
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

༄༅། བྱང་ཆུབ་ལམ་གྱི་སྒྲོན་མ་བཟུགས་སྟོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

31 October 2017

As usual, let us engage in 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 listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.

In generating your motivation along these lines, understand that it encompasses both the aspiring bodhicitta attitude and the engaging bodhicitta attitude. Generating the mind that thinks 'I need to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all mother sentient beings,' is an aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, which is the aspiring bodhicitta attitude. Then generating the mind that thinks 'for that purpose, I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well' encompasses the essence of the engaging bodhicitta attitude. If you incorporate this understanding into your practice then it becomes more profound when generating this motivation. Similarly, when doing any other practices, like a deity yoga practice, first aspiring bodhicitta is generated, followed by engaging bodhicitta. This practice states, 'I need to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all mother sentient beings, and for that purpose I'll now engage in this deity yoga practice'.

It is not sufficient just to have the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, you need to actually engage in the methods and means to achieve it. Thus, when you take active initiative to engage in the practices they become very meaningful.

Understand that by generating such a positive motivation, really taking it to heart, and regularly familiarising yourself with I, definitely brings about a transformation, particularly when you take the personal responsibility to put it into practice. Otherwise, when you generate the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, as noble as that aspiration may be, sentient beings are still in samsara and nothing has changed. But when you take personal responsibility to engage in the methods to help sentient beings to be free from their suffering, that will then bring about a great transformation in your own mind, and you will actually be able to benefit other sentient beings.

As the text explains this in great detail, it is appropriate for us to incorporate it in our practice. Following the pledges of aspirational bodhicitta, the text explains the ritual of the engaging bodhisattva vows. How to protect the vows is presented further.

THE EXPLANATION OF THE PERFECT METHOD

Aspirational instructions

Conclusion

If just generating the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, you do not have to engage in the practices of the pledges. However, when you generate the aspirational bodhicitta with an actual pledge, then you need to practise the five pledges.

We have already covered two pledges. The first pledge is to think about the benefits of bodhicitta again and again. The second is ensuring that the aspiration to achieve enlightenment does not decline, by generating that mind three times in the day and three times at night.

The third sub-heading is the instruction of training in accumulating two accumulations

This third subdivision is training in the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. Note that these two accumulations are the main causes for obtaining the two bodies of a buddha. More specifically, the accumulation of merit is the cause for obtaining the form body of a buddha, and the accumulation of wisdom is the main cause for obtaining the wisdom truth body of a buddha. While engaging in either of the two accumulations becomes the cause to obtain enlightenment, the more specific causes are now presented. When the teachings explain that you need to combine both accumulations, this means combining both method and wisdom.

The primary means for accumulating merit is generating bodhicitta, based on developing love and compassion.

Of the six perfections, the perfections of generosity, morality, patience, and concentration relate to the accumulations of merit. The perfection of wisdom refers particularly to the accumulation of wisdom, while the perfection of joyous effort is subsumed into both merit and wisdom.

The commentary presents the first half of verse 18 under this heading:

*18 ab. Having developed the aspiration for enlightenment,
Constantly enhance it through concerted effort.*

The commentary then quotes from Potowa to explain this verse.

Potowa advises, "Effort put in gathering the two accumulations should be induced by this."

What should we understand by the word 'this'? It refers to bodhicitta, so effort put into gathering the two accumulations should be induced by bodhicitta. That's how we need to understand it.

The commentary continues:

One trains oneself in generating aspirational bodhicitta through two means, which are remembering its benefit, and training in it six times (every day).

In relation to the meaning of the verse, the commentary continues:

After having generated it one can then enhance and develop it through making concerted effort in gathering the two accumulations of merit and wisdom by offering to the Refuge Objects ...

The refuge objects generally encompasses all three objects of the Buddha refuge, the Dharma refuge and the Sangha refuge. The commentary further presents:

... services to the sangha community, offering tormacake to harmful spirits, giving to the impoverished etc.

This is a specific presentation of how to accumulate merit. Having generated the aspirational bodhicitta, remembering the benefits, training in it by reciting the prayer three times through the day and three times in the evening, one then enhances it by making a concerted effort to gather the accumulation of merit. This refers to making offerings *to the*

Refuge Objects, services to the sangha community, offering tormacake to harmful spirits, giving to the impoverished, i.e. giving food to those who need food, and giving clothing to those who need clothing, and so forth.

In presenting the accumulations of merit and wisdom, the commentary does not specify the accumulation of wisdom, but the intent of the words is to incorporate into virtuous activities the understanding and realisation of emptiness, which is actually wisdom. The commentary emphasises that one enhances and develops it through making a *concerted effort*. So, just thinking about the benefits and engaging in the practice once or twice is not enough; you actually have to engage in them again and again, which of course requires some effort. The root verse says *constantly enhance it through concerted effort*, where *constantly* means practising it again and again throughout the day.

Next the commentary quotes from:

Advice on Collections (*Sambharaparikatha*) by Vasubhandu

“A Bodhisattva must always think:
Today I will accumulate merit and wisdom
And bring benefits to all beings”.

This is a very potent verse, which gives very succinct advice. The words are very meaningful and we need to apply this advice ourselves. It would be good if you could memorise this verse and particularly cultivate this intention; generating the thought, ‘today I will accumulate merit and wisdom and bring benefit to all beings’. The advice here is for bodhisattvas to always think in this way, and since we aspire to become a bodhisattva, it is important to train our mind with this altruistic intention.

The fourth sub-heading is the instruction of training one’s mind in not abandoning sentient beings.

The particular instruction in this practice is not to abandon sentient beings, as this would be a cause for giving up bodhicitta, which is a root downfall of the bodhisattva vows. To protect your bodhicitta from degenerating, you need to understand that the advice is not to abandon sentient beings. What does this mean? An example using an ordinary situation may reveal that when you have a disagreement and conflict with someone, you may be inclined to develop a mind that thinks ‘I’ll have nothing more to do with this person’. If you generate such a thought, you are abandoning their welfare because you give up on them. This is when you are generating the mind of abandoning them.

If a bodhisattva generated a mind not to benefit a particular person or being any longer, that would be a cause for their bodhicitta to degenerate, because it is giving up the welfare of sentient beings. Giving up on even one sentient being is giving up on all sentient beings. This is what you should understand.

The commentary presents the explanation:

According to Shangrom, the word ‘also’ (in the below verse) implies the causes for the mind generation of bodhicitta not to decline, needs to be practiced in this life; while mentally abandoning sentient beings means relinquishing bodhicitta. This explanation is considered to be very good by some [earlier masters].

The main point being presented here is that one needs to engage in practices to ensure that the causes for bodhicitta do not decline in this life, and that mentally abandoning sentient beings means relinquishing or giving up bodhicitta. This is the point that I was explaining earlier. The

commentary emphasises that the explanation presented by earlier masters is the best way to understand the meaning of the lines in the verse.

The first four practices are the means by which bodhicitta does not degenerate in this lifetime. To incorporate this into your own practice, keep these four practices in mind: think about the benefits of bodhicitta again and again, reciting it three times day and night (as in the Six Session Guru Yoga) etc.; engage in the practice of accumulating merit to the best of your ability by making offerings to the objects of refuge, offering service or offerings to the sangha community, offering tormacakes or ritual offerings to the harmful spirits and so forth; and engage in the practices of morality, patience, joyous effort and concentration. That encompasses the practice of merit. For the accumulation of wisdom, generate an understanding of emptiness to the best of your ability, bring it to mind again and again, and incorporate it into your practices.

This will serve as a means to enhance your aspirations to achieve enlightenment at your own level. You may not yet have developed the actual aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, but you have the seed of it based on love and compassion at your own level, and you have a genuine aspiration to achieve enlightenment. Likewise, your wish to benefit others is also a seed that can be improved and further developed by these practices.

Many of us have also taken bodhisattva vows, perhaps several times. So, engaging in these practices becomes a means to uphold and further strengthen those bodhisattva vows. These are the ways we can incorporate this into our own daily practices, which makes it very meaningful.

The fifth sub-heading is the instruction of training in abandoning four black dharmas and adopting four white dharmas.

This relates to the following verse:

*18cd. To remember it in this and also in other lives,
Keep the precepts properly as explained.*

If you practice adopting the four white dharmas the four black dharmas are naturally overcome.

The four black dharmas (dark practices) are:

- Deceiving abbots, masters, gurus and those worthy of offerings.
- Making others feel regret about something that is not regrettable.
- Speaking disparagingly etc. to beings who have correctly entered the Mahayana.
- In the absence of sincerity, using deceit and misrepresentation to get the service of others.

The four white dharmas (light practices) are:

- Forsaking consciously lying to any living being whatsoever, even in jest, or even for the sake of your life.
- Not deceiving but remaining sincere with all living beings.
- Developing the thought that all bodhisattvas are the Teacher.
- Causing the living beings that you are helping to mature, to not want the modest vehicle but to adhere to perfect enlightenment.¹

¹ Source: *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Vol. 2, p. 76.

The explanation of these dharmas are clearly presented in the lam-rim. The abbot refers to abbots of monasteries, the master refers here to a lama or abbot from whom you have received vows and precepts. These are actually presented in a very detailed manner in the lam-rim. 'Deceiving' here means misleading abbots, preceptors, teachers, and so forth, through lies or falsehood.

Leading others to regret their virtuous deeds, means influencing them to regret their virtuous deeds, which would be a misdeed from one's side.

The lam-rim explains speaking disparagingly etc. to beings who have correctly entered the Mahayana and refers to criticising a bodhisattva out of anger.

You can refer to the lam-rim for a detailed explanation of the other white and black dharmas.

Then the commentary raises a hypothetical question:

Is it enough just to train oneself in the above-mentioned four causes to prevent the ceremonially generated aspirational Bodhi-mind from declining in this life?

It continues:

... it is not enough because one must not forget, but remember it (Bodhi-mind) in other lives too. Relating to this the 'Kashyapa requested sutra' stated that, as it is said, 'the two sets of four practices should be completely guarded and applied'.

The point here is that if you merely generate the aspiration to achieve enlightenment without making a pledge, then there's no fault if you do not practice the advice contained in the five pledges. However, if you generate the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, and make a pledge to do so, then you need to practise in accordance with the explanation of the five pledges.

You need to incorporate this understanding when you take a subsequent initiation or *je-nang*. If attending one of these initiations, you need to be mindful of whether you are making a pledge or just generating aspirational bodhicitta. There are specific indications during the ceremony as to whether the focus is to just generate the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, or whether it is to make a pledge along with that aspiration to achieve enlightenment. You need to understand that distinction.

The commentary further explains:

As to the question of whether or not the Bodhi-mind newly arises within the continuum of an ordinary being or not, the commentary does not provide a clear answer. However, declining of Bodhi-mind due to the cause of four black dharmas and mentally abandoning sentient beings happens only to ordinary beings. This implicitly suggests that the arising of the Bodhi-mind within it (the continuum of ordinary beings) is a fact.

The commentary states that, *mentally abandoning sentient beings happens only to ordinary beings*. In other words, giving up bodhicitta only happens at the level of ordinary beings. There are three levels on the path of accumulation: on the small path of accumulation degeneration of bodhicitta is possible; on the medium path of accumulation and beyond there is no decline. That is why the commentary says abandoning sentient beings only happens to ordinary beings.

Consider the full explanation, *however, declining of Bodhi-mind due to the cause of four black dharmas and mentally*

abandoning sentient beings happens only to ordinary beings. According to the teachings, the commentary explains this implicitly suggests that the arising of the Bodhi-mind within the continuum of an ordinary being is a fact, meaning that it is possible for an ordinary being to generate bodhicitta. The main point here is that bodhicitta can only decline on the level of an ordinary being.

Engaging instructions

The commentary presents the second subdivision from the earlier category²:

The second is the explanation of engaging (bodhisattva) precepts and so forth, which has three presentations:

- [by making a connection with the earlier part,] taking engaging vows
- Manner of taking engaging vows
- Training in the precepts after having taken the engaging vows.

Taking engaging vows

To understand engaging vows, you need a clear understanding of the distinction between aspiring bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta. This has been presented many times. In *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* the analogy used to distinguish between them is that someone who has a wish to go is analogous to aspiring bodhicitta, and someone who is actually engaged in the act of going is analogous to engaging bodhicitta.

One specific definition states that the mind of bodhicitta that is not accompanied by the actions of the bodhisattva deeds is aspiring bodhicitta, while bodhicitta that is accompanied by the actual deeds of the bodhisattva e.g. the six perfections, is called engaging bodhicitta.

To further understand this, beings who encompass these two levels of bodhicitta on the path - for example, bodhisattvas in single-pointed meditative equipoise on emptiness - would be bodhisattvas who have aspiring bodhicitta in their mental continuum. As they are in meditative equipoise, they are not actively engaging in the deeds, therefore they are not practising engaging bodhicitta. When in the post-meditative state, the bodhisattvas actively engage in the bodhisattva deeds (such as the six perfections) and are therefore practising engaging bodhicitta.

The commentary further explains:

It is impossible to achieve enlightenment without engaging in the bodhisattva deeds, even if one has produced bodhicitta mind. One may engage in the practice of giving and so forth however, they do not become bodhisattva deeds unless one has taken bodhisattva vows. Hence, to imply that one should hold bodhisattva vows as a basis of bodhisattva's deeds, it says here.

This implies that to hold the bodhisattva vows as a basis for bodhisattva deeds, you have to have the basis of morality in order to actually take the bodhisattva vows, and then engage in the bodhisattva deeds.

The commentary refers to the verse:

19. *Without the vow of the engaged intention,
Perfect aspiration will not grow.
Make effort definitely to take it,
Since you want the wish
For enlightenment to grow.*

² This is the second part of the heading Explanation of the Perfect Method. It was introduced in the teachings of 12 September 2017.

The first two lines explain that the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, which is generated first, will not develop further if one does not take the vow.

The next line, *make effort definitely to take it*, states you must definitely make effort to take the vow, *since you want the wish for enlightenment to grow*. In other words, if those who aspire for enlightenment want this aspiration to grow and develop further, they must definitely take the bodhisattva vows.

The commentary presents the meaning of this verse:

Having generated a firm aspirational mind through a ritual, one must take engaging vows with strenuous effort without procrastination and without being disheartened.

As already explained, first you take the aspirational mind through the ritual of generating the aspirational mind to achieve enlightenment. Then one must further back that up by taking engaging vows *with strenuous effort without procrastination and without being disheartened*.

Taking bodhisattva vows entails a lot of promises, with a lot of vows to uphold, and so involves much more practice. This verse emphasises that you should not be disheartened by that practice.

The commentary further explains:

Since the engaging vow is aimed at achieving the awakened state, it is called an awakening vow (Tibetan; *byang sdom*³) which is a case of labelling the name of result to the cause. The purpose of taking up the engaging vow is to develop and perfect an aspirational mind.

From this you can appreciate the sequence of the Six Session Guru Yoga practice. It begins with generating refuge, then generating the four immeasurable thoughts, followed by generating the aspirational bodhicitta with a pledge. Following that is generating the engaging bodhisattva vows, and going over the engaging bodhisattva vows.

The commentary further explains:

The development of an aspirational mind is dependent on the engaging vow because there is no other way to develop an aspirational mind to its perfect and excellent state other than holding the vows, which are by nature characterised by engaging mind.

The development of an aspirational mind is dependent on the engaging vow. That is because there is no other way to develop an aspirational mind to its perfect and excellent state other than by holding the vows that are by nature characterised by engaging mind.

This basically re-emphasises the points explained earlier. To back this up the commentary presents the quotation:

Hence, it is said in 'Nyingpo Ngepar Duwa' by Atisha. "Endowed with superior intention, generate engaging mind, then the very aspirational mind previously cultivated will increase extensively.

The commentary clarifies that:

Some early masters such as Geshe Yungwapa interpreted the cultivation of aspiration mind as a form of vow, however most others said that the term vow is simply implied for Atisha himself.

To clarify the point, some may call generating the aspiration of bodhicitta a vow. This is incorrect, and this is the point being clarified.

To back this up, the commentary then quotes (as it says) from Atisha himself:

Having generated bodhicitta mind first, one then takes the Bodhisattva vows.

Here the bodhicitta mind refers to the aspirational bodhicitta mind. Atisha himself says that one first generates the aspiring bodhicitta mind, and following that, one takes the vows. The bodhicitta and bodhisattva vows are mentioned separately, with the bodhisattva vows being presented next.

Before we conclude our session this evening, we will recite the *King of Prayers* for Joyce Cameron who passed away recently. Some might have known her in the past. We will also make dedications for Sue Fotheringham, who has recently had surgery, wishing her to have a quick recovery. For Venerable Tsepel's mother, who is currently unwell and hospitalised, to have a speedy recovery. And also for Vicki who has not been well.

Make your dedications in accord with the explanations I've given previously. On a practical level, after doing our practices for them, notify them, as this will give them some solace and so they will feel they're being looked after by the Centre. They normally support the Centre, and now when they're going through some difficulties, offering our prayers and dedicating our practices will be a good service to them, and their minds will be happy.

Of course, it is important to expand your dedications and practice to encompass all sentient beings. In summary, we are doing the practices to benefit all sentient beings so they are free from suffering and obtain ultimate happiness. By doing these practices sincerely you will, in fact, be the immediate beneficiary.

As Lama Tsongkhapa says - who His Holiness the Dalai Lama quotes regularly - if one engages wholeheartedly to benefit other beings, one's own welfare will be fulfilled on the side. His Holiness has stressed that this is a very potent instruction. When you benefit others, you need not have to worry about your own welfare, as that is automatically accomplished on the side.

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

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Jill Lancashire
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute

³ *byang chub sems dpa'i sdom pa*