
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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We will begin with our usual meditation practice. As you know, it is very important we begin our practice with a proper motivation. So, try to cultivate the bodhicitta mind as your motivation.

With the cultivation of our motivation we are also focussing on the goal of our practice, which in the instance of bodhicitta as a motivation, is to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. When we take refuge in the Three Jewels, our goal is to liberate all beings from cyclic existence, particularly the three lower realms.

[Meditation]

We have just done what is called the 'giving and taking' meditation, and it is really very beneficial to do this meditation regularly and be able to do it effectively. As part of engaging in this meditation, we chant a prayer, which summarises what to reflect on in this meditation. In this way we are meditating through the medium of spoken words. As Geshe Chekawa said in his *Seven Point Thought Transformation*, 'Practice every activity by these words'.

In order to do this meditation, you first need to have a clear visualisation of all other sentient beings in front of you. We should become familiar with imagining that all sentient beings in front of us lack happiness or are afflicted with suffering.

In order to cultivate love, which by definition is the wish for other sentient beings to have happiness, you first need to have this image of all sentient beings who are desperate for happiness and joy. Likewise, as a way to cultivate compassion, you have got to have a strong image of all sentient beings who are subject to various kinds of suffering. If we become familiar with the thought of all other sentient beings as being deprived of happiness or being subject to suffering, then every time we begin this meditation we will be able to easily bring this image of all sentient beings to mind. That will then serve as a good cause to induce love and compassion for them.

In visualising other sentient beings, it is important that we include all sentient beings regardless of whether they are our friends, enemies or if they are strangers to us. So that our love and compassion for other beings is unbiased think that all are equally subject to suffering or deprived of happiness. If this meditation is done effectively it will also give us a very positive experience and benefit us as much as it benefits other beings.

Let consider how sincere we are in doing this meditation, and how effective the meditation is. In this meditation we are supposed to have cultivated a wish that all sentient beings have happiness, which is love, and that all sentient beings be free from suffering, which is compassion. If we ask ourselves who all those sentient beings are, we will find that 'all sentient beings' is just a generic term, having no reference to any particular sentient being or beings. That's why, in real terms, it is difficult for us to show true love and

compassion for even a single person. Therefore, it is really important to train ourselves in cultivating and developing love by focussing specifically on some beings in real life.

You have heard many times that the actual practice of cultivating love and compassion refers to cultivating this attitude towards real sentient beings such as those with whom we live and interact. Despite the fact that we engage in meditation on love and compassion quite regularly, it is questionable whether we are actually making any progress. For example, the moment you step out of this gumpa and see someone that you dislike or remember has said something bad to you, you immediately forget about the love and compassion cultivated in the meditation and feel hatred and resentment. This shows that what we do in real life and what we do in meditation are complete opposites. So, this kind of spiritual practice or meditation is not much of benefit in real life situations.

We are deceiving ourselves into thinking that we have cultivated love for all sentient beings, because when we think of actual people there are lot of individuals who we resent or hate. So in practical terms, showing love and compassion to all is very difficult. As you hear frequently in the teachings, sometimes we should focus on particular beings and work on cultivating love and compassion for them.

We should be measuring how we are doing in our spiritual practice against real-life situations. If we are making progress, then in everyday life we should be calmer and more self-controlled and enjoying more stable peace and happiness. Hence, it is of paramount importance that we integrate our spiritual and meditation practice, such as cultivating love and compassion, into real-life situations, and thus be able to control our thoughts, emotions and deeds.

In our case, Dharma and meditation practice is only possible when we aren't facing any adverse situations, and when we face adverse circumstances such as someone provoking us, all our Dharma practice goes out the window. In fact, it's more important to practise the Dharma when we confront some adverse situation, because that's the time we need the support of our practice. Although in the situation may be challenging, we have to practise the Dharma even more so than when there are no adverse, unfavourable situations. Regardless of how long we have been following the Dharma or practising meditation, if our mental attitude or outlook when we face life's challenges is same as it was before we followed the Dharma, then our practice of Dharma has not been effective.

There is the story of practitioner who, when asked, 'What you are meditating on?' replied, 'I am meditating on developing patience'. When the other person said, 'That is just rubbish' or something like that, the practitioner immediately became quite irate. He said, 'I am practising patience' and then lost his temper! He might have cultivated patience during meditation when there were no unfavourable conditions, but when he faced an unfavourable situation outside of his meditation he was not able to practise.

Someone who was going through a troubled relationship once told me how while she was meditating she felt peaceful and was really happy. However, when she saw her husband soon afterward, she lost all self-control and peace of mind. She admitted it was then difficult to practise Dharma.

The essence of spiritual practice is to observe our thoughts and deeds at all times, and to subdue those that are negative

and destructive. You have heard this many times, and you need to remember it, and really think about it over and over again. Atisha said that the best of all instructions is to watch your mind at all times.

Help others, don't harm them. Dharma teaches about patience. No patience means that when they harm you, you harm them, and you don't benefit them. Geshe Chengawa said if we put all the teachings of the Greater and the Lesser Vehicle together then they come down to the two points of benefiting other sentient beings and preventing harm to other beings.

I often say to myself 'I won't harm others, I will help others'. Thinking 'I will help others, I won't harm others' gives me a very good feeling. Open up your mind. You think, 'I like benefits, I don't like being harmed'; all sentient beings think the same. Thinking, 'just as I wish all sentient beings help me, I will do the same. I won't harm anyone' gives a very good feeling.

Open your thinking. You are one person; there are many others. Think of other people's happiness. They are not happy, they don't like suffering. Go beyond yourself. Think of the happiness of others. You like happiness, and don't like suffering. They are same as me. Everyone is the same. When you get up in the morning say 'Today I will help, and I won't harm. That is my practice today'.

Practically speaking, it is probably not necessary to have a vast knowledge because the fundamental point of turning your mind towards the Dharma is really calming your own mind. What's most important is that our approach to the Dharma has some sort of effect on our mind.

3. Identifying the wisdom

Going back to the commentary, we are at the third subheading. In relation with this, we refer to this verse from the root text:

47. *Through realising that the aggregates,
constituents
And sources are not produced;
Understanding the emptiness of inherent
existence
Is described as wisdom.*

The commentary reads:

The first line indicates the observed object of wisdom. The second line implies the aspect (of the wisdom), whereas the last two lines identify the wisdom.

The thirty-five things – the five aggregates, the eighteen constituents and the twelve sources – imply the subject or focus.

What are the five aggregates, the eighteen constituents and the twelve sources.

Can somebody list the five aggregates? [Answer] Form, feeling, recognition, compositional factors, and consciousness.

The eighteen constituents are: [Answer] the six objects of observation, the six sense powers or organs, and the six sense consciousnesses.

And the twelve sources? [Answer] The six internal sources are the six sense powers and the six external sources are the six sense objects.

All the phenomena are included in these thirty-five classes of phenomena, so they are the bases of the view of selflessness.

The commentary continues:

The truth or aspect of those things is that they are not inherently something to be ascertained, realised and known.

This line indicates that what is to be realised is that these thirty-five things are the bases for grasping at inherent production, which serve as the basis for other grasping.

The Tibetan term *she ja* translated as 'object of knowledge' includes all things that exist. The term, 'object of knowledge' indicates an object and that there is something to be known. From that perspective what is to be known with regard to the object is the two truths, which are conventional and ultimate truth. So what is to be ascertained and realised here is the lack of inherent production.

Next the commentary states:

The truth or aspect of those things is that they are not inherently something to be ascertained, realised and known. This is because the principal cause of wandering around samsara is grasping at the true existence of things as they appear. Within grasping at true existence, grasping at the inherent production serves as the basis for other grasping. Therefore, it must be eliminated, and for this, the realisation of the absence of inherent production is necessary

First the commentary explains what qualities you have to realise with respect to those thirty-five objects; what you have to realise is the lack of inherent production of those things. Then it explains why we have to realise that lack of inherent existence with respect to those thirty-five objects. Next it goes on to say how grasping at the inherent production or true existence of those thirty-five objects serves as the main cause for sentient beings to be subject to birth in cyclic existence.

We can see here how these thirty-five objects encompass all the objects of knowledge. For example, with respect to the form aggregate, form is something that can appear to our mind. If you look at this glass and how it appears to our mind then it has the appearance of existing in its own right, existing by itself, and having a very concrete and true existence.

Not only can that glass (or any other object) appear to our eye sense consciousness as existing in that way, but our mind also grasps at that object as appearing as the true nature of that object. As it says in the commentary, *grasping at true existence, grasping at the inherent production serves as the basis for other grasping*. Here, *other grasping* specifically refers to all other forms of mental affliction that stem from grasping at the inherent existence of the object. *Therefore*, the commentary says, *it must be eliminated*. Here 'it' refers to grasping at true existence.

The commentary then says, *and for this, the realisation of the absence of inherent production is necessary*. The use of the term 'inherent production' is a clear indication that the basis establishing this view of selflessness is related to compounded or conditioned or impermanent phenomena. It doesn't mean that permanent phenomena are not selfless. Refuting inherent production with respect to all impermanent objects implicitly refutes selflessness with respect to permanent objects.

We have to understand that the realisation of the absence of inherent production and the grasping at inherent production are states of mind that directly oppose each other. If you cultivate this realisation of the absence of

inherent production, then you will automatically be counteracting grasping at inherent production.

The realisation of the absence of inherent production, which is considered as a state of mind, is a correct state of mind. It is a valid cognition, whereas the opposite, which is grasping at inherent existence, is a wrong state of mind and does not have a valid basis to sustain that view.

The commentary continues:

Thus, through realising non-production, one realises the absence of inherent existence of all things too. Of the two, method and wisdom, this is described as wisdom, as well as the reference to the main training of wisdom.

The commentary clearly indicates that of the two, method and wisdom, the realisation of the lack of inherent production is the wisdom aspect as well as a reference to the main training of wisdom.

Here we need to remember the threefold trainings, which are the trainings of moral ethics, concentration and wisdom. The training of moral ethics refers to the various vows, the training of concentration mainly refers to calm abiding, and wisdom mainly refers to special insight. Then we should also remind ourselves how this threefold training relates to the practice of controlling or calming the mind. With the training of moral ethics, we can remove all the gross forms of mental distractions and afflictions; with calm abiding we can remove sinking and excitement as we have discussed, and thereby remove subtle distractions, and with special insight we can overcome the root cause of mental afflictions.

It is good to give a bit of thought to how each one of these threefold trainings relates to taming our mindstream.

And then commentary continues with

Sharawa also said, 'When realising that nothing is tenable to have an existence upon the final analysis of reasoning, one is not realising in the meditation that something that existed before has become non-existent; rather, one is realising that something which is innately empty or non-inherently existent as being empty of inherent existence'.

So in the final analysis of reasoning, one is not realising in the meditation that something that existed before has become non-existent.

What does *final analysis of reasoning* mean?

Student: inaudible.

What you are you actually looking for? Use the example of one object.

Student: That's a table. Ultimate analysis doesn't search for whether the table exists or not, as in a conventional analysis. In ultimate analysis we have to first understand what is appearing falsely to our mind i.e. a table existing from its own side, independently. That is what you search for.

When you talk about ultimate analysis of how the table appears in our mind, what are you searching for?

Student: You are searching for the appearance of that table, whether the table is existing as it is appearing from its own side to the innate self grasping of ignorance.

So you are looking at whether whatever appears to our mind really exists or not? If it does not, then what is it that you are looking for?

Student: We are looking for the mode of existence of the table, which is a table that exists from own side, independently of any other thing. That is the self of table. We are looking to see if we can

find that self of the table, that nature of the table existing in and of itself, independent of anything else.

To realise the emptiness, you just have to go through the final analysis of what our mind is doing and how it processes what it apprehends. Just have a think about that and you will find out.

The commentary continues

This perfectly explains the meaning of the line, 'Understanding the emptiness of inherent existence'. (Verse 47).

Hence, the nature of the Mahayana path is described in the Maitreya's *Ornament for Clear Realisation*,

Not abiding in the existence due to wisdom,
Not abiding in nirvana due to compassion.

The wisdom realising selflessness ensures that you don't fall into the extreme of cyclic existence. The line *Not abiding in nirvana due to compassion* basically shows the framework of the Mahayana path, which is the combination of the wisdom of emptiness and great compassion.

If you gain the wisdom realising selflessness, then you don't fall into extreme of cyclic existence. Because a follower of the Lesser Vehicle has a direct realisation of the selflessness, they achieve the state of liberation from cyclic existence. Therefore they are free from the extreme of falling into the existence (samsara). *Not abiding in nirvana* refers to the extreme of nirvana or the extreme of peace. Although the follower of the Lesser Vehicle achieves liberation they fall into the extreme of peace or nirvana because they do not have this great compassion. Mahayana followers are free from that because of their great compassion.

The commentary then states:

The Sublime Continuum also says, 'Having cut off all the craving to the self by wisdom'. These refer to the two of method and wisdom.

We will continue with this next week.

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 Sandup Tsering.

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