging in these external distractions, and thus one's mind naturally becomes more focussed inwardly.

With this inner focus one will be better equipped to develop the **concentration** needed to overcome subtle distractions. So there are two levels of distraction, gross and subtle. This is explained clearly in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. The gross distractions are excitement and laxity, and these are overcome by developing concentration. The subtle distraction is the inner distraction of grasping at a self, which is only overcome by understanding selflessness or emptiness.

The most profound level of concentration is related to developing calm abiding and thus the **wisdom** that realises emptiness, which is called special insight. This is how you need to understand the interdependent relationship between the three higher trainings.

Shared paths

Then the commentary makes this point:

There are many persons of great scope who share the path common to the person of a small and middling scope.

This refers to beings who are on the great scope path, who engage in the practices of the small scope and medium scope as a means to enhance their great scope practices. We, who aspire to the great scope, engage in the practices of the small scope and medium scope as the basis for the practices of the great scope.

The commentary further explains:

Hence, the person of middling scope explicitly mentioned here primarily refers to one who correctly engages in the means of achieving liberation but merely for their own sake.

This is the definition of a medium scope being, which refers back to the line in the root text, *Those who seek for themselves alone, and so forth*.

If someone, who is inspired to engage in the practices of the small scope and medium scope, reaches the practices of the medium scope, and meets with a virtuous teacher who is of the Hinayana path, then they will naturally be inspired to follow the Hinayana path.

Whereas when someone who has these aspirations meets a Mahayana virtuous teacher, then from this point on they will be led onto the path of the Great Vehicle. It is for this reason that the great masters of the past have encouraged us

to make strong prayers to meet with a Mahayana virtuous friend or teacher. This is a most important aspiration to make.

The Mahayana virtuous friend or teacher will, when guiding a student or a disciple on the path, present the practices of the small scope, and followed by the practices of the medium scope in such a way as to inspire the student to develop the strong wish to benefit other sentient beings. Then, because the wish to benefit other sentient beings is implanted in their mind from the very beginning, the student becomes very acquainted with that wish. When all the practices that are common to the small scope and the medium scope are done with the underlying wish to benefit other sentient beings, then when the student becomes mature enough to engage in the practices of the great scope, they will be ready to implement the techniques for developing bodhicitta, love, compassion and so forth.

The commentary further explains,

In terms of the vehicles there are two such persons, namely those who are followers of the hearer's vehicle and self-realiser vehicle.

I've also explained this previously and it's good to be able to make this distinction. The person who enters the hearer's path or the solitary realiser's path doesn't necessarily have to be a proponent of the tenets of the Lower Vehicle. When they are on the hearer vehicle path, they don't necessarily have to be a proponent of Hinayana tenets.

The commentary further explains,

In terms of the objects to be meditated upon there are two, namely, meditating upon the four noble truths and meditating upon the forward and reverse order of the twelve links.

As presented here, those who are on the hearers' vehicle path are said to engage mainly in the practices of the Four Noble Truths - the Truth of Suffering and the Truth of Origination, which are to be abandoned, while adopting the Truth of the Path and thus achieving the Truth of Cessation. There is no other than that which is presented in the four noble truths. Solitary realisers are said to meditate mainly on the forward and reverse order of the twelve interdependent links.

Three types of middle scope practitioners

The commentary further explains:

The explicitly mentioned person of the middling scope can be further divided into three. Namely those are those who are motivated by an aspiration to achieve liberation for themselves; engaging in the moral training of the ten wholesome actions are the small person of the middling scope;

We can relate this presentation to our own personal practice. The practice of the small scope is engaging in the ten wholesome deeds and avoiding the ten unwholesome deeds for one's own purpose; we need to understand how to incorporate this with our intention to benefit others.

When the commentary says *to achieve liberation for themselves*, it doesn't specify solely for themselves. We can engage in practices to achieve the goal of personal liberation, but it is not solely for our own purpose. The implication of not specifically mentioning 'solely' indicates that the practice of working towards liberation can lead into the practices of the great scope.

The second type of person refers to:

those motivated by the same aspiration engaging in the four noble truths are the mediocre person of middling scope, or medium scope;

And the third is:

those who possess the same aspiration meditating upon the non-duality of selflessness are the great person of middling scope.

Having presented these three types of people

the commentary further explains:

Following the system of the Great Teacher Nagarjuna and Glorious Chandrakirti, [indicating that Atisha is the follower of the Great Teacher Nagarjuna and Glorious Chandrakirti] the followers of the Lesser Vehicle can be divided into three from the perspective of their meditational understanding and realisation of the three types of selflessness respectively employing as an object of meditation.

Then the three selflessnesses are presented. They are:

- Selflessness in terms of being merely empty of substantially existent self;
- Selflessness of objective phenomena in terms of being empty of partless particle of external object; and
- Subtle selflessness in terms of being empty of inherent existence that both the person and phenomena are merely imputed conceptually.

This needs to be related back to the earlier point that a person who has entered the Hinayana path does not necessarily have to be a proponent of the Hinayana tenets.

The person who realises the **first type of selflessness** would be a person of the Hinayana vehicle as well as a proponent of Hinayana tenets. More specifically, they would be a proponent of the Sautrantika school of tenets. Therefore they are followers of the Lower Vehicle.

The person who realises the **second type of selflessness** would be a proponent of the Mind Only school. In terms of a vehicle they would be a person who has entered the Lower Vehicle, the Hinayana vehicle, but as they are also a proponent of the Mind Only school they are a proponent of the tenets of the Great Vehicle.

The person who realises the third type of selflessness, subtle selflessness, who has entered the Lower Vehicle, is a proponent of a Great Vehicle school of tenets, specifically the Consequentialists or the Prasangika Middle Way school.

In accordance with the system of the Great Teacher Nagarjuna and the Glorious Chandrakirti, it is said that an arya being necessarily has to have gained the realisation of emptiness, and it is also asserted that according to this system an arya being has to be a proponent of the Prasangika Middle Way school. So someone who has gained the realisation of selflessness or emptiness, while not necessarily having to be a Mahayanist, definitely needs to be a proponent of the Prasangika Middle Way school of tenets.

Practices of a middle scope being

We can leave this for our next session.

Because I'll be in retreat from this Monday I want you to do a discussion and an exam over the next two Tuesday sessions.

Bring along the texts, the *Great Extensive Lam Rim* as well as the *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* to the discussion. Then, using these texts as a basis, you can work through the topics of relying on a spiritual teacher which is the root of the path, and then reflect on the leisure and endowments of a human rebirth and how to take the essence of these leisure and endowments. There's no need to go into too much discussion about the hell realms, such as whether they exist or not, or trying to get your heads around how to understand it, as in our context it's sometimes hard to comprehend. Then discuss the four main subjects of the contemplation of the small scope which are impermanence, generating fear of the lower realms in particular, then karma, and taking refuge.

It's very good to engage in discussions because it's a way for older students to refresh their understanding of these teachings, while newer students will gain a better understanding. So it's of mutual benefit for everyone.

Engaging in studying a text, hearing the teachings and discussing them serves as a means to implant good imprints in the mind. The way that I understand imprints is that when we hear, for example, a certain point or a teaching, we might forget it, sometimes the moment after we hear it. Although we may not immediately recall what was said earlier, on the subtle level it does implant some sort of imprint which, when activated in the future, will develop into a better understanding. That is how one could understand the importance of imprints.

The sequence that is presented in the teachings is that we must first hear the teachings, which includes study and discussion and so forth, and then we need to contemplate them and, finally we need to put them into practice. Of course, when we put them into practice then our understanding is further enhanced and we will develop real faith in the Dharma. Otherwise, if we just listen and really don't really engage in the practice as a way of gaining some experience of changing and subduing our mind, then there's a danger that whatever teachings we hear will end up further strengthening the delusions in our mind. And that is the great pitfall.

It is said one obtains a blessing from listening to the teachings, while also accumulating virtue. To be a blessing, the teachings that one receives need to move and transform our mind. They have to be experienced on a personal level, otherwise it is hard to understand how the teachings have had any effect. But when one personalises them, and actually incorporates them into one's daily life and practice, then the blessings and virtues ensue.

As mentioned in the past, at the very end of life nothing but the Dharma can help at the time of death. This is an important point to really contemplate. It is something that is within our hands right now; we have the ability to actually incorporate the Dharma, which is the only thing that can help at the time of death, into our life right now.

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