

But one needs to understand that there is this distinction between the views hearers can hold.

As presented in the sessions on the tenets², Prasangikas are defined as those who do not accept true existence, even conventionally. Thus, those who have a belief in true or inherent existence are definitely those who do not hold the view of the Prasangika. Thus we can clearly say that those who hold the view of the Prasangika are the ones who gain the actual realisation of emptiness. The main point, as presented by Gyaltsab Je, is that those who forsake the Great Vehicle scriptures do so out of ignorance. He elaborates this point in his commentary.

Now we may feel that these subtler points about views and tenets are irrelevant to us. However, from a practical point of view, we need to understand the unsuitability of forsaking the Great Vehicle scriptures. What we need to understand from this presentation, is that we must be extremely careful not to deride or criticise the others, just because we don't see their qualities. There is real danger for us if we do that.

We must be very cautious about not immediately jumping to the wrong conclusion, assuming that someone lacks qualities, or that they are not worthy of certain qualities. For example, if we don't know anything about the Christian faith, but immediately assume that this tradition lacks suitable explanations of spiritual practices, then that would be a great fault. It would be quite absurd for someone who does not know anything about a particular tradition to immediately assume that it lacks certain qualities.

As Gyaltsab Je explains later on, it is very difficult to see someone's qualities from their external appearance. Whatever qualities they possess are inner qualities, which are not necessarily displayed outwardly. We may see some faults externally, but that doesn't mean that they don't possess inner qualities, which they may very well be concealing. Because we fail to see their inner qualities, there is a great danger in immediately criticising someone when we see some faults. So Gyaltsab Je really cautions us against creating negative karma in this way. In another text he explains this point very clearly with an analogy of how on the surface it is extremely hard for us to recognise a noble being. So we must be very cautious when criticising others lest we fall victim to creating the heavy negative karma of criticising a bodhisattva.

3.2.1.1.2. Reasons for the derision

This section has two verses the first of which is:

*368. Either through not knowing the good qualities
[of altruism] and the defects [of mere self-
concern],
Or identifying good qualities as defects,
Or through despising good qualities,
They deride the Great Vehicle.*

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary seems to fall into three main points:

[1] The causes for antagonism are: *either through not knowing the good qualities* of the altruism of a bodhisattva that forsakes one's own benefit and takes on the responsibility to solely benefit others...

In this case *antagonism* is caused by *not knowing the good qualities of the altruism of a bodhisattva*. As explained here, the altruism of a bodhisattva is that a noble being has completely forsaken working towards their *own benefit* or welfare, but *has taken on* the complete *responsibility solely to*

benefit others. Such are the qualities, in brief, of a noble being or bodhisattva. Not knowing those qualities could be one of the causes for antagonism.

The second point, as Gyaltsab Je indicates, is:

[2]...*and not knowing the defects* of exerting great effort for mere personal gain while harming others;

Those who adhere to the hearer vehicle may not have any intention of harming others, but they definitely exert themselves to achieve a personal goal. Their sole purpose in meditating and practising is to gain liberation for themselves. That being the case, a bodhisattva's way of life may seem quite ridiculous. What is the point of being so concerned about others when they could be working towards achieving liberation for themselves? That's how the antagonism may arise. Because of their own limitations, as a result of being obsessed with achieving their own personal goal of liberation, they may hold that sort of negative view.

A bodhisattva's intention is completely based on altruism, and they have no concern for themselves or for personal gain. Rather their concern is solely for the benefit of others. Their sole purpose for engaging in spiritual practice, meditation and gaining realisations, (i.e. practising the path), is so that they can benefit other sentient beings. A bodhisattva's primary concern is how best to benefit other sentient beings to free them from suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness.

Thinking about the altruism of a noble being or a bodhisattva should really inspire us to practise in a similar way, such as with the *tong len* meditation practice we did earlier. *Tong len* is the meditation of taking the suffering of others upon oneself and giving one's own happiness to others. Of course, when this practice is done properly with a good intention, it gives immense personal benefit as well as accumulating virtue. In order to familiarise ourselves with this altruistic mind, it is essential that we do the *tong len* meditation practice.

Most importantly, however, we need to try to apply the same attitude to our everyday life, in whatever situation we may find ourselves. When we see others who are disadvantaged or suffering in any way, we should try to be there to help them as best as we can. Rather than letting others experience the suffering by themselves, we can take upon ourselves some of their hardships or difficulties. That would be a practical way to apply the practice of giving and taking in our everyday lives. The main thing is to constantly hold in high esteem the altruism and deeds of the noble beings, whilst making constant attempts to practise in the same way.

When the commentary says *exerting great effort for mere personal gain while harming others*, it is not indicating that hearers have any intention to harm others. But we can relate this point to a hearers' self-cherishing mind, which is obsessed with obtaining self-liberation. That self-cherishing mind could be understood as harmful in that it prevents one from being fully committed to removing suffering and bringing happiness to all sentient beings. Understanding it in this way can give us a subtler understanding of what harming others means.

The final point is:

[3]... *identifying good qualities as defects, or through despising good qualities.*

These are also points that we can relate to our dealings with others in everyday life. Out of jealousy or envy we might feel antagonistic towards someone by *identifying their good*

² These were presented in 2001.

qualities as defects, rather than seeing them as good qualities. Rather than accepting and being joyful about their good qualities, we turn their good qualities into faults. Failing to acknowledge the good qualities of someone and finding fault in them, is a fault on one's own side. To counteract that, it is good to train our mind to always acknowledge the good qualities that others have, to be joyful about them, and be happy that they possess such qualities.

Thus the third point clarified in Gyaltsab Je's commentary, is that when good qualities prevail, failing to acknowledge them and *despising good qualities*, is another cause for one to feel antagonism towards others.

We must definitely protect our minds against this fault of antagonism and train our minds to feel a sense of joy and happiness for others. On a practical level, we need to be really diligent about recognising the qualities of others and joyful about their qualities. However there is also a danger if we don't see faults as faults. If we see faults as qualities, then that is yet another fault! When we fail to acknowledge faults as faults, then there is a danger of being influenced by those faults.

Therefore we need to be very diligent, and use our analytical wisdom to acknowledge true qualities while at the same time recognising faults as being faults. Also, we should always try to associate with others who can help us to grow and develop further in gaining more qualities. I feel there is no greater joy than associating with others who uplift us. Such people are the supreme companions to associate with.

The second verse under this heading reads:

*369. Those who deride the Great Vehicle—
Knowing that to harm others is defective
And that to help others is a good quality—
Are said to despise good qualities.*

Having explained earlier that antagonism can arise from seeing good qualities and despising them Gyaltsab Je asks this question:

If one asks why would they condemn the Great Vehicle and despise good qualities? It is feasible to say that *those who deride the Great Vehicle do so while knowing that to harm others is defective and that to help others is a good quality, ...*

Here Gyaltsab Je is saying that despising good qualities arises from seeing some good qualities. Those of the Lesser Vehicle acknowledge *that helping others is a good quality and harming others is defective*; for without knowing good qualities there is no way to despise it.

This is, Gyaltsab Je says:

...because the Great Vehicle presents the complete method for abandoning defects and acquiring all good qualities, while the Lesser Vehicle presents the methods only partially.

The Great Vehicle presents a very complete and thorough explanation on abandoning all defects and acquiring all good qualities in relation to benefitting others. As the Lesser Vehicle only presents these methods partially, a Lesser Vehicle being is unable to relate to the extent of the good qualities of the great beings of the Great Vehicle, and so develop antagonism towards them, and despise their good qualities.

3.2.1.1.3. Faults of deriding the Great Vehicle

The first verse that relates to this outline is:

*370. Those who despise the Great Vehicle,
Source of all good qualities in that [it teaches]
taking delight,*

*Solely in the aims of others due to not looking
to one's own,
Consequently burn themselves [in bad
transmigrations].*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Because bodhisattvas do not look at their own welfare, they take delight solely in the aims of others. Thus, *those who despise the bodhisattva's practice—the Great Vehicle, which is source of all good qualities—consequently burn themselves in bad transmigrations because they create heavy negative karma.*

This is emphasising a point made earlier, which is that *bodhisattvas* are defined as those who do not have any concern for their *own welfare*, and that *they take absolute delight solely in the aims of others*. This means that their sole purpose for practising is for the benefit of other sentient beings. *Those who despise the bodhisattvas' practice* (which include the tenets or views of *the Great Vehicle, the source of all good qualities*), *consequently burn themselves in bad transmigrations*, which indicates that they will create the heavy negative karma to be re-born into unfortunate rebirths of the hell realms and so forth.

The point here is that because of what the bodhisattvas stand for, and the noble intentions they have, despising them, or the practices they engage in, and the treatises to which they adhere, will *create heavy negative karma*.

In another of Gyaltsab Rinpoche's teachings, he gives the analogy of a pit of burning embers that is camouflaged with earth and leaves, so that it cannot be seen from the surface. There is always the great danger of stepping onto it, and falling down into the pit and being burnt. This analogy is used to show the great risk of criticising others, when we are not able to see whether or not they are a bodhisattva. When we lack the clairvoyance or insight to see the qualities in the minds of others, and then criticise them, we could very well be criticising and finding fault in a bodhisattva. If we do so, we will be in great danger of creating very heavy negative karma. These are all very important points about which we need to be mindful.

The next verse under the same heading reads:

*371. One type with faith [in emptiness forsakes it]
through misconception [of it as denying cause
and effect].
Others who are angry [forsake emptiness]
through despising it.
If even the faithful type is said [in sutra] to be
burned,
What can be said about those who turn their
backs on it through despising it!*

As will be explained in the commentary, the fault of despising emptiness comes about because in despising the Great Vehicle, one is also directly despising what the Great Vehicle presents. The path presented in the Great Vehicle can be summarised into the two collections of merit and wisdom. The way to accumulate merit is presented with the extensive deeds of the bodhisattva, and the wisdom realising emptiness in the perfection of wisdom presentation. Therefore when one despises the Great Vehicle, one is also directly despising emptiness as well.

As Gyaltsab Je clearly explains in his commentary:

There are two types of beings who forsake emptiness: *One type with faith in emptiness forsakes it through misconception of it as denying cause and effect. Others who are angry forsake emptiness through despising it. If even the faithful type, who misunderstand emptiness as*

denying the existence of karma and its effects, *is said in sutra to be burned, what can be said of those through despising and turning away from emptiness, which is the perfection of wisdom. They will definitely burn. Thus, even if one does not have interest in emptiness, one should never deprecate it.*

The first type of person has *faith in emptiness* but, because of adhering to an incorrect or incomplete understanding of emptiness, they fall into the extreme of *denying* the very *existence of karma and its effects*. If *emptiness is misunderstood*, there is a danger of thinking that emptiness means that nothing exists, and therefore *cause and effect*, i.e. *karma and its consequences* do not exist.

When they develop that *misconception* of emptiness then, as explained in the sutra, they create heavy negative karma. It is not as if they don't have faith in emptiness, because they do have an appreciation of the explanation of emptiness. But due to the misfortune of not gaining the correct understanding of emptiness, they create the negative karma of denying the existence of cause and effect or the consequences of karma.

If the sutra explains that with the mistaken view of emptiness one creates negative karma, then there is no need to mention those who intentionally despise emptiness out of antagonism. They will definitely create negative karma and burn with sufferings of the unfortunate rebirths.

The conclusion, as Gyaltsab Je states, is that *even if one does not have interest in emptiness, one should never deprecate it*. This implies that, at best, try to develop a keen interest, faith and a clear understanding of emptiness. Then a stronger appreciation and keen determination to develop one's understanding of the realisation of emptiness will arise. So try to develop a keen appreciation and admiration for emptiness, but if that is not possible, then at the very least don't deprecate or despise it.

We can apply this personal advice to our everyday lives, and those we relate to. At best, try to acknowledge the qualities in others. As emphasised in the mind training teachings again and again, one needs to develop a pure view where one does not look for faults in others, but rather only looks at their good qualities. Dealing with others in this way is the highest level of practice we can do. Even if one cannot avoid seeing faults, then at least try not to openly criticise others. This is really very practical advice in our daily lives.

We can consider ourselves as being extremely fortunate because we have access to the correct view of emptiness. I have reiterated many times in the past, in many sessions on emptiness, that in gaining an understanding of emptiness, there is a real danger of going to the extreme of denying all existence. Gaining the correct understanding of emptiness has to be free from such extremes, which may lead to denying the existence of karma and cause and effect. One should be aware of how dangerous and what a great fault that is.

By now, of course, most of us are not in any danger of denying the existence of karma and its effect. With our understanding of emptiness, we can safely abide by the law of karma. So we can rejoice in having a sound basis for showing a greater appreciation of emptiness, and for making strong aspirations to gain a further understanding of the realisation of emptiness. This is something which we can feel very fortunate about!

As the commentary states, by despising emptiness one will experience the consequences of burning with suffering in

bad transmigrations. From that we need to derive an understanding of how the opposite of that is also true. If despising emptiness is such a heavy, negative karma, then praising and showing appreciation of emptiness is very, very virtuous, and a cause for us to accumulate great merit. So we have the great good fortune to create such great merit by appreciating and praising the view of emptiness.

If one fails to gain the correct understanding of emptiness and has only a partial understanding based on the literal meaning of 'emptiness', then, for example, we would interpret the verses of the *Heart Sutra* literally. You would then think that if 'form is empty', then there must be no form at all. That is when we fall into the danger of completely denying the existence of something that does actually exist. Having such a misunderstanding leads us to denying the existence of the law of karma. Without a correct understanding, we are at risk of interpreting explanations literally, and then it is very easy for us to develop that misconception about emptiness.

As I mentioned previously, I once met someone in St Kilda who said to me: 'I've heard about emptiness and I have read about it, and now I'm meditating on emptiness. I go off in the yacht somewhere by myself and I just focus on nothing, and it really gives me a sense of joy'. I am in no way suggesting he was criticising or despising emptiness, but even from that partial understanding of emptiness it seems that he derived some benefit from thinking about nothing! For him, temporarily thinking of nothing, and that there is no good and bad, seemed to give him some sort of relief. So to that extent he gained some benefit. However that is not the correct understanding of emptiness.

Thinking about nothing, and stopping all conceptions and thoughts, good and bad, and preventing them from occurring, worked for this man, because most of our emotions are negative ones, and unease arises in our mind as a consequence to seeing external objects. When we view objects, some will be beautiful and others will be ugly, and different kinds of emotions arise in our mind which will make us uncomfortable and uneasy. So, temporarily, just thinking about nothing seems to give some kind of relief. Regardless of his misunderstanding of emptiness, he definitely gained some temporary benefit. One could say that there was some benefit for him in having an sense of absence in his mind, rather than getting upset about things and becoming carried away with external objects.

In the *Heart Sutra*, the very next point after 'form is empty' is that 'emptiness is form'. Thus with the correct understanding, one is able to derive the essence of that the meaning, which is that form is none other than a manifestation of emptiness. It is not that form doesn't exist at all, but that the appearance of an inherently existing form is empty. It is the true existence or inherent existence of form that is empty.

When we gain that understanding of how when form is presented as being empty, and that form is actually a manifestation of emptiness, then we can derive the correct understanding that form is empty of inherent existence, but not empty of existence altogether.

3.2.1.1.2. Therefore, the unsuitability of despising the Great Vehicle

This is comprised of five sub-divisions. Here we need to note these headings in themselves are extremely profound points of practice.

3.2.1.1.2.1. Elimination of great suffering through a little suffering

3.2.1.1.2.2. Though there is a little suffering in the deeds of the Great Vehicle, it is unsuitable to despise what completely eliminates suffering

3.2.1.1.2.3. Rightness of making effort for the sake of great bliss; wrongness of being attached to small pleasures

3.2.1.1.2.4. Suitability of liking the Great Vehicle

3.2.1.1.2.5. Summation

3.2.1.1.2.1. Elimination of great suffering through a little suffering

The verse relating to this reads:

372. *Just as it is explained in medicine
That poison can be removed by poison,
What contradiction is there in saying
That what is injurious [in the future] can be
removed by suffering?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins the explanation of the meaning of this verse with an assertion :

If you say: It is suitable to despise the Great Vehicle because asceticism such as giving away one's head is unbearable, and because the profound is difficult to realise.

This is a presentation of a doubt about whether it is suitable to despise the Great Vehicle, because great *asceticism such as giving away one's head is unbearable*. This relates to the bodhisattva's deeds of generosity where, at a high level of practice, bodhisattvas give away their body parts and limbs and so forth. So the argument is that because the Great Vehicle encompasses such great asceticism, and *because the profound, emptiness, is difficult to realise, it is suitable to despise the Great Vehicle*.

Then Gyaltsab Je responds to the doubt in this way:

[Response:] *Just as it is explained in medicine that an immediate suffering and death caused by poison can be removed by poison, what contradiction is there in saying that what is injurious in the future can be removed by a minor suffering in this life? It is totally appropriate.*

Here Gyaltsab Je is saying that it is reasonable to bear small suffering now if it prevents greater suffering in the future. Whatever practice we do involves some hardship and difficulty, because of our limited physical and mental condition. Let alone the higher levels of practice, such as giving away one's limbs and so forth, whatever level of practice we undertake will involve some difficulty and will require some effort. But we can willingly endure such hardships and difficulties, knowing that they can become a cause for removing long-term suffering in the future, and will bring about future happiness.

The analogy presented in the commentary is that when doctors prescribe a treatment that may be unpleasant, they encourage their patient by saying: 'Even though this treatment may be difficult and hard, if you don't follow it now, you could suffer much more later on when the disease has advanced'. That is how a doctor encourages a patient to accept treatment, in spite of the unease and difficulty it might temporarily cause.

The example given in the commentary is that even what is considered as *poison, can be removed* by an antidote of a similar kind. This means that whatever is considered as poisonous could help to relieve the greater disease, and thus be suitable medicine. If that is the case, then when great suffering in the future can be removed from experiencing minor suffering now, *it is reasonable and appropriate*.

Immunisation shots are uncomfortable, but the injections will prevent diseases in the future. It reminds me of a Sera monk at the time when we were in a hospital together in India. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis, so he required a lot of injections. He wasn't very comfortable when they brought in the needle, and when he saw the nurses coming he would say, 'Oh, here they come now, they are coming!!' [laughter] then he would cover himself up with his *zen* or upper robe. He would say 'Of course, I have no choice, I have to take these shots, but it is really uncomfortable!'

The main point here is that it is neither suitable nor appropriate to despise a bodhisattva's practice by thinking it is a meaningless asceticism, and difficult to bear. Whatever practice the bodhisattvas endure now, will remove greater suffering for themselves and others in the future. Understanding that will prevent one from criticising the bodhisattva practices.

Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

© *Tara Institute*