

We'll continue with the teaching on the *Lamp for the Path* commentary. Basically, we will read the commentary text then clarify some points relating to important questions raised in the commentary.

In terms of the commentary outline, we are at the second main heading, which is:

2. BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE METHOD OF ENGAGING IN MANTRA

This presentation relates to the Mantrayana, which is also called the resultant vehicle. In contrast, the Sutrayana or the vehicle of perfection of wisdom is called the causal vehicle. There are three sub-headings:

2.1. Necessity of receiving the initiations for engaging in the vajra vehicle

This obviously shows that, before disciples can engage in tantric practice, they need to fulfil all the prerequisites, including receiving initiation/empowerment, which is a ceremonial permission to practise given by a qualified teacher.

2.2. Who can or cannot actually receive the two higher initiations

This raises the question of who is or is not appropriate to receive the two actual higher initiations.

2.3. The question of whether or not it is appropriate to teach and study tantra without receiving the two higher initiations

2.1. NECESSITY OF RECEIVING THE INITIATIONS FOR ENGAGING IN THE VAJRA VEHICLE

Tantric practice is known by different terms, such as Vajrayana or vajra vehicle; Tantrayana; secret mantra or Mantrayana; the method vehicle; or resultant vehicle. Each term literally refers to certain unique characteristics of tantric practice.

We can't go in detail here, but generally, in the case of Vajrayana, for example, *yana* means vehicle, which can refer to the spiritual path that carries one to (enlightenment); and *vajra*, in a definitive sense, refers to the Vajrasattva yoga (concentration on transcendental wisdom, which is the inseparable union of method and the wisdom and is indestructible. The term tantra means continuity or thread, and can refer to the unbroken lineage of tantric teachings.

The term secret mantra implies that these teachings should be practised discreetly, and not be revealed to those who are not suitable. As to the term mantra, *man-* means the mind and *-tra* means protection, so mantra means protection of the mind. The mind here specifically refers to the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and emptiness. Hence, in an ultimate sense, mantra is a

means of protecting one's mind from ordinary perception and conception.

Tantra is called the method vehicle because it employs a superior method for achieving enlightenment. It is also called the resultant vehicle because, in tantra, you take the four purities of the resultant state of enlightenment into the path. The four complete purities relate to the pure vision within which tantric practitioners engage in their practice:

1. Place – in the tantric path, you visualise the place you are in as an actual pure land.
2. Body – you visualise yourself as the deity.
3. Enjoyment or resources – what you utilise represents the uncontaminated nectar or the perfect resources of an enlightened being.
4. Deeds – simulating the deeds of an enlightened being.

This first heading or section has three sub-sections:

2.1.1. The recipient

2.1.2. Conferring of ripening initiation upon that person

2.1.3. Significance of conferring initiation

2.1.1 The recipient

The first heading refers to verses 60 and 61, which read:

Verse 60

*If you wish to create with ease
The collections for enlightenment
Through activities of pacification,
Increase and so forth, gained by the power of
mantra.*

Verse 61

*And also through the force of the eight
And other great attainments like 'the good pot'-
If you want to practice secret mantra,
As explained in the action and performance
tantras.*

The commentary reads:

When Jowo visited Tsang, including Khu and Ngog, six disciples posed five questions of which the last three were related to mantra.

The three questions are:

If you have not received the vajra preceptor initiation, are you fit to teach tantra or not? Are celibates allowed to receive the two higher initiations or not? If you have not received the initiation, are you fit to practise secret mantra or not?

The commentary continues:

The answer to the first question is provided in Verse 67 [of this root text], '... listen to or explain the tantras' and so forth.

The answer to the second question is provided in Verse 64 [of this root text], 'Because the Great Tantra of the primordial Buddha' and so forth. The answer to the third question is provided in Verse 61 [of this root text], 'As explained in the action and performance tantras' and so forth.

Just as those who follow the vehicle of perfect wisdom achieve all their goals for themselves and for others by engaging in the six perfections and the four means (of gathering disciples), ...

So here we note that another term used to refer to Sutrayana is the perfection vehicle, through which Mahayana practitioners achieve their goals for

themselves and for others by engaging in the six perfections. The six perfections are the main deeds of this vehicle, whereas the main thought or motivation that drives these deeds is the bodhicitta mind.

We should also note that when we speak of 'vehicle', we speak of two separate vehicles: the perfection vehicle or Sutrayana, and the Mantrayana. However, when we speak of the Buddhist philosophical views, we only speak of the four schools of tenets and don't speak of their differences in terms of Sutrayana and Tantrayana. This implies that, as far as the profound view of emptiness as the final view to be attained goes, there is no difference between Sutrayana and Mantrayana – it is the same view as presented by the great Indian masters, such as Chandrakirti.

However, these masters do differentiate between Sutrayana and Mantrayana with respect to the subjective mind that realises the profound view of emptiness. They explain that the subjective mind as presented in Mantrayana is far more profound and refined than that presented in the Sutrayana.

The commentary continues:

... likewise there are also suitable beings who are liberated by the Vajrayana path...

After noting how the followers of the perfection vehicle reach their goals by cultivating bodhicitta and so on, the commentary explains the qualifications of the person who engages in the Vajrayana path:

... likewise there are also suitable beings who are liberated by the Vajrayana path. They aspire to accomplish the welfare of other beings, and are fit to follow the path, which blissfully and swiftly leads them to fully complete the collections for the great self-enlightenment. They aspire to achieve, merely through the force of mantra recitation, the four activities of pacification, increasing, controlling and wrathful deeds;...

Here, mantra recitation refers to the mantras that we recite or chant when we engage in a retreat, for example, where we try to accumulate a certain number of mantras. However, in reality, 'mantra' refers to the transcendental wisdom of bliss and emptiness within the continuum of a deity. In Tibetan, a retreat based on this is called *bsnyen pa*, which literally means the practice of approaching or being close to a deity.

There is also a type of retreat called *las rung*, which means a practice to perform activities, because through such a retreat, you are trying to accomplish the four activities of pacification, increasing, controlling, and wrath. Usually you hold the *mala* over your index finger and then, with each recitation of the mantra, you pull a bead with your thumb towards your direction. However, it is said that the finger upon which you place your *mala* depends upon the activity you want to accomplish. You place the *mala* on the index finger for the activity of *pacification*; place it on the middle finger for the activity of *increasing*; on the ring finger for the activity of *controlling*; and on the little finger for *wrathful activity*.

The commentary continues by referring to a *good pot*, which is a *wish fulfilling vase*, through which you are able to achieve everything you wish for. Then it refers to *the eight great spiritual feats* – these can be common or

uncommon spiritual feats. The eight common spiritual feats are: *pills, eye-lotion, seeing beneath the ground, the sword, flying, invisibility, longevity and youth*.

Accomplishing the four activities and the eight great spiritual feats makes the path that you follow very easy, blissful and swift in accumulating the collections for enlightenment, and achieving the state of complete enlightenment.

The commentary continues:

... and they intend to engage in the pure deeds of secret mantra as taught in the four classes of tantra such as action, performance and so forth.

This last sentence refers to the practices that enable tantric practitioners to fulfil the goal or purpose of other sentient beings. Whereas what was described before – achieving the four activities and eight spiritual feats – is primarily for tantric practitioners to fulfil their own self-goal or purpose.

2.1.2 Conferring of ripening initiation upon that person

The commentary continues:

As to the second (Conferring of Ripening Initiation upon that Person),

Verse 62 says:

*Then to receive the preceptor initiation,
You must please an excellent spiritual teacher
Through service, valuable gifts and the like
As well as through obedience.*

Verse 63ab says:

*Through the full bestowing of the preceptor
initiation,
By a spiritual preceptor who is pleased,*

Having purified their continuum through the common path, then the followers of the Vajrayana path intend to enter into the secret mantra by engaging in any of the four classes of tantra,...

Having purified their continuum through the common path, refers to how, before one enters the tantric path, one must fully purify oneself by following the common path, the Sutrayana or perfection vehicle.

The main practice within the vehicle of perfection falls under the three principal paths. The first is **renunciation**, which is essentially the genuine wish to seek liberation. Without cultivating true renunciation, whatever practice one does will not become a cause to achieve liberation from cyclic existence let alone buddhahood. The second is the **bodhicitta** mind, which is an aspiration or wish to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all beings, without which your practice cannot be called a Mahayana practice, let alone Tantrayana. The third principal path is the view of **selflessness or emptiness**, which is the final view of reality that eliminate the ignorance of self-grasping.

The view of emptiness is essential for tantric practice, which in fact commences with and evolves within it. This is because, in tantra, we are essentially supposed to view everything as the manifestation or play of emptiness. Without a true understanding of emptiness, then the frequent mention of 'emptiness' or 'manifestation of emptiness' that we find in the tantric ritual manual means nothing, and so there is nothing for us to meditate

on. In fact, when you read the *Heart Sutra*, where it says, 'form is emptiness, emptiness is form', this connotes the same meaning – that form is the manifestation or extension of its emptiness.

Here, where the commentary mentions *having purified their continuum through the common path*, it means that, as essential as the three principal paths are in the sutra path, so too are they essential in practising Mantrayana.

Next, we come across the qualifications of the gurus of the Vajrayana path. In the *Guru Puja*, you will find a few verses that explain those qualities, beginning at the verse:

Wise and patient, your three doors are well controlled.
Without pretension or deceit, you understand Mantra and Tantra.
Skilled in arts and teaching, you have twice ten qualities.
Oh Lord of Vajra Masters, hear my prayers!

The commentary continues:

... they need to devote themselves to and please a qualified noble lama.

This refers to the qualified noble lamas of the Vajrayana or Mantrayana. You should study these qualities. There are specific qualities of the vajra gurus, and specific qualities of the lamas in the context of Sutrayana.

So, *why do they need to please the lamas?* As it mentions here, you have to please the qualified noble lamas because:

The purpose of pleasing the lama is to receive the vajra preceptor initiation.

You should refer to the *Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion* by Ashvagoshā, where there's a very good explanation of qualities of the gurus.

As the commentary continues:

The purpose of pleasing the lama is to receive the vajra preceptor initiation. This applies to the three higher initiations too.

In terms of the four classes of tantra, the first two, action and performance tantra, don't have a vajra preceptor or vajra master's initiation, because in those tantras, you don't need to take tantric vows but take only bodhisattva vows. However, yoga tantra and highest yoga tantra have a vajra preceptor's initiation and require you to take both the bodhisattva and tantric vows.

We will read the commentary, which is self-explanatory:

As to the manner in which they please the lama, Maitreya's *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutra* says:

Rely on the teacher by way of
Respect, material things and practice.

Accordingly, you verbally and bodily express your respect and reverence to the lama, offer material objects such as precious jewels, clothing, food, drink as well as personal services to the lama, and voluntarily practise what has been taught by the lama, all precisely in accordance with the lama's wishes, offering everything of your three doors to please them.

Note that the highest form of offering to the guru, or of guru devotion, is to put the guru's words into practice.

Then the commentary says:

There is a reason to please the lama. Having pleased the lama, the disciple requests the lama to give an initiation.

So, as it is said here, in order to receive the initiation, first, the disciple must request the lama for the initiation.

The commentary continues:

The lama then confers upon the disciple the complete vajra preceptor initiation together with the final supporting subsequent empowerment. In this way the disciple is made a suitable vessel for the secret mantra.

Just to clarify here, the subsequent empowerment, often known as *rjes sNang* in Tibetan, is usually bestowed at the end of an initiation ceremony. Subsequent empowerment is conferred to bestow the blessings of the guru's holy body, speech and mind to the disciple following the conferring of initiations. However, this does not mean to say that the process of conferring initiation is not equivalent to conferring subsequent empowerment. Also, in some cases, the lama confers the subsequent empowerment but not the actual initiation.

2.1.3 Significance of conferring initiation

The commentary continues:

As to the third, Significance of Conferring Initiation.

Verse 63cd says:

*You are purified of all wrong doing
And become fit to gain powerful attainments.*

As stated above, there are reasons for conferring all four initiations which are: to fully purify three doors of negativities and obscurations together with their latencies/imprints, and to qualify the disciple to accomplish the small, medium and great spiritual attainments/feats.

The purpose of *conferring all four initiations* is to fully purify three doors of negativities and so forth. Receiving an initiation empowers us to engage in tantric practice, such as listening to, contemplating, or meditating on tantra; and explaining tantra to others. Initiation empowers us to undertake such tantric activities.

In the ultimate sense, initiation empowers us to achieve the complete state of enlightenment and thereby perform the deeds of enlightened beings. Also, as it says here, it *qualif(ies) the disciple to accomplish the small, medium and great spiritual attainments/feats*. After we receive the initiation, we follow it up by safeguarding the tantric vows, precepts, and so forth.

Through this, we will be able to achieve spiritual attainments, such as the three levels of spiritual feats. If we achieve the great feat, we can reach enlightenment within this very life. If we achieve the medium spiritual feat, we can reach enlightenment in the intermediate state [following the cessation of this life]. Achieving the small feat means we can, at most, reach enlightenment within sixteen lives.

Another benefit of receiving initiation is to implant a seed – the special cause to actualise the three bodies of a buddha.

2.2. WHO CAN OR CANNOT ACTUALLY RECEIVE THE TWO HIGHER INITIATIONS

The commentary then continues:

Regarding the second, which is Who Can or Cannot Actually Receive the Two Higher Initiations.

The two higher initiations are the secret initiation, and the wisdom knowledge initiation. We will read the root text, verses 64, 65 and 66:

Verse 64

*Because the Great Tantra of the Primordial Buddha
Forbids it emphatically,
Those observing pure conduct should not
Take the secret and wisdom initiations.*

Verse 65

*If those observing the austere practice of pure conduct
Were to hold these initiations,
Their vow of austerity would be impaired
Through doing that which is proscribed.*

Verse 66

*This creates transgressions which are a defeat
For those observing discipline.
Since they are certain to fall to a bad rebirth,
They will never gain accomplishments.*

Now if you ask, is it mandatory for all those who wish to accomplish spiritual feats to take the actual initiation?...

Here, the word *actual* refers to embracing an actual or real consort; through this, the disciple receives the secret initiation. In other words, the process of actual secret initiation involves the disciple inducing bliss through embracing an actual or real consort. Whereas when we talk about the actual wisdom knowledge initiation, this is where the guru embraces an actual consort, and through the bliss from that union, the wisdom initiation is conferred.

The commentary then says:

It is not mandatory as stipulated here. Given the object of knowledge as the subject, the preceptors, who belong to any of the five ordained groups ...

The *five ordained groups* include fully ordained monks and nuns; novice monks and nuns; and *siksamana* or trainee ordained nuns with six precepts .

... or householders with the pure conduct vow of celibacy ...

This would be a layperson who has taken the precept of celibacy.

... cannot take the actual secret and wisdom knowledge initiations in order to confer the same to the disciples, because this is forbidden emphatically by the Bhagawan in the great root Kalachakra tantra of the Primordial Buddha.

The commentary continues:

Now, if you ask, what sort of fault is observed to forbid those in pure conduct from taking the two initiations?

Obviously, those with celibate vows are forbidden or not allowed to take the two actual initiations.

If householders who abide in the austere practice of pure conduct and any of the five ordained groups actually hold or take the two initiations, then they are engaging in the forbidden code of the Teacher.

This warns that they are going against, or breaking the moral code prescribed by the Buddha.

This means that they transgress the pure vow of austerity and the ordination vows and end up receiving *pham pa* (transgression of root vow) to the vow of austerity and the downfall of root vows similar to *pham pa*.

There are different terms used for transgression of the root vow. For the fully ordained monk who transgress this root vow, it is called *pham pa*. Whereas for novice monks and nuns, it's called *pham 'dra*. For lay practitioners with the vow of celibacy, it is called *sBom po*.

Since those who transgress (root vows) commit downfalls, they will surely fall down into the three lower rebirths, and will never accomplish spiritual feats. Relating to this, Jowo himself said, 'Those who follow the liberating path of pure conduct must not confer nor must the disciples take (from them) ...

This clearly advises those who have taken a pure vow of celibacy to not take the actual secret initiation themselves, nor should they confer the actual wisdom knowledge initiation to disciples. Similarly, disciples should not take the actual wisdom knowledge initiation from a guru with a pure vow.

The commentary continues:

The *Self-commentary* also says, 'There are some who do not understand the meaning of the great tantric teachings of the secret mantra, or who are not under the guidance of a noble lama. Because of their reliance upon evil friends, they do not understand the way of the secret mantra. They instead rely on the provisional scriptures, and through boasting "we are tantric practitioners", recklessly indulge in all kinds of activities and proclaim, "We will be swiftly accomplish the spiritual feat of mahamudra". These people will go to hell and so forth'.

2.3. DISPELLING DOUBT ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT IT IS APPROPRIATE TO TEACH AND STUDY TANTRA WITHOUT RECEIVING THE TWO HIGHER INITIATIONS

The third is Dispelling Doubt with Regard to the Question of Whether or Not It Is Appropriate to Teach and Study Tantra Without Receiving the Two Higher Initiations.

We'll continue that next week. In fact, we should be able to finish the *Lamp for the Path* text next week, as there's not much left now.

From the following week, we will begin the teaching on Lama Tsongkhapa's *Great Stages of the Path*, focusing on the section under the heading 'How to train in the (bodhisattva's) deeds in general'. This section falls under the main heading 'The stages of how to train in that', which has two sub-headings: one is 'How to train in the deeds in general', which covers all six perfections, but the last two perfections are only dealt with briefly; the second sub-heading is 'How to train in the last two perfections in particular', which we won't be covering.

If you have a hard or digitised copy of the *Great Stages of the Path* it would good to bring it to the teaching sessions and also read it.

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