

Study Group - “Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*”

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Try to cultivate the bodhicitta mind by thinking that the purpose for studying the Dharma is to achieve the state of Buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings.

433.331.3 Engaging in the Uncommon Vehicle of Tantra or Vajrayana

Now as to the topic of these teachings, we are up to the heading of Engaging in the Uncommon Vehicle of Tantra or Vajrayana.

Using the term ‘vehicle’ in the context of the Great Vehicle or the Lesser Vehicle generally refers to the means of achieving a goal. Used in the context of Lesser Vehicle it refers to the means of achieving a goal for oneself. In the context of the Great Vehicle or the Mahayana it refers to the means of achieving a goal for the sake of all other beings.

Alternative Terms and Their Meaning

There are at least five commonly known terms that are synonymous with the tantra vehicle. These are the secret vehicle, the mantra vehicle, the resultant vehicle, the vajra vehicle and the method vehicle. Each of these terms has a different literal meaning, which in turn explains different aspects of Tantra.

Saying that the vehicle of tantra is a **secret vehicle** implies that it should be practised in secret and that it is not suitable to be taught to those with a lesser mental faculty, or who are not mentally ripe.

The next term is **mantra vehicle**. Mantra is a Sanskrit word where *man* means mind and *tra* means protection. So the implication of the term is to protect the mind from ordinary perceptions and apprehensions. However the reference of mantra in the ultimate sense is to the exalted wisdom of great bliss. So, for instance, the ultimate reference of the Tara mantra is the omniscient mind of Tara.

In the Guru Puja there is a line which says that you bless the offerings with the blessings of concentration, the blessing of mudra and the blessing of mantra.

Briefly the blessing of concentration means that when we are making these offerings our mind has to be single-pointedly focused on whatever the substance or object we are offering. In reality those substances are the non-dual bliss and emptiness.

In a relative sense the blessing of the mantra means that whatever mantra we say from our mouth is a blessing of the offering.

Then there is the blessing of the mudra, which in a relative sense is when you display ritual gestures with your hand as you make the offering. This blessing of the mudra also refers to the manifesting your body in the aspect of the deity.

This explanation of the blessing of concentration and so on is a side track, but because we do this Guru Puja offering so often it is good to know its meaning.

The vehicle of tantra is sometimes called the **resultant**

vehicle. This is in contrast to the Sutrayana or the vehicle of the perfection of wisdom, which is called the causal vehicle. Here tantra is called the resultant vehicle because it employs the path that accords with the desired result, which is the attainment of the state of Buddhahood.

Here result refers to the four thorough purities of the state of Buddhahood: purity with respect to place which is the pure land, purity of the body where you attain the body of a deity, purity of resources which is that in that state of buddhahood whatever you experience is the uncontaminated bliss of the exalted wisdom, and purity of actions, which means that all your actions are effortless and spontaneous.

In tantra you undertake practices which themselves very much resemble the resultant state of Buddhahood – the four thorough purities. For example, when you engage in tantric practice you think of the place where you are sitting as a pure land. In this pure environment you generate yourself as the deity, which is the pure body. Arising as the deity you indulge yourself in secret objects that induce uncontaminated bliss. At the same time, the way you perform deeds of purifying and benefiting other beings is also similar to the actions of a Buddha.

Tantra is called **the vajra vehicle** because in tantra you employ the yoga of Vajrasattva, which indivisibly unites both method and wisdom.

Tantra is also called the **vehicle of method** to indicate the superiority of the tantric method over the Sutrayana, or to indicate the greatness of the tantric method.

Another general thing that you should know is the basis of distinction between the different vehicles of Buddhism, such as the lesser vehicle, the greater vehicle, and then within the greater vehicle you have Sutrayana, and Tantrayana. These vehicles are distinguished on the basis of the different methods they employ on the path. Whereas the schools of tenets are differentiated on the basis of the different philosophical view that each school presents.

The Importance of the Three Principles of the Path

In the lam rim text it is said that before one enters into the vehicle of Tantra, the secret mantra vehicle, it is most important that one has gained the realisation of the three principles of the path, which are the main subjects of the vehicle of Sutrayana.

In fact when it is said that Tantra is a very quick means to achieve the state of enlightenment, it is assumed that one has already gained the realisation of those three principles of the path, which are renunciation, bodhicitta and the wisdom of emptiness. We see that the order of presentation of this topic in the lam rim text reflects this. We have covered the topic of the three principles of the path at great length, before arriving at this topic of Tantra.

We can study and realise true renunciation by following the

teachings for the stages of the path of persons of small and medium scope. Then by following the stages of the path for the person of great scope we study bodhicitta, and generate bodhicitta mind. The wisdom of emptiness is essential, and is common to all three stages of the path.

We can only achieve the state of liberation from cyclic existence or the supreme liberation that is the state of Buddhahood, if we depend upon the three principles of the path. Realising renunciation enables us to achieve liberation from cyclic existence, whereas the bodhicitta mind leads to the achievement of complete enlightenment. The wisdom understanding emptiness is essential as it is a common cause for the achievement of both liberation and complete enlightenment.

As this lam rim text says, anyone who engages in the tantric path without gaining the realisations of the Sutrayana path, for instance the three principle aspects of the path, is like a small boy riding on a very wild horse. Rather than achieving any advantage they face great danger. It is very important to understand here that even the greatness of Tantra is very much dependent upon gaining the realisation of all the Sutrayana teachings, such as the three principles of the path. As we said before, without gaining renunciation there is no way to achieve liberation, let alone achieving complete enlightenment or the goal of the tantric path of the generation or the completion stage.

On the other hand, however, we have to understand that we can make very quick progress if we gain a very good experience and realisation of all the stages of the path of Sutrayana. For instance if one generates renunciation, in a sense the stronger the renunciation the stronger and more forceful the compassion, and through this a more forceful bodhicitta mind is generated. It is said that with the complete realisation of the three principles of the path, if one engages in the tantric path one can quickly gain complete enlightenment.

The Advantages of the Tantric Path

The lam rim text mentions that the teaching of Tantra is rarer than the occurrence of a buddha. The teaching of Tantra is rare in the sense that only a very few of the 1000 buddhas who will manifest in this degenerate age will teach about Tantra.

We have to understand that the benefit of relying on the tantric path is that it is possible to achieve the state of enlightenment within a single lifetime of the degeneration age.

Understanding the benefits should motivate us to engage in this tantric path. However, as we have said before, we have to progress stage-by-stage along the spiritual path. For the tantric path it is said that first of all one has to rely upon a tantric master or a vajra master with full qualifications. One then enters into the mandala of, for instance any of the three highest yoga deities of Guhyasamaja, Heruka and Yamantaka, and then one takes the initiation. After that one maintains and safeguards all the tantric pledges and vows which one has taken as part of the initiation.

It is important to try to understand the systematic stage-by-stage order of progress, from properly relying on Guru devotion at the beginning of the path, up to the final result of the path, which is achieving the state of non-duality of the path of no more learning.

We have only discussed Tantra briefly here. The tantric path is regarded as a swift path to achieve enlightenment, because both aspects of the path, the accumulation of merit and wisdom, or method and wisdom, are united into the

one path.

In the Sutrayana when you engage in meditative equipoise on emptiness you are mainly accumulating wisdom, but not merit. In order to accumulate merit you need to arise from meditation, and in the post meditation period engage in actions to accumulate merit and so on. So merit and wisdom are accumulated separately.

In Tantra it is said that both merit and wisdom are accumulated simultaneously. For example, in tantric practice when you visualise yourself as a deity you are accumulating merit, and at the same time, the mind that visualises the deity also realises emptiness, thereby accumulating wisdom as well. Therefore, the superior quality of Tantra is that it offers access to the state of Buddhahood through one meditation, or one mind that has both the method and wisdom.

The next topic is about the four means of gathering disciples, which is the means to ripen the continuum of other beings. We shall continue on this topic in the next teaching.

Study Group Seminar

In October there will be a Study Group Seminar and Geshe-la recommends the topic of Special Insight.

Of course the success of the seminar depends mainly on the effort that everyone puts into preparing their contributions to that topic. Divide into four groups to prepare for the part of the topic which is allocated for each group to present. Depending on the topic you could divide into smaller subgroups, and before the actual day of the seminar meet together to discuss the topic. So in this way, if there is a good coverage of the topic on the day, and then this will be very beneficial for everyone.

Each group has to focus on their own topic to the point where they feel very competent about providing answers to any question arising from other groups. At the same time you also have the opportunity to put questions to the other groups. To do that you also have to give some thought to their topics, and try to think of important questions which you want to know, or which you may not have resolved in your own mind.

The seminar would be more interesting and exciting if every group made a list of some assertions about the topic. Then the other groups can focus particularly on those assertions, which may give rise to some good questions. Of course if you make such assertions in your group presentation, then this also puts the other groups on the spot especially if they do not have any questions.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

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