
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

4 September 2018

We will begin with the motivation of love and compassion for other beings as you have just cultivated in the meditation of giving and taking.

The meditation of giving and taking intensifies the love through which we wish other beings to have happiness, and compassion through which we wish them to be free from suffering. So, we should ensure that our motivation for listening to the profound teachings stems from love, which is to wish all other beings to have happiness, and compassion, which is to wish them to be free from suffering.

In everyday life too, we should cherish the incredible value of love and compassion within us, and always remember to maintain that love and compassion. Whatever actions we engage in, try to make sure they are infused with love and compassion, which very much represents basic human nature.

We may all have different reasons for practising meditation. Some of us practise meditation to bring more peace and happiness in our life, or to find a sense of relaxation. For others it is to spread peace and happiness to all other sentient beings. There are others who want to practise meditation to bring other beings under their control or have an influence over them. I would say we could achieve all of these through practising meditation, particularly through cultivating and developing love and compassion.

It is important to understand here that when talk about meditation or spiritual practice, such as cultivating love and compassion, we are talking about transforming our mind and the qualities within us. Therefore, when we practise meditation or spirituality, our focus must be turned inward and our mind should not be wandering after external things and events. That is to say, if we are cultivating love and compassion for other beings, we must ensure it arises from the depths of our heart. For our practice to progress to the point where we can experience its benefit, we must be prepared to practise over a prolonged period of time, as well as know the essential points of how to practice. You should not expect genuine love and compassion to arise after one or two days of meditation; rather you need to meditate consistently over and over again to gain familiarity with the practice. Only then will you really experience the benefits of the practice. When we develop more love and compassion through a proper understanding and application of the practice, then automatically all of the benefits we talked about earlier – such as bringing joy, peace, inner stability and having a positive influence on those around us – will naturally happen.

Some schools of thought claim you can bring other people under your control or influence them through the

power of anger. But if you check, you will see that you are not really winning them over to your side in that way. On the other hand, if we show love and compassion towards others, we can really win them over to our side.

Love and compassion will not only benefit individuals who cultivate it, but also the broader group or community. Where there is love and compassion, then naturally there is a friendly and harmonious atmosphere and more happiness. When we talk about the benefits we receive from love and compassion, we are talking about receiving benefit from some quality within us. Hence, we need to recognise that quality as our true and unfailing refuge or protection. This is what is meant by Dharma as being the true refuge.

For instance, we say that the ethical practice of refraining from the ten non-virtuous actions can prevent us from falling into a lower rebirth and hence serves as a true refuge or protection for us. Just note here that the Tibetan word for ‘virtuous’ is *gewa* and for ‘non-virtuous’ it is *mi-gewa*; in English, these Tibetan terms are often translated as virtuous or positive actions or deeds and non-virtuous or negative actions or deeds. The Tibetan term for karma is *ley*, which is rendered in English as ‘action’. Technically speaking, when we talk of, for example, the ten non-virtues, there are not in fact ten non-virtuous actions, because the three mental non-virtues are not actions in the Tibetan sense of *ley* (or *karma* in Sanskrit). These three are not *ley* or actions, but they are *ley-lam* or an action path (i.e. a karmic path). If we engage in the ethic of restraining from the ten non-virtues, we don’t have to wait for our future life to experience the benefits – we can experience them in this very lifetime. And, as we experience the benefits, our conviction or faith in the practice will increase, and we will recognise it as the ‘unfailing refuge’ within us.

HOW ONE TRAINS IN SPECIAL INSIGHT (CONT.)

Going back to the teachings, the commentary reads:

As to the question, ‘How do you abandon the grasping at that realised wisdom?’, the answer is found here:

We are talking here about *that realised wisdom*. Earlier on we talked about the view of emptiness, and then we talked about the wisdom that realises that view, which refutes the view of inherent or true existence. So the question now is, how do we avoid grasping at that wisdom itself?

The root text reads:

54. *Just as wisdom does not see
An inherent nature in phenomena,
Having analysed wisdom itself by reasoning,
Non-conceptually meditate on that.*

The question here is: ‘how can we abandon misconceptions in relation to the wisdom realising selflessness?’ Earlier on, the text discussed the way to abandon or eliminate this misconception of grasping at the self with regard to various phenomena or objects. It said this misconception could be abandoned or counteracted by the wisdom realising emptiness. So the question now is: ‘if we grasp at the inherent existence of that wisdom itself, how are we going to abandon that?’

The commentary reads:

Just as the investigating wisdom could not see an inherent nature in any of person and other phenomena upon analysis, the wisdom itself is also lacking an inherent nature upon analysis because it doesn't truly exist as one or many.

As the commentary says, *the wisdom itself is also lacking an inherent nature upon analysis*, just as it previously said that *any person and other phenomena are also lacking inherent existence upon analysis*. If we investigate and try to find that wisdom as a consciousness or awareness, we will not be able to find it. Therefore, that consciousness exists at a relative level as something that is clear, and a knower – that is, in the definition of consciousness.

But if instead of leaving the definition there and being satisfied with that meaning of consciousness as being clear and a knower, we proceed to investigate and search for and identify that consciousness, we will not be able to find it. That's why the commentary says that *wisdom itself also lacks an inherent nature upon analysis because it doesn't truly exist as one or many*.

The words *nature upon analysis* refer to the final analysis. Just as you cannot ultimately find any other phenomena, in the final analysis, if you keep investigating and searching then, at the end, you cannot find wisdom consciousness as well. The commentary continues:

So, upon analysis by reasoning, both the subject and the object are without production; and non-conceptually meditating on it is definitely the cause of non-conceptual exalted wisdom.

Regarding this, the *King of Samadhi Sutra* says, 'Having analysed the selflessness of phenomena and then if meditating upon the point of analysis; that is the cause to achieve the resultant state beyond sorrow'.

The result of meditating on special insight [into the truth of emptiness]

We now go on to the third sub-heading under 'How one trains in special insight'.

The commentary reads:

The third, The Result of Meditating on Special Insight, has two:

1. The actual meaning
2. Establishing it by the scriptures

The actual meaning

Here, the commentary says:

Regarding the first the root text says:

55. *The nature of this worldly existence, Which has come from conceptualisation, Is conceptuality. Thus the elimination of Conceptuality is the higher state of nirvana.*

According to Sharawa, 'This passage presents the benefit of special insight meditation in pulling out the root cause of samsara...

So the *root cause* is the ignorance that grasps at a truly existent self. The commentary continues to explain how the root verse is also referring to the four noble truths:

Moreover, [that] *Which has come from conceptualisation* presents the truth of cause (of suffering) to be abandoned, *the nature of this worldly existence* presents the truth of suffering to be known, the third line (*thus the elimination of conceptuality*) presents the truth of the path to be followed, and the fourth line (*the higher*

state of nirvana) presents the truth of the cessation to be achieved'.

Then it continues:

Based on this we can make the statement – given the true cause karma and mental afflictions are to be abandoned, and it is possible for them to be abandoned by those wishing for liberation,...

The statement here refers to a syllogistic statement and *the true cause* refers to the truth of the cause of suffering: *karma and mental afflictions*. So this statement clearly indicates that *karma and the mental afflictions are the true cause*, and thus are the main objects of abandonment for those who aspire to achieve the state of *liberation*. This statement also shows the possibility of abandoning karma and the afflictions. If that were not possible, you could not abandon the true cause. So the statement shows that not only are *karma and mental afflictions to be abandoned by those wishing for liberation*, but also that it is possible to abandon them.

However, all karma is not necessarily an object of abandonment, as certain positive karmas are not objects of abandonment. When we talk about karma as an object of abandonment, we have to know the context of the topic. Here, the karma or action specifically referred to is that which comes under the truth of the cause of suffering. The statement above says that karma and the mental afflictions must be abandoned if you aspire to liberation. However, the only reason given is simply:

... because they arise from the ignorance which is the conception of grasping at the true existence of things.

That's the reason or proof given in the commentary – that these karmas and all mental afflictions arise from ignorance. How could this prove the possibility of abandoning karma and afflictions? Can someone have a go at that?

[Student:] *Because ignorance can be exactly reversed or opposed by the wisdom realising emptiness. Through realising the wisdom, all ... adventitious karmas remain [inaudible] ...*

[Geshe-la:] Can you explain more about how, if there is an antidote or opposite force to ignorance, we can prove that ignorance can be abandoned?

[Student:] *When we look through this object there is existence ... it can't be found by ... [inaudible] ... investigating the... so [postulating?] the mind realising non-existence ... and therefore realising that it is not ... [inaudible] ... inherently, they must exist ...*

[Geshe-la:] Yes, that's fine. But what we have to consider here is that, on the one hand we talk about ignorance, and on the other hand, we talk about wisdom. They are two counter forces, but what we need to understand is that only one of them is tenable to the valid mind or supported by valid cognition. When we look at ignorance, the way in which it apprehends the object is not tenable to a reasoning mind or supported by valid cognition because it is based on mistaken perception. However, the way the object is viewed by wisdom accords with the ultimate reality of the object. Hence, wisdom is supported by valid cognition, in the sense that it cannot be refuted by a valid mind.

The commentary continues:

In relation with this, to quote Nagarjuna's *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*, 'The Teacher, Buddha, said that the conception of the real existence of things which arise from causes and conditions is ignorance. From this ignorance the twelve dependent limbs arise.'

Again, there's a syllogistic statement:

Given: The samsara of the three realms of existence ...

When the commentary says *the samsara of the three realms of existence*, it is referring to the desire, form and formless realms. The term samsara or cyclic existence can refer to any of the five aggregates, so we can refer to the aggregates of human beings as cyclic existence, in the sense that human beings take rebirth or are born with these aggregates.

Of course, in the formless realms, not all five aggregates are present, but the other four [apart from form] are present. So going back to the syllogism:

Given: The samsara of the three realms of existence is to be known by those aspiring for liberation as being the absence of true existence, ...

It refers to *samsara* for *those aspiring for liberation* as something that these practitioners have to know as being empty of true existence. However, previously the commentary stated, the *true cause of samsara* is *the mental afflictions*, which are to be abandoned. We need to think about why the commentary has emphasised these two: that the true cause is to be abandoned, and that we must know the absence of true existence of samsara. Through meditation, we can recognise that the grasping at the self of the person is the root cause of ignorance. So if we can understand this, we can see the possibility of an end to our cyclic existence.

The reason then given in the syllogism is:

... because it is in the nature of being conjured by conceptual thought.

In other words, cyclic existence *is in the nature of being* superimposed or imputed by our own *conceptual thought*. When we understand this, we will understand that cyclic existence doesn't truly exist because it is merely imputed by thought.

The commentary continues:

To quote (the *Sutra Requested by Upali*):

A splash of pleasing flowers open their petals,
Golden palaces blaze in breathtaking beauty;
Look for their maker, but you'll never find him,
For all of these are built of conceptions –
The world is an invention of conceptions.

Rather than having their own independent existence or intrinsic nature, all things are imputed by our thoughts and labelling, which is to say that if things did not depend on imputation by thought or labelling, they should exist. In the latter case, certain objects would exist before being labelled or being given a name; the object would be able to be identified from its own side as being that particular object. As that is not the case, this quotation gives some analogies to show how all things are merely imputed by thoughts and by labels.

What is more important here is to relate this to our own practice and to our own way of viewing things. We should understand that the many and various things that appear to our mind do not necessarily align with the way

things actually exist. The example given here is of seeing beautiful flowers blossoming – if we see these as merely labelled, a mere projection of our conceptual thought, and if we associate this view with our perception of that particular object, this will have the immediate effect of lessening our attachment to that object as being beautiful.

So, we can just say to ourselves that the way an object appears to us is not the way it exists in reality, from the object's side. This understanding shows us the projections of our mind and how, because of these projections, we see objects in that particular way.

The commentary then continues with another syllogistic statement:

Given: The wisdom realising selflessness is to be followed by those wishing for liberation because completely abandoning the conception of grasping at things from its root is the state of liberation, and wisdom is the direct antidote to that conception.

The text here implies that nirvana, or the state of liberation, is a state of abandonment of the root: an abandonment of *the conception* or the *grasping at* the truly existent self *from its root*. That state of abandonment or the uprooting of the grasping at the true self is the state of nirvana or liberation.

The commentary goes on to the truth of the cessation of suffering:

Given: The state of the complete abandonment of conceptualisation is to be achieved by those aspiring for liberation, because it is the supreme or the great state beyond sorrow.

...and quotes...

Fundamental Wisdom says:

The cessation of ignorance occurs through,
Meditation and wisdom.

This shows how wisdom or the truth of the path is a means to achieve the truth of the cessation of ignorance.

Then the commentary further quotes:

Also *The Four Hundred Stanzas* says:

Seeing the selflessness in the object,
Is the cessation of the root of samsara.

... and continues by quoting the *Supplement to the Middle Way*:

The *Supplement to the Middle Way* says, 'Hence, a yogi who views the emptiness of the 'I and mine' will be completely released'.

The commentary continues:

In short, everything within *this worldly existence* comes from the *conceptualisation* of grasping at true existence, therefore it is rooted in it, and in *the nature of conceptual* construction. Those who fully *eliminate* and uproot *conceptualised* grasping together with its latencies will attain *the higher state of nirvana*, the supreme non-abiding nirvana enabling them to accomplish the welfare of their own self and that of others.

Here, we need to note where the text says that grasping at the self or the conception of the self is the root cause of cyclic existence. It is saying that nirvana or the state of liberation is achieved by uprooting self-grasping. In particular, it refers to the *root cause together with the latencies*. Normally we distinguish between the *root* or

seed of self-grasping, and the *latency* of self-grasping. When you overcome the latency of self-grasping, you achieve the full state of enlightenment. But this is not necessary to achieve the state of liberation of the hearers' vehicle, where the practitioner only needs to abandon the seed of self-grasping. The seed refers to a causal capacity to replicate a result similar to its type.

We will stop tonight's teaching here.

If it is feasible, it would be good to have another discussion night soon. We will decide the date of the discussion later.

Discussion groups are a good opportunity to develop and refresh our knowledge. In particular, this text touches on so many important topics, such as the four noble truths – the truth of suffering, which is to be known; the causes of suffering, which are to be abandoned; the cessation of suffering, which is to be achieved; and the path to be followed to that cessation. The text also talks about cyclic existence and self-grasping as its root cause. There are a lot of important topics that you have already studied in the recent past, and it is important to further enhance your understanding of them.

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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