
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

༄༅། བྱུང་ལུ་ལམ་གྱི་སྒྲོན་མ་བཟུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

24 July 2018

As we have already set the correct motivation, we can now begin the meditation.

[Tonglen meditation]

Enforce your bodhicitta motivation by thinking, 'I will attain the precious state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings, and for that reason I will listen to this profound teaching and put it into practice'.

How to train in special insight Identifying the wisdom (cont.)

As the commentary says:

These refer to the two of method and wisdom. The *Lamp for the Path* clearly stipulates the certainty of the number, the order and the nature of the two.

We have quoted the root text which refers to the necessity of just these two: method and wisdom, then refers to the order of the method and wisdom and the nature of the method and wisdom.

The commentary explains the certainty of the number saying here:

How? First, the Mahayana path is subsumed within the two of method and wisdom, and there is no need of more than the two nor can it be less than two.

It continues:

The first [referring to the number required in the Mahayana path] (no need of more than the two) is implied in verse 42.

Verse 42 says:

*Thus, to eliminate all obstructions
To liberations and omniscience,
The practitioners should continually cultivate
The perfection of wisdom with skilful means.*

This verse is saying that the two obstructions can be eliminated by *long familiarity with method and wisdom*. Method primarily refers to great compassion, and wisdom to the wisdom realising emptiness. These two encompass the entire practice of the Mahayana path. A previous session stated that there are two bases. These refer to the two truths which are the main subject to be understood on the path. The two paths refer to the *method* and the *wisdom* and the two results refer to the two bodies of a buddha to be attained by the path.

The verse refers to two obstructions. In terms of the Hinayana or Lesser Vehicle, the main obstruction is afflictive emotions. On the Mahayana path the main obstruction is the obstruction to knowledge or omniscient mind. These obstructions are what *can be eliminated by long familiarity with method and wisdom*. *Long familiarity* implies that in order to achieve full enlightenment, we must be prepared to exert effort on the path for a long period of time. For example, in terms of cultivating compassion or wisdom, even if it takes

many lifetimes, we have to be motivated to continually exert ourselves. Even if we can't, it is beneficial to make an aspirational prayer, 'may I be able to exert the effort to cultivate compassion and wisdom, no matter how long it takes, until I achieve full enlightenment'.

Previous teachings have highlighted the importance of having a combination of method and wisdom on the path, but here it says that the method and wisdom cannot be one without the other. It also affirms method and wisdom in terms of number (which is two), and how everything in the path of the Mahayana is included in these: *there is no need of more than two*. We have to understand that just by depending on these two it is possible to achieve complete enlightenment by fully overcoming the two main obstructions, therefore *there is no need of more than the two*. It also says, *nor can it be less than two* which means the path cannot be completed if either method or wisdom is missing.

The commentary says:

The second (nor can it be less than the two) is implied in verse 43, 'Wisdom without skilful means ...'

This verse presents familiarising oneself with the method prior to meditating on wisdom. This is also indicated by the subsequent order by which the six perfections are put into practice.

The commentary states that let alone achieving full enlightenment, without method or wisdom one cannot even reach the first level on the bodhisattva's path. It says:

This is also indicated by the subsequent order by which the six perfections are put into practice.

This is indicated in Verse 43.

43. *Wisdom without skilful means
And skilful means without wisdom
Are referred to as bondage.
Therefore do not give up either.*

Then as it says¹:

In alignment with the same meaning ...

The commentary clearly says here that familiarity with method is done prior to meditating on wisdom. This order is also applied to the six perfections from the perfection of giving, moral ethics, patience, joyous effort, concentration and wisdom, which comes at the end.

The commentary says that the root text *The Lamp for the Path* indicates method comes before wisdom, and that this is aligned with the subsequent order of the six perfections in Shantideva's *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

The commentary quotes two lines from the *Bodhicharyavatara* which say: 'All these branches of the doctrine of the Victorious One are expounded for the sake of wisdom'. The commentary quotes this verse and refers to the root text, *The Lamp for the Path* where it states the order of method and wisdom: method first followed by wisdom.

The full verse in Chapter 9 of Shantideva's *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* is: 'The able one explained all these different means for the purpose of wisdom,

¹ Trans: When you translate Tibetan into English the order of the words can change, and that's why there is some discrepancy in the order being presented here, and the order in which this commentary is read.

therefore those who wish to pacify suffering should generate wisdom’.

The intention of the Buddha’s teachings is to liberate all beings from cyclic existence and from lower rebirths. To achieve the state of liberation, the main path is the wisdom of realising selflessness. Then what it says here is that the limbs of the other five perfections are taught by the Buddha in order to gain the wisdom.

The commentary continues:

Having said that [referring to the fixed order of method and wisdom], there are some exceptions to this as is said ...

The commentary indicates that there are some exceptions. Recall that when you studied Chandrakirti’s text *Supplement to the Middle Way* it talked about the order of the followers of the Mahayana path, depending on whether they are dull or sharp-minded (sharp faculty). There was talk about some Mahayana followers who initially cultivated compassion, then the bodhicitta mind and then the wisdom realising emptiness, which is in accordance with what is mentioned here i.e. method first and then wisdom. However, there are those with sharp minds who gain the realisation of emptiness first, and then generate the bodhicitta mind. So, when it says ‘there are some exceptions’ it is referring to Mahayana followers with a sharp mind or sharp faculty.

You need to be clear about the order in which method and wisdom are pursued. Essentially it depends on the level of your mental faculties. In terms of the way the texts present it, both *The Lamp for the Path of Enlightenment* and Shantideva’s *The Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, explicitly say that method comes before wisdom. However, this is the order for a follower with less mental faculty. Although not explicitly mentioned, the approach for the follower with a sharp mind is indicated indirectly. In Chandrakirti’s *Supplement to the Middle Way* the order for followers with sharp faculties is explicitly mentioned – wisdom is taught before method.

There’s a difference in the way that those with sharp faculties and those with less-sharp faculties approach the path. Before generating the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, those with sharp faculties need to gain the conviction that it is possible to achieve enlightenment. For those with less-sharp faculties this is not important as these people generate their aspirations based primarily on their faith in the path. Those with sharp faculties need to establish in their mind the possibility of achieving the state of liberation before they aspire for it. In order to understand this, they have to understand the fact that the root cause, or the main obstruction to achieving the state of liberation is an erroneous view of self. Therefore, they have to see the possibility of uprooting that erroneous view, for which they first need to gain an understanding of selflessness.

What’s mentioned here also touches on the importance of remembering the qualities of the Three Jewels, such as the qualities of the Buddha. If we recognise and have admiration for or conviction in all the qualities possessed by the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, then we would feel inspired and want to achieve the same qualities. In other words, we won’t have a genuine aspiration to achieve the

state of buddhahood if we have not recognised the qualities of a buddha.

Here we can notice some sort of sequential order we need to follow in order to make progress along the path. If we consider the progressive order of those with sharp faculties, we can see that before they generate an aspiration to achieve the state of buddhahood, they must fully gain a knowledge of the qualities of a buddha and the Three Jewels and reflect upon these. Not only that, they need to gain an understanding of why they need to achieve buddhahood in order to benefit other sentient beings. Based on your own knowledge and reasoning you can truly see the importance of benefiting other sentient beings and how to fully benefit them, and that it is necessary to achieve the state of buddhahood.

The commentary continues:

The certainty in terms of the nature (of the method and wisdom) is presented in the following two verses:

45. *Apart from the perfection of wisdom
All virtuous practices such as
The perfection of giving are described
As a skilful means by the victorious ones.*
46. *Whoever, under the influence of familiarity
With skilful means, cultivates wisdom
Will quickly attain enlightenment –
Not just by meditating on selflessness.*

The commentary quotes just the first line of verse 47. If you refer to the root text, which we have already covered, you can understand it:

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

The commentary continues:

As to how to practise these two (method and wisdom) ... ‘Just like taking a walk, initially one step at a time, then like the two wings of a bird, combine the two together and becoming familiar with it, is how one reaches enlightenment’. Thus, one should train accordingly.

Again, there is an implication of the order of method and wisdom. Even though it is necessary to consolidate both method and wisdom together to reach full enlightenment, initially the order in which one applies these two is method first followed by wisdom.

There is also an implication here that even though the main goal is the state of buddhahood, that this is not something which comes from above, all of a sudden. Here it implies that reaching enlightenment is a step-by-step, gradual process with a sequential order of development. Although the method and wisdom are initially developed and enhanced separately, towards the end of the path they need to be merged and developed jointly.

In practice, we need to progress on the path from the bottom to the top. This means you need to start the practice from where you are at the moment, in terms of making an effort to eliminate negativities, even if it is one small negativity, and cultivating positive qualities, even

if it is just a small one. We have to slowly progress from that base level. Just as there are two main practices on the path characterising method and wisdom, at the end or resultant stage there are also two - the *rupakaya* or the form body which is the final result of the method, and the *dharmakaya* or the truth body which is the final result of wisdom.

It's good to familiarise yourself with reflective meditations on the stages of the path *or* lam-rim. Reflect on these topics in sequential order by beginning with the precious human rebirth and finishing with the state of complete enlightenment.

Alternatively, you can reflect on the lam-rim topics in reverse order, by beginning with the state of complete enlightenment, then moving back to its cause on the tenth bodhisattva level, reflecting how this depended on the ninth bodhisattva level and so forth until you go back to the first level, then to the path of preparation, which depends on the path of accumulation, and that depends on cultivating the bodhicitta mind.

Finally, you should look at all the causes of the bodhicitta mind as you study the seven-fold cause and effect sequence. From that perspective the bodhicitta mind depends on the immediately preceding cause, superior intention, which in turn is derived from compassion. One goes back to renunciation, which in turn arises from the awareness of the suffering nature of cyclic existence, particularly of lower rebirths. In this way you think about the law of cause and effect to prevent a lower rebirth, then back to thinking about the precious human rebirth. That is the reverse order. Then you can do it from top to bottom again. You need to be able to complete lam-rim meditations in these two orders over and over again until you become very familiar with it. You can see how much there is to meditate on!

If you have an outline of the lam-rim text *The Path to Bliss* it is good to look at it and use it as a reference for your meditation. It's good to remember all the detail in the lam-rim outline as it can really help you do the meditation. Then, if you decide to meditate on the precious human rebirth, you can immediately remember what you have to think about it in terms of the outline. For example, it talks about the difficulty and rarity of finding such a rebirth and there are more sub-headings underneath that, so you can then reflect on these. That's a very good way.

We have to remind ourselves of the fact that, whether we like it or not, one day we have to leave this existence. We know it doesn't matter where and what form of rebirth we take, as long as we are born within cyclic existence we are subject to suffering. For example, a human rebirth brings the suffering of birth, sickness, ageing, death and so forth. Cyclic existence is in the nature of perpetual suffering, therefore we must motivate ourselves to integrate our Dharma practice, as the Dharma is the only true means we have of freeing ourselves from cyclic existence.

Right now, we may enjoy freedom and choices, but we won't have this when we face death because everything fails to support us at that moment. Our friends cannot help, nor our possessions, nor our body. They cannot

even accompany us after death. We cannot take even a portion of our possessions with us, nor any parts of our body. The only thing that can help us at the moment of death is our faith in Dharma. That is the only thing that is of benefit. Therefore, there is an opportunity for us to prepare ourselves right now, so that even if we cannot prevent death, we can face death and die happily, without any feeling of regret. If this is not possible, at least we will not be too distressed or frightened.

The degree to which we can actually apply our Dharma practice at the time of death depends on our level of familiarity with the practice. Therefore, if you start to practice now and familiarise yourself with the various contemplations, then there is no doubt that you will be able to do the same contemplation at the time of death with ease. As I said before, even though we cannot prevent death, through our practice we can ensure that at least we can face it without regret or fear.

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.

Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Jill Lancashire
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering
Edited Version

© Tara Institute