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# 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 meditation practice.  
[Tonglen meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings incorporating into it, to the best of one's understanding of bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment.

As I've mentioned previously, it is really important to engage in the practice of meditation as it is one of the best ways to bring about physical and mental wellbeing. It is important to understand and acknowledge that both internal and external conditions affect one's mental wellbeing. You need to recognise what these are and then try to further develop those conditions and increase them.

It is the same with our physical wellbeing; there are external conditions and internal conditions, and it is also good to understand and acknowledge what they are as a way to further develop those conditions. With this understanding, the main thing is to acquire the good conditions for one's wellbeing that one has not yet acquired, and increase those that one has already obtained. And one needs to avoid the adverse conditions one has not acquired yet, and abandon those one already has acquired.

When the causes and conditions for happiness are intact then the consequence is that one will experience happiness. Likewise, if the conditions for happiness are lacking, then one will not experience a genuine sense of happiness. There are also causes and conditions for suffering, and when these causes and conditions are intact then the consequence is the experience of suffering, even if one doesn't wish for it. When the conditions for suffering are removed then one will not experience suffering. So it is good to know that there are causes and conditions for both happiness and suffering.

As acquiring these conditions depends entirely upon oneself, one cannot blame others for one's lack of happiness or experience of suffering. If one lacks happiness, then one needs to acquire the appropriate conditions to experience a sense of wellbeing and happiness. Likewise, if one is experiencing any level of suffering, then the conditions that will remove those causes of suffering need to be applied. This basic fact indicates that we should take more responsibility for our own wellbeing. In fact, on a more profound level, it can be encouraging to know that we do have that ability to acquire those conditions.

While these teachings are presenting the ways that the practices of bodhisattvas benefit other sentient beings, we need to understand that on a personal level we need to begin by securing our own wellbeing and happiness. Then on the basis of our own wellbeing and happiness,

we will be able to extend benefit and wellbeing to others as well.

In summary, happiness doesn't come about by waiting around and wishing to be happy; the conditions for one's happiness have to be acquired. Waiting for suffering to just cease naturally is also pointless, as the right conditions also have to be acquired. We all naturally wish for everything to go well, but leaving it as a wish only causes more misery. If wishing for happiness alone could indeed bring about happiness then we should all be very happy by now, as most of us have already spent twenty to thirty years wishing to be happy and striving for that happiness.

Apparently, there are some who have waited for the right person to appear in their life, and are still waiting for that to happen after many years. They might even end up waiting for the 'right person' until the end of their life!

What does meeting the right person mean anyway?

*Student 1:* Someone who makes you happy.

*Student 2:* Someone who fulfils your desires.

That, of course, is a completely wrong approach. If you are not able to fulfil your own desires, then how could you possibly expect someone else to do that for you? If there was anyone who could have fulfilled all your wishes and desires to make you entirely happy, then Buddha Shakyamuni would have already done that long ago.

We have also come into contact with some very great and precious teachers who have all the perfect qualities intact, but if we don't make the effort from our own side, then it doesn't help much.

These days there are many who have a rinpoche as their partner. If anyone could fulfil your wishes, then perhaps a rinpoche could! However, there was an American lady who was married to a rinpoche, and she once made the comment, 'Although he's a rinpoche he's got more desire than me!' If that was true, then how could someone who has more desire than you fulfil your wishes? I don't think she was exaggerating, as it was her own experience.

Nagarjuna gave a very succinct description of the meaning of wealth, he said 'the meaning of wealth is to be content!' That is to say, that one's desires will be fulfilled when one develops contentment. This is really true.

Coming back to the main point, all of you have a good basis of understanding the law of karma i.e. the natural consequences of cause and effect. The main criteria for being able to acquire what one wishes for and to avoid negative circumstances is to abide by the law of karma.

## The manner of taking vows

### The ritual of taking vows without a lama (cont.)

Having covered the first verse under this heading, the commentary now poses a rhetorical question:

Now, if one asks what is the scriptural source for the ritual without lama?

Having previously explained that there is a ritual for taking the vows without a lama, the next verse presents an authentic scriptural source.

25. *I shall write here very clearly,  
As explained in the Ornament  
Of Manjushri's Buddha Land Sutra,  
How, long ago, when Manjushri  
Was Ambaraja, he aroused  
The intention to become enlightened.*

Then the commentary explains the meaning of this verse.

The specific promise to explain it is expressed here. As explained in the Ornament Of Manjushri's Buddha Land Sutra, once upon a time of the immeasurable aeon, Manjushri was born as the Chakravarti king called Ambaraja or Sky King, and at that time in front of the Tathagatha called the King of the Melodious roaring dragon, He generated the unsurpassable mind of enlightenment. This is lucidly written here. As to the explicit presentation of the bodhicitta and the manner of holding the vow in that sutra, it [the root text] says:

This explanation should be quite clear. As the commentary indicates, the next six verses in the root text are actually quoted from the *Ornament of Manjushri's Buddha Land Sutra*.

The verses for taking the vows are:

26. *"In the presence of the protectors,  
I arouse the intention to gain full  
enlightenment.  
I invite all beings as my guests  
And shall free them from cyclic existence.*
27. *"From this moment onwards  
Until I attain enlightenment,  
I shall not harbour harmful thoughts,  
Anger, avarice or envy.*
28. *"I shall cultivate pure conduct,  
Give up wrong-doing and desire  
And with joy in the vow of discipline  
Train myself to follow the Buddhas.*
29. *"I shall not be eager to reach  
Enlightenment in the quickest way  
But shall stay behind to the very end  
For the sake of a single being.*
30. *"I shall purify limitless  
Inconceivable lands  
And remain in the ten directions  
For all those who call my name.*
31. *"I shall purify all my bodily  
And my verbal forms of activity.  
My mental activities, too, I shall purify  
And do nothing that is non-virtuous."*

These verses from the sutra are to be recited when one takes the bodhisattva vows without a lama.

Then the commentary explains:

Having offered the seven limbed practices to the Three Jewels, take the vow by utilising the awakening mind generation statement by the Manjushri Ambaraja,

Here 'take the vow' refers to reciting the verses that have just been quoted. As a way to back this up the commentary continues:

It says, in 'Compendium of Trainings' (Shikhsamuccaya by Shantideva),

As you will recall the ritual of taking the bodhisattva vows with a lama is in accordance with the presentation in the *Bodhisattva Bhumi*, or *Bodhisattva Grounds*. Here, the ritual of taking the bodhisattva vows without the lama is in accordance with Shantideva's *Compendium of Trainings* or *Shikhsamuccaya*. Although both texts include presentations of taking vows from a lama and taking vows without a lama, the commentary specifies that the ritual for taking vows without a lama is from the *Compendium of Trainings*.

"Following the supplication prayer to the Spiritual Master, one either repeats after the preceptor or recites it by oneself - O Preceptor, please listen to me, I named so and so.

When the *Compendium of Trainings* says, *Following the supplication prayer to the Spiritual Master, one either repeats after the preceptor or recites it by oneself*, it is referring to the fact that according to the *Compendium of Trainings*, in the ritual of taking vows from a lama one repeats the vows after the preceptor or lama, and if there is no lama present then one recites the vows by oneself. However, an important point to note is that one needs to visualise the Buddha in front of oneself and imagines repeating the verses after the Buddha and receiving the vows from the Buddha.

If there is a preceptor one begins the ritual saying

O Preceptor, please listen to me.

The connotation of the Tibetan word translated here as *please listen to me* is 'Please listen to me as I have a request to make'. So there is this additional connotation of 'I have something to request'. This is of course in accordance with what we do in daily life. When we want to request something from someone we first get their attention, and having done that we say: 'Oh, can you please listen to me, I have a request to make', and then you ask whatever favour you want from them.

It's basically the same here. Out of great veneration and respect for the lama, one first prostrates to him, makes mandala offerings, and then with one's palms joined at one's heart, one says, whilst kneeling, 'oh please pay attention to me.

This is in line with requests made to the Buddha such as in the *Vajra Cutter Sutra*, where it begins with Subhuti kneeling on his right knee and making the request to the Buddha to please teach. It is in accordance with that tradition that one kneels on one's right knee when taking the vows.

Having made that request to listen, one says

I named so and so

The indication here is that one actually states one's name after the request to listen. Then the ritual continues:

Then, one says, "just as mentioned in the arya *Manjushri's Buddha Land Sutra* how in the past the Arya Manjushri actively generated the mind of enlightenment, so too I generate the mind."

The most potent part of this is the actual vow: *just as Arya Manjushri generated the mind of enlightenment, I too will also generate this mind of enlightenment.*

As the commentary then explains:

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If one prefers the short version then simply recite this three times and take the bodhisattva vow.

After repeating the short vow three times, one then generates the conviction that one has received the bodhisattva vows.

For someone who is taking the vows for the first time, at the end of the third repetition one generates the strong conviction that 'I have now received the bodhisattva vows intact'. For those who have previously received the vows that have since degenerated, after the third repetition one generates the mind, 'the degenerated bodhisattva vows have now been restored'. For those whose previously obtained bodhisattva vows have remained intact without any degeneration, one generates the thought, 'the purity of my vows is now further increased'.

Having developed the conviction that one has either received the bodhisattva vows that had not been obtained before, restored previously obtained but since degenerated vows, or increased the undegenerated vows obtained previously, one then generates a mind of great joy for having engaged in this incredibly good deed of taking the vows. After that one can recite verses such as those from the *Six Session Yoga*, 'From today I've become a child of the Buddhas' and so forth. Otherwise one can recite a few verses which are in the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

I'm mentioning these extra points as a reminder for those who are practising regularly. Any understanding that you have can be incorporated into what is being explained here. Your understanding will be enhanced when you remember that there are similar points in other texts to a point in the text you are now studying.

Having received the bodhisattva vows, henceforth one has to observe the eighteen root vows and the forty-six auxiliary vows.

After the explanation of the short version of reciting the few lines mentioned earlier, the commentary explains the extensive version of taking the vows:

However, the extensive version of the ritual is to repeat these (Verse 26 - 31) three times, from the line 'In the presence of the protector,' up to 'And do nothing that is non-virtuous.'

So, one takes the vows in the extensive manner by reciting all of these verses three times.

Next, the commentary further explains:

The *Compendium of Trainings* takes into account of both the Ritual with and without Lama, so this was explained earlier. But in here it follows the system of the Ritual without Lama.

The word *here* means that the *Lamp for the Path* extracts its presentation from the *Compendium of Trainings*, and presents it as a ritual to take the vows without a lama.

As mentioned in the commentary:

To elaborate it there is two - generating the mind and correctly taking the vow.

### Generating the mind

Generating the mind means generating the mind into the unsurpassable perfect state of complete

enlightenment in the presence of the Protector-Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

One takes the bodhisattva vows in the presence of a visualised assembly of *protector-buddhas and bodhisattvas*. Thus, one visualises all buddhas and bodhisattvas as being present when one takes the vows.

By taking the vows in the presence of all buddhas and bodhisattvas one has made a great promise in front of a great assembly. Thus, when one holds the vows properly and maintains them well, the benefits are unimaginably great. But if one doesn't practice according to the advice, then one will incur great negativity, for one is being unfaithful to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The connotation of *unsurpassable* is that there is no other state beyond the state of enlightenment.

The purpose of generating it is to host all sentient beings equal to the limits of space or in another words to benefit them all.

As a host, what does one offer all sentient beings who are one's guests? As the commentary explains:

What one will offer to them is to ferry those who are stranded in samsara, release those who are bound, revive those who are breathless, and lead those who have not yet gone completely to the state beyond sorrow. Sharawa regards this as the preliminary to the engaging mind and the actual aspiring mind.

### Correctly taking the vow

Regarding the section on taking the Bodhisattva vows or the pledges to engage in (Bodhisattva deeds), there are three sub-headings.

What is presented here is called the pledge of morality. As I've explained previously the pledge of morality is not actually the bodhisattva vow; it is merely making a promise to observe morality.

### The pledge of morality

Here the pledge of morality is to observe the three types of morality:

- the morality of restraining from negative deeds
- the morality of gathering virtue
- the morality of benefitting sentient beings.

I've explained these three types of moralities many times in the past. We can say that basically all bodhisattva deeds are subsumed into these three types of morality. The practices of the six perfections are also subsumed into these three practices of morality.

The extensive lam-rim explains how all the bodhisattva deeds are subsumed into the three of abiding, maturing one's own mental continuum, and maturing the minds of other sentient beings. **Abiding** refers to the first morality of restraining from negative deeds. **Maturing one's own mind** refers to the morality of gathering virtues, and **maturing the minds of others** refers to the morality of benefiting other sentient beings. These points are very meticulously presented.

Yet, another way of understanding is that the bodhisattvas' deeds are basically subsumed into two main categories:

- engaging in activities to fulfil one's own purpose; and

- engaging in activities to fulfil the purpose of other sentient beings.

Both the morality of refraining from negative deeds, and the morality of gathering virtue, are subsumed into engaging in activities to fulfil one's own purpose, while the morality of benefitting other sentient beings is subsumed into engaging in activities for the purpose of benefitting other sentient beings.

We can relate this to the following verse in *The Foundation of All Good Qualities*

By clearly recognising that developing bodhicitta  
Without practising the three types of morality  
I will not achieve enlightenment  
Please bless me to practise the bodhisattva vows with  
great energy.

When reciting this in the past you might have wondered what 'practising the three types of morality' actually refers to. Now you have the answer, as that is what is being explained here.

The actual definition of morality is the mind of restraint. With that definition you might wonder how the definitions of the morality of gathering virtues, and the morality of benefitting others fit into the definition of a mind of restraint?

The lam-rim specifically explains that when one engages in gathering virtues on the basis of restraining from misdeeds, then that is the morality of gathering virtues. Likewise, engaging in the means to benefit other sentient beings on the basis of restraint from misdeeds is referred to as the morality of benefitting other sentient beings. As both are based on the morality of restraint from misdeeds they are presented as a morality. This is how you need to understand this point.

Next the commentary explains:

The first is the pledge of the morality of refraining (from negativities) which means to pledge that from the day of taking the vow until achieving the unsurpassable state of enlightenment one will give up the following four arising due to the cause of any of the nine types of antagonistic [or harmful] attitudes.

I have explained the nine *types of antagonistic attitudes* many times in the past. As explained in the teachings, with any one of these nine attitudes one will generate a mind of harmfulness, as a result of which anger arises. As also explained in the teachings, beings in the higher form and formless realms have no anger, because they don't have the basis of these nine attitudes.

In relation to **oneself**, one generates the mind that so and so is such an enemy; they have harmed me in the past, they are harming me now, and they will harm me in the future and that is a cause for anger to arise.

In relation to **one's friends or relatives**, thinking that so and so has harmed my relatives in the past, is harming them now, and will harm them in the future, is again a cause for anger to arise.

In relation to **one's enemy**, thinking so and so has benefitted my enemy in the past, is benefitting my enemy now, and will benefit my enemy in the future, generates anger and is the cause of wishing to harm other beings.

Then the commentary lists *the four arising due to any one of these nine antagonistic attitudes*. The first two are:

Harmful thoughts such as the thought of killing (someone) out of hatred.

Feeling irritated and belligerent towards others.

As I've explained many times again, anger is one of the six root delusions, whereas belligerence is a secondary delusion.

Lati Rinpoche once asked Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey to explain the difference between anger and belligerence and Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey explained that belligerence only arises in relation to animate objects, not inanimate objects, while one can feel anger towards both animate and inanimate objects. Lati Rinpoche agreed with that, saying that making this distinction is a good point.

The main point here is that anger is a root delusion. The secondary delusion of belligerence is a wish to really harm the other, which arises out of an anger that has escalated and has become really strong. We can see that there is a difference in how these states of mind are generated. When anger first arises, it is just a state of mind that generates a harmful intention that doesn't reach the point of actually wanting to do something about actively engage in harming them. It's more a mind of unease about the other. Then when that starts to escalate further it can become resentment, which is a state of mind where one actually wants to do something about it, thinking 'Wait until I get the opportunity'. Then with belligerence one thinks 'I'll definitely strike them with my stick'. It has come to the point of really wanting to take action to harm them.

The third is:

Being miserly and not wanting to give away one's possessions to others.

The two things we can give are material things or the Dharma. If one has the means and does not give to someone in need, such as a beggar, then if the four conditions are intact, one would incur an infraction of the bodhisattva vows.

Fourth is:

Feeling jealous and finding other's success unbearable.

This is another very important point to be mindful of.

The commentary continues:

This implies the length of time too.

This refers to the duration of the vows, which is from the time that one has taken the vows until one achieves enlightenment. The length of time also applies to the next point:

It is also important to refrain from acts of sexual conduct by engaging in pure conduct, and to give up wrongdoing together with its causes of desire for sensual objects.

The first part is quite explicit and easy to understand. *Wrongdoing* or negative karma is actually a non-virtue itself, and *with its causes* refers to the desire for sensual objects which are the desire objects of the five senses - nice sights, nice fragrances, nice sounds, nice taste, and nice tactile objects. Developing desire for these sensual

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objects is a cause of wrongdoing or negative karma. Then the commentary summarises:

By giving up these and taking joy in observing pure morality, one should train oneself well in following the noble deeds of the Buddha.

### **The pledge of the morality of benefitting sentient beings**

The second is the pledge of morality of benefitting sentient beings, which means to generate a determined spirit to remain for a limitless time or for as long as samsara remains to benefit even one single sentient being; there should not be any sense of impatience or expectation to swiftly achieving enlightenment whatsoever.

As presented here, the emphasis is not on thinking, 'I should achieve enlightenment quickly for my own benefit'. Rather one should generate the mind of wanting to remain in samsara to benefit sentient beings, for as long as there are sentient beings in samsara.

This explanation is in accordance with other explanations. There's a point in the *Six Session Guru* relating to this after the presentation of the eighteen root vows. As other texts explain, rather than falling into a tainted mind of wanting to achieve enlightenment quickly for one's own purpose, the altruistic mind of wishing to benefit sentient beings lasts for as long as there is just one sentient being in samsara. The altruistic intention is, 'I will remain in samsara as a way to benefit them, and lead them out of that state'.

Basically, the morality of benefitting sentient beings is, of course, in accordance with generating the mind of bodhicitta. There are also practical ways of benefitting other sentient beings. In fact, as I've also presented previously, there are actually eleven different ways of helping. When you're travelling, for example, and you see someone with a load that is difficult for them to carry, help them to carry their load, and so forth. There are many practical ways of benefitting other sentient beings. I've also presented this in the past so you can look that up.

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 Sandup Tsering.

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