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# Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual, let us spend some time on our meditation practice. [*Tong-len meditation*]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: "For the sake of all mother sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose, I will engage in listening to the teachings of the lam-rim and putting them into practice well".

*Geshe-la:* Did you have a good discussion last Tuesday?

*Students:* Yes, yes, thank you.

*Geshe-la:* So, as the discussion went well, when I ask you a question, you should be able to give the answer!

In relation to the twelve interdependent links, Jeremy could give an example of how one set of the twelve interdependent links finishes in two lives, and Damien could give an example of them finishing over three lives.

Don't be shy in giving your response, it would be a virtuous act: there's no need to be shy when engaging in virtue. As I say regularly, one should be shy when engaging in non-virtuous acts, not when doing virtuous acts.

So, in the set of twelve interdependent links, how many will be exhausted in this lifetime, and how many will be exhausted in a future lifetime?

*Damien:* Over two life cycles, it's six and six. They are ignorance, action, consciousness, then craving, grasping and existence over the first life. Then, in the second life, there is name and form, six senses, contact, feeling, birth, ageing and death.

*Geshe-la:* What kind of karma would that be?

*Damien:* One of the five heinous crimes or some really great virtuous karma.

*Geshe-la:* Does it necessarily have to be a heinous crime that exhausts the twelve interdependent links in two lifetimes?

The literal translation of the term 'heinous crime' is actually 'karma of immediate retribution'. That means you will experience the results in the very next lifetime, without an intervening lifetime. So the results of the karma that is created will be experienced in the very next life.

I'm asking you specifically to give an example of how the effects of a karma created in this lifetime would be experienced or exhausted in the next lifetime - for example, if you create the karma to be reborn as a human.

If, in this life, you create the projecting karma to be reborn as a human, then you will be reborn as a human in another lifetime. However, 'another life' doesn't necessarily mean the immediate next life; it could be any

lifetime after that. If the projecting karma is created in this lifetime, and you are not reborn as a human in the very next life, but in a lifetime after that, then that would be exhausting the twelve links of that specific projected karma over three lifetimes. So, for one set of twelve interdependent links to be exhausted, it will not take more than three lifetimes.

Can you explain *how* it is exhausted in three lifetimes?

*Damien:* The first lifetime would be ignorance, karma and consciousness, then there is either a gap or there's some period of time to the second life. Then, in the second life, there will be craving, grasping and existence at the end of that life. Then, in the next life there will be name and form, six senses, contact, feeling, birth, ageing and death.

*Geshe-la:* What we need to understand from this discussion of how the twelve interdependent links are exhausted over various lifetimes is that, at the present moment, within our consciousness, we would have many imprints of the projecting karma to be reborn as humans. for example. In fact, we have a lot of imprints of different projecting karmas in our consciousness right now, including non-virtuous karmas to be reborn in the lower realms.

With this understanding, we can rejoice in the imprints of virtuous karmas and further strengthen those. For the non-virtuous karmas, we need to engage in purification practices to purify the projecting karmic imprints within our mind leading to rebirth in the lower realms.

In terms of the twelve interdependent links, what activates the imprints is the link of **craving**. We need to understand that craving is the main link that activates the imprints in one's mind. So, while we have virtuous projecting karma and non-virtuous projecting karma in our minds now, without the links of craving and grasping, those imprints will not be activated. Therefore, we need to understand that attachment is the main factor that propels us into the next life.

Actually, both craving and grasping, followed by existence, are the links that activate the imprints in one's mind. In this way, we can understand that craving and grasping are the main causes to be reborn in cyclic existence.

As presented in the four noble truths, the truth of origination is delusions and karma, which are the causes of all suffering. However, in the context of the twelve interdependent links, one can understand that delusions are the main cause of cyclic existence and suffering.

The Vaibhashika accept that the main conditions or causes to be reborn in cyclic existence are delusions and karma. Therefore, they posit that arhats who have abandoned delusions and karma will not take rebirth again, because they don't have the causes for that. So, when an arhat 'passes beyond sorrow', for Vaibhashikas, this means that when they pass away, they will not take rebirth again.

Since the Vaibhashika don't posit the possibility of taking rebirth in order to benefit other sentient beings, they would argue that when the Buddha passed away, or entered nirvana, he would never take rebirth again. It is good to understand the Vaibhashika position. They assert that arhats are not reborn again, and don't assert

taking rebirth intentionally through aspirational prayers. So, according to the Vaibhashika, even the Buddha would not take rebirth again after passing into nirvana. They assert that, in order to take rebirth, one has to have the causes, which are karma and delusions.

We need to understand why the Vaibhashika assert certain things, rather than being surprised and saying, "Oh, why would they assert that?" They have their own reasons for their assertions.

Of course, in the Great Vehicle system, we assert that there is birth even after the delusions and karma have been eliminated; one can still take intentional or controlled rebirth out of aspirational prayers. Again, because we assert this, we have to be able to prove that this is the case.

The Vaibhashika also assert that the form body of the Buddha is in the nature of true suffering.

At our last session, we came to the point in the commentary where it was going into the presentation of the great scope.

### **THE EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION OF THE GREAT SCOPE**

This has two sub-headings, namely:

- The extensive explanation of the path of perfection
- The brief explanation of entering into the mantra<sup>1</sup>

#### **The extensive explanation of the path of perfection**

This has two further sub-headings, which are:

- Explanation of the path
- Explanation of the fruit (translated last time as the result)

#### **Explanation of the path**

Again, this is subdivided into two, which are:

- Promise of the explanation
- Explaining the perfect path

#### **PROMISE OF THE EXPLANATION**

The root verse is quoted:

5. *Those, who through their personal suffering  
Truly want to end completely  
All the suffering of others  
Are persons of supreme capacity.*

As presented in the commentary:

If you ask, 'how do the followers of great scope eradicate sufferings of other beings?' ...

The definition or explanation of a great scope being was presented earlier: it is a being whose intention is to eradicate the sufferings of all other sentient beings. Thus, the hypothetical question here is 'how do the followers of the great scope eradicate sufferings of other beings?'

The commentary continues:

In order to fulfil the excellent goal for others, it is necessary to achieve the highest enlightenment, which is the means (to fulfil the excellent goal for others).

As presented here, in order to eradicate the sufferings of other sentient beings, it is essential that, firstly, one achieves the highest state of enlightenment oneself. As explained previously, without achieving that state of enlightenment oneself, there is no way that one can alleviate the sufferings of other sentient beings.

As further explained in the commentary:

To imply that such a means to fulfil the excellent goal for others is the instruction imparted by the noble Lama, the text says, ...

Then the next verse is quoted:

6. *For those excellent living beings,  
Who desire supreme enlightenment,  
I shall explain the perfect methods  
Taught by the spiritual teachers.*

This encompasses the pledge, or the promise, to compose the text.

The commentary then explains:

These lines also imply (the author's) promise of explanation - of the means of achieving the highest enlightenment to those noble sentient beings who wish to achieve the enlightenment.

To understand the implication here of *highest enlightenment*, we can refer to our understanding of the hearers' and solitary realisers' state of liberation, which can also be termed 'enlightenment'. In accordance with the explanation here, those personal goals are not the highest state of enlightenment.

When the commentary refers to *those noble sentient beings who wish to achieve the enlightenment*, the term 'noble sentient beings' refers to beings of the great scope. Thus within the three scopes - small, medium and great - this refers particularly to beings of the great scope.

Then as the commentary further explains, quoting from Sharawa:

Sharawa said, the term Noble sentient beings refer to those whose (Mahayana) nature has been awakened, and thus possess an extraordinary sense of responsibility.

The awakening of Mahayana nature is said to occur whenever great compassion is developed within one's mind. What is explicitly mentioned here is superior intention, which is translated in the commentary as *an extraordinary sense of responsibility*. When superior intention is developed, that is the main sign that the Mahayana nature has been awakened. However, even prior to generating the superior intention, the point where great compassion is developed within one's mind is the time when the Mahayana nature is awakened. Next the commentary explains:

The lines (verse 6) "who desire supreme enlightenment" indicate an aspiration to achieve enlightenment and the lines (verse 5) "Truly want to end completely, All the suffering of others" indicate an aspiration to achieve the welfare of other beings.

The line in Verse 6 which reads, *who desire supreme enlightenment*, specifically indicates the aspiration to achieve enlightenment.

The line from Verse 5, which reads, *truly want to end completely all the suffering of others*, specifically indicates the aspiration to achieve the welfare of other beings.

<sup>1</sup> Trans: The language used in some of these headings might differ from last week's translation, but they are basically the same point.

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These two aspirations – the aspiration to alleviate the sufferings of all living beings and, for that purpose, aspiring to achieve enlightenment oneself – sum up the mind generation of bodhicitta.

Then the commentary further explains:

Hence, these verses present the fully-fledged definition of bodhicitta as mentioned in the *Ornament of Clear Realisation* (by Maitreya Buddha).

What is being referred to here is expressed in a verse from *The Ornament of Clear Realisation*, that defines bodhicitta:

Mind generation is the desire for  
Perfect complete enlightenment  
For the welfare of others.

The definition of bodhicitta presented in *The Ornament of Clear Realisation* is an altruistic mind that combines the two aspirations of aspiring to free other beings from all suffering; and, for that purpose, aspiring to achieve enlightenment.

As explained on many occasions in the past, the two aspirations can be understood as aspirations to accomplish the two purposes – of others, and of oneself.

These two purposes can be further understood in conjunction with the sevenfold cause and effect process for developing bodhicitta. For the six earlier parts of the technique – remembering all beings as one's mother (1), remembering their kindness (2), wishing to repay their kindness (3), developing great love (4) and great compassion (5) – one trains one's mind specifically to aspire to fulfil the purpose of others, which is perfected when one develops superior intention (6).

When one develops this superior intention based on love and compassion, one then resolves: "I myself will take on the responsibility to free all beings from all suffering, and place them in the highest state of happiness". When one makes that commitment to solely take on the responsibility oneself, that is the optimum level of development of the wish or aspiration to fulfil the purpose of others. Having developed the superior intention, one looks into whether one actually has the ability to free all beings from suffering and place them in the ultimate state of happiness. Then, one realises that right now, at this time, one doesn't have that full ability.

One further investigates if that is possible: how can one achieve that ability? That is when one develops a strong, keen yearning to achieve enlightenment. It is only when one becomes enlightened, having removed all faults and obtained all perfect qualities oneself, that one can fulfil the purpose of others. When one aspires to achieve enlightenment oneself, for the sake of other sentient beings, that is what is referred to as 'aspiring to fulfil the purpose of achieving enlightenment oneself'.

The sevenfold cause and effect sequence of training the mind to develop bodhicitta, which comes from Atisha's instructions, is explained further in the text.

Then the commentary points out:

... and also it presents it as the 'Entrance Door to Mahayana'.

This indicates that the mind generation of bodhicitta is like the entrance to the Mahayana, because once one

develops it within one's mind, one becomes a Mahayanist. If one has not developed the awakening mind or the mind generation of bodhicitta, one will not become a Mahayanist.

The commentary further mentions:

Despite the fact that Jowo (Atisha) was a great scholar in five fields of knowledge ...

As presented earlier, Atisha was a great master of all the sciences.

... the mode of presentation of the text is supported by authentic scriptural sources and reasoning to indicate that this is not a self-creation but is following the words of Lama Serlingpa and other lamas.

The indication here is that these words are not improvised, but accord with the words of authentic lamas, such as Lama Serlingpa, and other great masters. The main point here is that the Dharma comes from an authentic source.

Next, the commentary states:

As Potowa says, this in a way shows that the teaching of Jowo (Atisha) is a pith spiritual advice for us.

So Potowa mentions that the teaching of Atisha is a pith spiritual advice for us, for the following reason :

If we express our gratitude towards lamas by recognising not only small or large but all our happiness or positive qualities as an outcome of the lamas' kindness, then the lamas' blessings would flow automatically and our qualities would increase.

These are also points about relying on the spiritual teacher.

Hence, one should always remember any qualities gained is the blessing of the Lamas and in this way one receives lamas' blessing all the time.

The indication here is that when we remember that whatever qualities we have achieved are due to the kindness of our teachers, we will constantly be receiving their blessings.

Furthermore, the commentary says that:

Since Potowa interpreted this section as Remembering the Kindness of the Lamas, Geshe Sharawa wrote in detail on how to rely on the lamas here.

Regarding the lines in verse 6, the commentary says:

In short, (verse 6) "*For those excellent living beings...*" these two lines identify the vessels (listeners) who receive this Dharma. "*I shall explain the perfect methods Taught by the spiritual teachers*" are two lines identifying the nectar like Dharma.

Then it reads:

Moreover, "*the perfect methods*" indicate the subject matter, "*I shall explain*" indicates the purpose (of composing the text), "*Taught by the spiritual teachers*" indicates the unique way of presenting the subject matter, "*supreme enlightenment*" indicates the ultimate purpose, "*I shall illuminate the lamp For the path to enlightenment*", indicates an extensive explanation.

These are specific points relating to verse 6.

The commentary continues:

The following questions arise, as early in the text, (verse 1) "*I shall illuminate the lamp For the path to enlightenment*", and (verse 2) says "*I shall write clearly*

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*distinguishing, Their individual characteristics*". In here too it says, (Verse 6) "*I shall explain the perfect methods*". Are these repetitive?

The question raised here is that it seems that the author's pledge is repeated three times - "*I shall illuminate the lamp for the path ...*" in the first instance; secondly, "*I shall write clearly distinguishing*"; then thirdly "*I shall explain the perfect methods*". So the question here is *are these repetitive?*

The commentary explains:

No, there is no such fault. The line in (verse 1) where it says "*I shall illuminate the lamp For the path to enlightenment,*" indicates the author's promise of the explanation for the whole text in general and the line in (verse 2) where it says "*I shall write clearly distinguishing...*" indicates that the difference between the three scopes person is explained separately. Whereas the line in (verse 6) where it says "*I shall explain the perfect methods*" is to indicate the explanation of the unmistakable means to achieve the highest enlightenment specifically for the followers with the nature of Great Vehicle.

As indicated in the commentary with respect to the line in Verse 6:

"*For those excellent living beings,*" that can also be treated as the synthesis for the rest of the text.

The commentary further explains:

Thus, in here, the Mahayana mind-generation's (bodhicitta) definition, classifications and methodology of training are in accordance with the view of the Three Great Charioteers - that is the Seven-fold Cause and Effect, and Exchanging and Equalising one for others as a means to cultivate the precious mind of enlightenment as part of one's stage by stage progression along the path to enlightenment.

So:

Following this view one should put all one's effort and human capacity in meditation to generate bodhicitta.

The commentary further says:

In relation to this, the Great Jowo (Atisha), at the time of passing away said to Tonpa (Dromtonpa), "from now onward don't receive Dharma from the Indian scholar Serdod, he would teach to corrupt the four tantras, but regard the sutras as the Spiritual Guide and have a Noble Mind."

So it the instruction given is to *regard* the teachings, *the sutras as the spiritual guide and have a noble mind* or a gentle mind.

The next passages show some poignant moments in the accounts of the great masters:

Then, also when Tonpa (Dromtonpa) was passing away, his head was resting in the lap of Potowa and he felt tear drops running through his hair and soothingly advised to Tonpa, saying, "Don't be sad, have a Noble Mind and be a special person in this very life time."

Then, as mentioned here, Jowo replied in the affirmative, saying:

"Yes Jowo, I will." (Potowa) replied and then asked, "What does it mean to have a Noble Mind?"

The answer was uttered with effort by Dromtonpa, just before he passed away. Here, the commentary notes, he

was in a feeble state, but trying to use some force in his voice to say it:

With an effort he (Dromtonpa) said it twice, "it means bodhicitta."

So that is what a 'noble mind' means.

The commentary continues:

Potowa recalled this experience later in saying, "at that time I felt as if putting a stake [or ritual dagger] in my heart."

Basically, the commentary is saying that this was very potent advice.

Next, the commentary reads:

Langri Tangpa stated that bodhicitta becomes stabilised when there is more sense of reverence to those who harm you than to those who benefit you;...

Of course, this is a very significant point - one can genuinely show *reverence* and *respect to those who harm you*. That would be a sign of having generated bodhicitta. So when training one's mind to develop bodhicitta, one needs to practise developing mindsets such as repaying harm with kindness.

The indication here is that the bodhicitta mind becomes stabilised and firmer when one is able to show respect *to those who harm you*, rather than retaliating. We can see that these are incredibly meaningful ways of practising bodhicitta in our everyday lives; they are ways to utilise our normal encounters with others as an opportunity to practise developing or establishing bodhicitta.

As further explained by Lumpawa in the commentary:

"we consider the generation and completion stages as the pith instruction, but really the extracted gist of the Jowo's instructions is cultivating loving kindness, compassion and bodhicitta."

This is also a pith instruction.

Then:

Even our All-knowing Je Tsongkhapa said in his *Spiritual Songs of Experience*...

Then quoting from this text *Spiritual Songs of Experience*, the commentary reads:

"Generating the mind is the central axle of the supreme vehicle path;

It is the foundation and the support of all expansive deeds;

To all instances of two accumulations it is like the elixir of gold;

It's the treasury of merits containing myriad collections of virtues;

Recognising these truths the heroic bodhisattvas

Uphold the precious supreme mind as the heart of their practice.

I, a yogi, have practiced in this manner; You, who aspire for liberation, should do likewise."

## THE EXPLANATION OF THE PERFECT METHOD

This has two sub-headings:

- Aspirational instructions
- Engaging instructions

### Aspirational instructions

The first of these has three headings, which are:

- The preliminary

- The actual
- The completion (which is the advice)

*The preliminary*

The first of these has a further three sub-headings which are:

- Accumulating merits
- Taking extraordinary refuge
- Training in the three minds

*Accumulating merits*

The commentary continues:

Of these three, relating to the first one, the text says, from Verse 6, “I shall explain the perfect methods.”

That is followed by a question:

What is the perfect method to achieve Complete Enlightenment?

The answer is twofold:

The method can be elaborated into two which are the excellent thought and the excellent deed. The thought here relates to Mind-generation (bodhicitta), an arising of which is, as indicated here, dependent upon accumulating merits.

This is indicated in many other teachings, and specifically when we recently studied the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*. The second chapter specifically relates the way to generate the bodhicitta mind by first engaging in purification and accumulating merit, which are the basis for generating the mind of bodhicitta.

The following explanations are in line with the lam-rim teachings, which we can leave for our next session.

The preliminary practices explained in the lam-rim teachings include setting up the altar in particular, by first cleaning the area, then arranging the representations of the holy body, speech and mind, and then making offerings. It is good for you to read that section in the lam-rim, which you can then relate to the explanation here.

The six preliminaries are very practical: by first cleaning the area, arranging the altar nicely, and then making offerings establishes the basis for one to engage in practice. It would take too much time for me to go into detail on this topic here. If you read that section in the lam-rim, then when the explanations are given here, you can relate to it and understand their significance.

In the lam-rim teachings the significance of cleaning the area is explained through quotes from the *Ornament of the Sutras*. When we understand the significance, it brings much more meaning to the action. Most of the older students have already received the lam-rim teachings, so you can relate those points to the passages here. One can then incorporate all of one’s understanding into this topic.

It will also restore your understanding of the teachings you have received before, which may have become a little dormant. This teaching will rekindle what you have understood previously.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltzen is used with the kind permission of Samdup Tsering.

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