
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 the usual meditation.

[meditation]

Now try to reinforce this motivation of wishing to achieve full enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. Think that you are listening to this profound teaching for that reason and promise to follow it up with practice.

It is not good enough just to think that whatever you practise or whatever teaching you receive is the Mahayana Dharma. More important is that you qualify yourself as a Mahayanist or a Mahayana follower. In order to call yourself as a Mahayana follower, you must sincerely appreciate and follow the Mahayana Dharma from the depth of your heart and practise it in thought and deed.

In order to recognise and appreciate all the excellent qualities possessed by a fully enlightened being such as a buddha, you also have to recognise and appreciate the qualities possessed by bodhisattvas, as only bodhisattvas can become buddhas. In other words, if you do not see any excellent qualities within bodhisattvas, then you are not appreciating any qualities possessed by a buddha. What makes the bodhisattvas very precious and unsurpassingly unique is their altruistic intention to benefit all sentient beings, and their spirit and determination to carry the burden of fulfilling the welfare of other beings.

A bodhisattva is defined as someone who has cultivated bodhicitta, which is an altruistic aspiration to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Not only do they possess this excellent altruistic mental attitude but, motivated by this they engage in virtuous deeds such as the six perfections to actually benefit other beings. This is how a bodhisattva eventually reaches the fully enlightened state of a buddhahood and achieves the truth and form bodies of a buddha.

Those of you who consider yourself as old students might find hearing this same thing over and over again is a bit of a strain on your ears. But the fact is that you can't instantaneously achieve the state of buddhahood, which is a completely perfectly state of enlightenment, free of all faults and endowed with all the excellent qualities. Rather it is a very long gradual process in which you work on trying to overcome all faults one by one, and trying to achieve all qualities one by one. Then, in the end, you reach the perfect state of enlightenment.

If we relate this state of the buddhahood to ourselves, then at the moment we have the potential to reach to that perfect state of enlightenment. But just knowing we have this potential is not enough to reach it. What we need to understand is that in order to fulfil that buddha potential we have to make an effort to get rid of all faults, one fault

at a time, and then work on cultivating and developing the excellent qualities, one excellent quality at a time. Although we are ordinary beings at the moment, we can achieve full enlightenment by gradually and progressively eliminating all the faults and achieving all the excellent qualities.

We need to ensure that our Dharma practice and mind are integrated together, not with the mind here, and the practice there. For example, if you are practising compassion, then it should be cultivated within your mind and you should be feeling a sense empathy for those who are suffering, instead of not feeling any sense of empathy or care with the suffering of other beings. With the practice of compassion our reaction to those who are afflicted with suffering is to say, 'Can I help you?' or go and help them. That's practice!! If we don't practice, there is perpetual suffering and unhappiness in our lives. If we don't put Dharma into practice, then no matter how long and how much we study Dharma, our mental continuum will never be subdued, and we won't reduce the suffering in our life; just like you can't boil something in warm water we cannot change the negative habits that result in suffering.

If you understand the benefits of cultivating loving kindness and wish to practise it, then your mental attitude towards others, particularly those who are very unhappy, should be one of wholeheartedly wishing them to be happy and expressing your desire to help them by asking, 'What can I do for you?'. In this way you are telling them you care about and love them. You can't say, 'He's unhappy, but I can't help'. The bottom line is everyone needs and appreciates loving kindness, and compassion. We all are same in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering.

Good learning and good practice should go hand in hand. Good learning but no practice is not enough! 'I know, I know, I know' is not enough. Practise loving kindness and caring, then the mind will change, which is good.

You have heard this before but its important always to remind yourselves that the indication of progress in the Dharma is not so much how much we know about Dharma, but the transformation within our mind. That is how we measure our progress. As the great Lama Tsongkhapa said, you measure how you are going with meditation or spiritual practice by knowing whether or not there is an increase or decrease in your compassion for other beings, in your mental afflictions and un your faith in 'your spiritual gurus and the Dharma.

We really have to be aware of this as we follow our spiritual practice, and look at the differences and changes with respect to our mental attitude and behaviours before and after we met the Dharma. Here, we should particularly focus on whether, after our meeting with Dharma, we have reduced the amount of negative states of mind such as anger, jealousy, and hatred and so forth. As part of our Dharma practice we should make a regular assessment on this basis and try to make a conscious effort to direct our practice to counteract negative states of mind. For instance, whenever we experience any unhappiness in life we should, as spiritual practitioners be looking for the cause

within ourselves rather than trying to look for some external cause. Always try to point your mind inwards because, as we all know, the source of all our suffering is really the mental afflictions.

If we look outside for the cause of suffering and difficulties and unhappiness, we won't be able to find it. But we can find it if we look inside. Having found that, we need to recognise and understand the cause of suffering very clearly and see that as our true enemy. Then we can try to work to counteract and defeat that enemy. In that way you will be able to reduce the suffering in your life.

I once quoted the passage by Atisha saying that we should be always proclaiming our own faults, and not the faults of others. Yet we do quite the opposite; we are always trying to hide and cover our own faults and weaknesses, while finding every opportunity to point out the faults of other beings. Atisha also said we should be proclaiming the qualities of others and be humble about our own qualities and try to keep them to yourself. Yet in practice, the way we think is contrary to this great advice.

Basically, what we want to achieve through spiritual practice is to subdue our own mental continuum. And in order to do this we have to recognise what makes our mind very wild and very uncontrolled – it is the mental afflictions that we continuously generate in our mind that are the real faults. By recognising that and trying to overcome and to remove these faults then we can see the result of our mind naturally becoming softer and gentler, more wholesome, peaceful and so forth.

HOW ONE TRAINS IN SPECIAL INSIGHT

The result of meditating on special insight

The actual meaning (cont.)

To return to the commentary:

In short, everything within *this world 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.

Establishing by scripture

The second is Establishing It By Scripture.

The Bhagawan Buddha said:

The great ignorance of conceptualisation
Causes us to fall into the ocean of samsara.
Abiding in the state of non-conceptual
concentration
Is as clear as a space free from conception.¹

The *Dharani of Entering Non-conceptuality* (Sanskrit: *Avikalpapraveshamadharani*, Tib: *rNam par mi rTog pa la 'Jug pa'i gZungs*) also says:

Verse 57

*When bodhisattvas non-conceptually contemplate
The excellent teaching, they will transcend
Conceptuality, so hard to overcome,
And eventually reach the non-conceptual state.*

The scriptures cited here are from both the sutra and tantra.

Then the commentary continues:

As to the question of the scriptural source to attest that worldly existence (samsara) comes from conceptual thought, and through meditating on selflessness we can eliminate conceptualised grasping together with its latencies, the above quote by the Bhagawan ...

Here the commentary raises a question relating to the scriptural sources giving evidence to show that this conceptualisation is the source of the worldly existence of samsara.

The term *conceptualisation* refers to grasping at a true self, or the conception of a self. In terms of our own experience this refers to the innate sense of 'I' which naturally arises within us. That conception of the self is really the source of worldly existence. We talk about ordinary and superior beings. What makes beings superior? I would point to the attribute of having overruled this conception of a self or self-grasping as making a person a superior being.

Not only that, but once someone has freed themselves from the rule of this sense of 'I' or this self-grasping, then they no longer create propelling karma or actions. So, the question is: what is the scriptural source to show that this is the case? What scriptural source shows that this conceptualisation is the source of samsara? What is the scriptural source for the assertion that *the realisation of selflessness* has the capacity to overcome this conceptualisation, together with its seeds?

There also a statement by Asanga saying that one who realises the truth no longer creates propelling actions, where *seeing the truth* refers to directly seeing ultimate truth, at which point you'll no longer create any throwing or propelling karma.

The implication here is that in order for a karma to be a throwing karma then it has to be the result of a strong form of the conception of an 'I' or self-grasping. The person who has directly realised selflessness has freed themselves from this self-grasping and hence no longer a slave to it. We call such a person a superior or transcendent being, because they are no longer under the thumb of self-grasping.

The commentary continues with:

...the above quote by the Bhagawan from the Sambhuta Tantra clarifies it.

As said in it, the syllogistic statement is Given (the subject): the object of knowledge, the conception of grasping at things is the great ignorance which serves as the root cause of samsara, because it is the doer (perpetrator), who causes us to fall into the depthless ocean of samsara.

This clearly points to *the conception of grasping at things*, which is self-grasping, *as the root cause of samsara*. In terms of the twelve links, this is the first link of

¹ Essentially this is verse 56.

ignorance. In terms of the four noble truths, there's the truth of suffering, followed by the truth of the cause of the suffering, and the truth of the cessation of suffering, followed by the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering. When we drill into the truth of suffering then we find that suffering arises from karma, which in turn has arises from delusions, or mental afflictions. If we further dip into the mental delusions we find that eventually they are all rooted in this self-grasping, which is grasping at this inherently existing self.

The words 'grasping at a self' refer to this deep-down innate sense of 'I' or some sort of self identity, and it's important to recognise that this is the root cause of all our suffering. The stronger that sense of 'I' is, the stronger the delusions, and the greater the karmas we create which throw us into this cyclic existence.

When we think of the conception of a self, it's important we don't think of it as some sort of idea, or doctrine relating to a view of self. When we hear about this conception of self it is critical that we relate it to this deeply engrained sense of self within ourselves, and then try to understand how we exist with that sense of 'I', which is that it seems that we have a very inherent and independent existence. As just mentioned, the stronger we grasp at that inherent or intrinsic self as the ultimate reality of ourselves, the stronger the thoughts of seeing those who are distant from us with a stronger sense of aversion, and the stronger the attachment to those who are close to us. And we know how actions arise from strong attachment and aversion. Therefore, when we talk about this conception of a self-grasping it's important to relate it to this deeply engrained sense of 'I' within us.

Then the commentary continues:

The 'doer' (ignorance) is attributed with the prefix 'great', which is appropriate. As said in the *Treasury of Deathlessness* (Tib: *Chimed mdZod*):

The great, the supreme and the immeasurable,
Signifies the traits of the learned, the diligent and
the passionate.

Superb, marvellous doer is called great. ????

The meaning of this is quite self explanatory. All these words have the same meaning even though we use them in different contexts. We can call those who are learned in this understanding, *great supreme, and immeasurable*, and so forth.

Having established the meaning of the first two lines (verse 55) by the scriptures - 'the nature of this world existence which has come from conceptualisation' and so forth - we now establish the meaning of the next two lines (verse 55) by the scriptures, 'thus the elimination of conceptuality is the higher state of nirvana'. As an antidote to the conception grasping at true existence, you probe into the meaning of selflessness and at the end of your final analysis, when you have gained the definite ascertainment of it (the meaning of selflessness), *abide in the non-conceptual concentration, free from conception*. You need to remain there to become familiar with it (non-conceptual concentration) and when you achieve complete familiarity, you will vividly perceive suchness or the ultimate nature of mind with the non-conceptual awareness, *as clear as an autumn space free from clouds*, as all the dualistic

conceptions together with their latencies are dispelled.

This is mentioned in the *Union of (Sun and Moon?) Tantra*. As the saying of the sages goes, 'The perfect is not perfect', and the same reasoning is used here.

As a further scriptural source, it is also mentioned in the *Dharani of Entering Non-conceptuality* that if you abide single-pointedly in meditative equipoise on profound emptiness, you can remove the veil of conceptual elaboration.

It says, 'Having gained the wisdom arisen from listening and contemplating the profound Mahayana noble Dharma, bodhisattvas contemplate and meditate on the non-conceptuality which opposes the mental attention to the sign (of true existence). As a result, they will transcend the difficult to transcend, the net of the conceptuality sign, and eventually achieve the awareness of non-conceptuality'.

The second is the Summary.

Verse 58

*Having ascertained through scripture
And through reasoning that phenomena
Are not produce nor inherently existent,
Meditate without conceptuality.*

By relying on the corpus of definitive scriptures and stainless reasoning, ascertain and thoroughly understand the lack of true or inherent production of all phenomena encompassing the person and the aggregates, and then you meditate single-pointedly on the meaning of suchness without any sign of conceptuality.

It is said,

Following the listening, take the practice to the
heart
And with ease, free from the stain of birth.

The second is the presentation of the results.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

Here we'll just read through the commentary again.

Verse 59

*Having thus meditated on suchness,
Eventually, after reaching 'heat' and so forth,
The 'very joyful' and then others are attained
And, before long, the enlightened state of
Buddhahood.*

Having thus trained in the common practices beginning with taking refuge, and all the practices relating to the person of small and middling stages, you generate the two of the wishing and engaging minds of enlightenment. Following that, you meditated on suchness with calm abiding and special insight supplemented by the vast method. There is a purpose to this meditation in that it enabled you to traverse the small, the middling and great path of accumulation, eventually attaining the four stages (of the path of preparation) resembling the certain discernment such as 'heat' and so forth. Relying on the super-mundane or transcendental wisdom, you would then attain the very joyful one and others which encompasses from the second bhumi (bodhisattva levels) to the tenth vajra-like meditative concentration. In this way, in fact, you will attain all the short-term results. Consequently, before long, you will quickly attain the ultimate result of the great enlightened state of buddhahood characterised by three bodies, five sublime wisdoms.

You will then spontaneously perform enlightened activities to ripen and liberate an infinite number of fortunate beings. The stream of these enlightened activities will flow until the end of cyclic existence. It is said, (Maitreya's *Ornament for Clear Realisation*) 'Likewise, it is accepted that the continuation of action will never cease until the end of samsara'.

Over the next two Tuesday nights you can hold a discussion on the content of this section The Presentation of the Results. This heading contains in a very short form a lot of very important and interconnected topics. It is important to know not only the various topics individually but also how these are structured and interconnected.

What follows after this and will continue up to the end of the text is a presentation of the Tantrayana. Most likely we will give just a summary. What you'll find in the commentary will give you a good framework, and those of you who are more interested can study in your own way.

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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