

the situation. In that way, our own mind will be settled and we will be more relaxed and less anxious about whether or not we are presenting the material in an appropriate way. So, the main thing is to ensure that we have a really positive intention, and a real wish to benefit others.

As I have also shared with you in the past, several years ago I was presenting the disadvantages of attachment at one of the teachings here. During those days I stayed back and had tea in the dining room afterwards. While we were having tea one evening, a young lady approached me and asked, 'Geshe-la, does one really have to give up all attachments?' [*Geshe-la laughs*] I immediately knew where she was coming from, and that giving up all attachments would have been too hard for her to accept. So my response was, 'Small attachments are OK! Don't worry, you can keep your small attachments!' [*laughter*] She was actually very pleased to hear that and she brightened up; so that was the suitable thing to say to her at that time.

Accepting attachment as being the root of all our problems will come gradually, based also on one's own experiences with rocky relationships. Without having had personal experience of the disadvantages of attachment, it would be hard to accept the need to abandon all attachments. But with some life experience, coupled with explanations from the teachings on how attachment has a lot of short-comings and pitfalls, one begins to accept the teaching as being very true.

With respect to the last two lines of verse 481, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

...May I always in all ways bring help and happiness to all sentient beings.

I have often encouraged you to try to develop this aspiration on a daily basis. As I have often shared with you in the past, every morning it is good to develop, even just for a moment, an intention such as, 'In every possible way, may I only benefit others, and may I not harm them in any way'. Now I find support for that from Nagarjuna himself!

As I have mentioned to you previously, I cannot in any way claim that I am a great meditator or a great practitioner. I usually say, 'I'm an example of a geshe who has done rigorous study, but who did not gain knowledge of the profound teachings, and has not been able to put it into practice'. However throughout the course of the day I constantly try to familiarise my mind with this thought, 'In every possible way, may I only benefit others and may I not harm them in any way'. Even if it is just for a few moments I try to think about it in my regular activities, when I am drinking tea or having a meal, or going out and about, or even just sitting down, these are the points I try to bring to mind. Even though I'm not able to do great and profound practices, this is one thing I feel that I am capable of doing—taking the initiative to contemplate how best I may contribute to the welfare of sentient beings. It helps my mind and that's why I find it so useful and beneficial. So for me this is a substitute for bodhicitta; even though I may not be able to generate bodhicitta, this is the next best attitude that I can try to familiarise my mind with.

Contemplating these points means really thinking about each word, as each one carries a lot of weight and meaning. *May I*, relates to the fact that 'I will take the responsibility myself'; *always* indicates at all times, not just when I feel like it; *in all ways* means not just in some ways, but in every way *bring help and happiness to all sentient beings*. So when we think about it, each word contains real profundity. The personal benefit we gain from this is that every time we

contemplate these points and their meaning, it helps to reduce the self-cherishing in our own mind, which comes from grasping at the self. Each time self-cherishing is reduced, it brings about genuine calmness and peace and so, to that extent, it has great personal benefit.

Furthermore, the attitude encompassed by this line serves as a basis for all other forms of practice. For example, when one has a genuine attitude of wishing to benefit and bring happiness to other beings, then one is able to practise the great profound practices of the six perfections—generosity, ethics, patience and so forth. In fact all practices of adopting virtue and avoiding negativity are based on this attitude of wishing to benefit other sentient beings.

The next verse reads:

482 *May I always without harm
Simultaneously stop
All beings in all worlds
Who wish to commit ill deeds.*

Again Gyaltsab Je's commentary simply reiterates the verse:

*May I always without harm simultaneously stop all beings
in all worlds who wish to commit ill deeds.*

Having this aspiration implies that if one has the capacity, then one should prevent others from engaging in negative deeds without harming them. If one is unable to stop them, then, at the very least, one should not assist them to commit negative deeds. This is really a significant point.

If we help others to commit negative deeds, then we will also incur the negativity. Whereas if we assist those who are engaging in virtue, then naturally we will also gain benefit, which then becomes a means for us to accumulate virtue as well. This is a really significant point. All too often we find ourselves in a situation where someone is committing a negative deed, and we may feel that, because they are a friend, we have to help them and we don't consider the consequences of their actions. But essentially, we would be assisting them as a non-virtuous friend, i.e. as a friend who helps them to create more non-virtue, which would be a great disadvantage.

These are really important points we need to keep in mind. When we are about to engage in a virtuous deed, we need to ensure that the activity of that deed is completely virtuous. For example, some may come here with the intention of hearing the teachings and do some Dharma practice, but even though they come here often, they still engage in non-virtuous deeds with others. It's as if they are coming here to intentionally make plans for a non-virtuous activity! These are things that I often notice, and it is a pity.

The next verse is about making the aspirations for oneself to serve as a benefit for all sentient beings.

483 *May I always be an object of enjoyment
For all sentient beings according to their wish
And without interference, as are the earth,
Water, fire, wind, herbs, and wild forests.*

484ab *May I be as dear to sentient beings as their
own life,
And may they be even more dear to me.*

These are similar aspirations those presented in the tenth chapter of Shantideva's *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

May I always be an object of enjoyment for all sentient beings according to their wish, and without interference, as are the earth, water, fire, wind, herbs, and wild forests. By being their spiritual friend, may I be as dear to sentient

beings as their own life, and may they be even more dear to me.

These aspirations of wishing to benefit other sentient beings are incredibly bighearted. The analogy used here is just as the four elements, *earth, water etc., herbs and wild forests*, and all natural good resources in the environment spontaneously and naturally serve to fulfil the needs for sentient beings, may I also become a source of natural benefit for sentient beings. This is implying that each and every sentient being has the merit to be able to utilise the natural things of their habitat, such as trees, crops, and other vegetation for their own benefit. Using that as an analogy, one is making the aspiration, 'Just like these natural resources, may I also serve to fulfil the wishes of sentient beings'.

Helping others as *their spiritual friend* can also relate to being a good Dharma friend as well. Aspirations such as, 'Just as their own life is dear to them, may they be more dear to me than my own life' are highly evolved aspirations to generate as way to benefit sentient beings, and they are really significant points for us to keep in mind.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary presents the next two lines of the root text under the following heading:

Aspirations to exchange self with others

Exchanging self with others is in accordance with the practice we do here regularly. The relevant lines read:

*484cd May their ill deeds fructify for me,
And all my virtues fructify for them.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary basically reiterates the verse, reading:

Aspirations to exchange self with others:

May their ill deeds fructify for me, and all my virtues fructify for them.

Again, these aspirations for practice are highly evolved. While older students may already be familiar with it, we need to be careful not to misinterpret what the practice of exchanging self with others means. It does not refer to physically exchanging oneself with others, but to exchanging the attitude of self-cherishing with the attitude of cherishing others. That is the main point.

Our general attitude is one of cherishing ourselves while neglecting others, or doing so at their expense. When one trains in this practice of exchanging self with others, one is attempting to change the attitude of self-cherishing to an attitude of cherishing other beings. Basically the practice is to lessen self-interest and to hold on to the attitude of cherishing other beings, because other beings are more important.

Along with this presentation, with which you will be familiar, the 'equalising' of the practice refers to developing an attitude of how oneself and others are equal in wanting happiness, and equal in not wishing to experience any suffering. On top of that, as mentioned in our last session, one needs to generate the attitude that oneself and others are also equal in having to develop one's own happiness and eradicate one's own suffering. That is the more profound connotation of being equal.

When the text states *May their ill deeds fructify for me*, it is referring to the suffering of other beings. The ripening result (or fruition) of ill deeds is suffering. Therefore when one generates the aspiration, *May their ill deeds ripen on me*, one is actually developing the aspiration 'May I experience their suffering'. The next line, *And all my virtues fructify for them*, relates to the ripened result of virtue, which is

happiness. Thus the line means, 'May they experience the happiness of the virtues I have accumulated'. This is the main point that is being presented here.

Furthermore, one can also derive an understanding of the difference between ill deeds and the results of ill deeds. Ill deeds are the cause that leads to future suffering. So the consequences of committing an ill deed will be suffering in the future. The ripening result of an ill deed created in the past, is the suffering that is being experienced now, in the present. Likewise with virtue: virtue is a cause to bring about the consequence of happiness in the future, whereas the actual experience of happiness at any time is the ripening of the result of virtue that has been created in the past. This is another point that we need to bring to mind.

As I have presented previously, the practice of giving and taking is an incredibly profound practice when it is done properly and wholeheartedly. One has to imagine, from the depths of one's heart, taking in the suffering of other beings, while at the same time nurturing a deep and genuine heartfelt intention to experience suffering on behalf of other sentient beings. Likewise when one gives one's virtues to others, one needs to again develop that keen intention of giving away one's virtues to be experienced as the result of happiness for other beings.

As mentioned previously, *tong len* is not an easy practice and requires a lot of mental strength, which comes with continuous training. To be able to engage in this practice fully and significantly, an individual has to have trained and developed their mind to the point where they are happy to experience suffering and unhappy about experiencing pleasure or any fleeting joy and happiness. However, even as trainees, if we do it wholeheartedly with the best of intentions, it will be really meaningful. If one does that practice even for just a few moments, visualizing the suffering of other sentient beings gradually entering into one and giving one's own happiness to other sentient beings, this can be an extremely profound meditation practice.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je presents the next verse under this heading:

Aspirations to benefit sentient beings until the end of samsara

*485 As long as any sentient being
Anywhere has not been liberated,
May I remain [in the world] for the sake of that
being
Though I have attained highest enlightenment.*

In explanation of this verse, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Aspirations to benefit sentient beings until the end of samsara:

As long as any sentient being anywhere has not been liberated, and even if one being is still in samsara, may I remain in the world for the sake of that being, though I have attained highest enlightenment.

This incredibly profound and meaningful aspiration is the same as presented in Shantideva's text, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. The aspiration and dedication is that, 'For as long as there are sentient beings in the world in samsara, may I also remain to benefit them'.

This is also in line with the prayer that is presented in the *Guru Puja*: 'Even if I were to remain for eons in the fiery hells of *avici*, for the sake of even one sentient being, may I not be daunted, and may I continuously benefit other beings'. From this one tries to develop a keen determination, 'I will forgo

my own personal liberation and remain in samsara in order to benefit sentient beings’.

These aspirations are also very meaningful on a practical level. They can actually bring us some solace. We might feel somewhat daunted thinking, ‘With my state of mind, I might be in samsara for many, many more lifetimes or even eons!’ But, because of these aspirations, we know that there are bound to be bodhisattvas and enlightened beings who will also be in samsara to continually benefit and help us. So the prospect of being in samsara may not be quite so daunting, because we know that there are enlightened beings that have vowed to remain in samsara to continually help us. Then perhaps things become a little bit lighter and easier to deal with, because we know that we always have access to their compassion and help.

A significant point to be understood from this aspiration is that the word ‘world’ in *May I remain in the world for the sake of that being*, refers to the cyclic existence of samsara. This is indicating that the implicit aspiration is, ‘May I remain in the abode of samsara’. In other words, abiding in the material, physical world rather than actually being in samsara.

There is a difference between an individual who is in samsara, and who is merely in the abode of samsara. ‘Being in samsara’ implies that propelled by delusions and karma, one is reborn in samsara with a contaminated body. So existence in samsara with a contaminated body and contaminated states of mind is a result of delusions and karma. Thus one will naturally have to experience all the shortcomings of samsara—suffering, pain, samsaric pleasures and so forth. Moreover being in samsara is an uncontrollable existence.

Whereas the aspiration described here implies ‘to be in the abode of samsara’ meaning that out of aspirational prayers one comes to the physical plane of samsara, or the world, as a way to benefit sentient beings. But one is not actually of that world as one is not born into cyclic existence as a samsaric being influenced by delusion and karma.

An analogy would be that when we talk about Melbourne as a place, we are referring to this physical place here. Likewise, Australia as a country is a physical place. One may be in Melbourne, but not necessarily be a Melbournian and one may be in Australia, but not be Australian. Similarly, when one is not born with the condition of a contaminated body and contaminated states of mind, one can be in samsara and not be a samsaric being.

Another tangible and vivid example would be us setting in the gumpa right now. As ordinary beings, with contaminated bodies subject to the suffering propelled by the delusions and karma of the past, we are physically here in the gumpa. If we take the gumpa as an analogy of cyclic existence, then we are both in samsara with the contaminated aggregates, and in the abode of samsara at the same time.

The implication here is that if one is reborn in samsara out of aspirational prayers, then one is not confined by the limitations of the suffering and pleasures of samsara, because one is beyond that. But by being in the abode of samsara one can help and benefit the sentient beings that have a samsaric existence. This is a difference we need to understand. These aspirations are not just mere words, and they cannot be taken lightly. To make these aspirations with a deep and sincere feeling from the depths of one’s heart takes a lot of courage and profound understanding of the Dharma.

2.2.2.3. IMMEASURABILITY OF THE MERIT OF THOSE VIRTUES

Having explained the immeasurable causes of those virtues, the immeasurability of the merits of those virtues is now presented.

The next verse reads:

*486 If the merit of saying this
Had form, it would never fit
Into realms of worlds as numerous
As the sand grains of the Ganges.*

Gyaltsab Je’s explanation in his commentary reads:

If the merit of the previously mentioned seven branches and saying the dedications and aspirations had form, it would never fit into realms of worlds as numerous as the sand grains of the Ganges. Thus, by focusing on limitless sentient beings because limitless amount of merit is accumulated, one can develop the conviction that the qualities of the Buddha are limitless.

The merit that one gains from doing the practices that were presented earlier, such as the seven limb practice, and the dedications and aspirations that have been presented, is immeasurable. It is said that the realm of the world or the universe is so small to accommodate the merit gained from those practices! By contemplating the immeasurable merit that is accumulated, one can develop the conviction that the results of that merit, which are the qualities of the enlightened beings, will also be immeasurable.

As I regularly emphasise, the significant point is that when we engage in dedications and practice, focusing on each and every sentient being, then because the number of sentient beings is limitless and we dedicate our merits to limitless sentient beings, it is naturally to be understood that the merit one accumulates will also be limitless. These are highly significant points of practice that we need to take as a personal instruction. Don’t take these aspirations lightly, but really take them to heart. Even as an aspiration, they are a profound practice because, if we practice sincerely and wholeheartedly, even for a short span of time, we can accumulate a great amount of merit. So these are very significant points of practice and instruction.

Because of the limitless amount of merit that is accumulated, one then develops a conviction that the qualities of the enlightened beings (the buddhas) are limitless. If we can follow the earlier part of the reasoning, then the second part of the reasoning naturally follows, which is that we can develop strong admiration and great faith in the enlightened beings, or buddhas, when we have insight into the great and limitless qualities with which the enlightened beings are endowed. This is how we need to understand the practice.

Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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