

Ornament for Clear Realisation

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Commentary by Venerable Geshe Lobsang Dorje

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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Tashi Delek to everyone. I hope you are well, both physically and mentally.

As you all know we are still living with this pandemic and a lot of people have been suffering and facing all sorts of problems. Applying the Dharma is very beneficial as it enables us to cope with this difficult time. So, I am assuming that you are utilising your Dharma knowledge to deal with this very difficult and unpredictable situation as Dharma practice is very effective in minimising or even completely eradicating suffering from its root cause.

Due to the pandemic, we have been unable to run our usual teaching and meditation programs at Tara Institute. We haven't had a teaching from our residential teacher, the most Venerable Geshe Doga for a very long time and most of you haven't seen Geshe-la and your other Dharma friends for a long time.

We are going through a time where there are rapidly changing instructions telling us what we can and can't do and should and shouldn't do and so on. Amidst all this, I am happy to inform you that our most Venerable Geshe Doga is in good health and spirits. We must however pray for the long life and good health of the Venerable Geshe Doga, and also pray that we may hear Dharma teachings from him as soon as possible. Since you all have known Geshe-la and received profound teachings from him over many years, I don't need to explain how much benefit you derive from him, and what he means to you. Geshe-la teaches the Dharma from his own experience and inner realisations, so his teachings and advice carry an incredible blessing. To be honest, this is something that I can't do because I lack such realisations and long experience of the Dharma. Therefore, I can say that one word from Geshe-la is more beneficial than hearing hundreds and hundreds of words from me.

We have been studying Maitreya's text *Ornament for Clear Realisation*. As a reminder, let me say that it has eight chapters pertaining to the subject matter of the eight stages of inner realisations, which is the implicit meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras. So, if the meaning of the stages of the eight clear realisations is already explained in the sutras, then what is the point of writing a commentary such as *Ornament*? In fact, *Ornament* specifically states its purpose under the section called Explaining the Purpose and Connection, where it says:

12. *Of the sutras having an essence of ten practices,
Upon having set them in mindfulness,
The easy realisation of them
Is the purpose of the composition.*

So, the purpose of the composition is to easily understand the meaning of the sutras. Otherwise, many trainees would not be able to understand them.

Ornament for Clear Realisation is organised into eight chapters – one for each of the eight stages of inner or clear realisations. The first chapter of *Ornament* is on the exalted-knower-of-all-

aspects, which is explained in ten topics, characterising the omniscient mind or the exalted-knower-of-all-aspects.

Currently we are studying bodhicitta which is the first of those ten topics. The word bodhicitta is a Sanskrit term, which in Tibetan is *sem-kye* where *sem* is mind and *kye* is generation. So *sem-kye* literally means 'mind generation'. This is presented under five headings:

- I.1.1. The meaning of bodhicitta or mind generation
- I.1.2. The causes for generating bodhicitta
- I.1.3. The divisions of bodhicitta
- I.1.4. The benefits of generating bodhicitta
- I.1.5. How to generate bodhicitta.

I urge you to put as much effort as possible into developing your understanding of this text. This is not only a great opportunity for you to develop an understanding of the Dharma, but also an opportunity to develop your Dharma practice. To apply the Dharma effectively in your practice you must have a firm understanding of the Dharma. So, a proper Dharma knowledge is essential for effective Dharma practice. That also gives you a good grounding for teaching the Dharma to others. Whether they believe in the Dharma or not, from your own side you can share authentic Dharma knowledge with them, and through this be of great service to humanity. A perfect example is His Holiness the Dalai Lama who is not known for possessing wealth but for the advice he gives to people from all walks of life – believers and non-believers, Buddhists or non-Buddhists. His messages touch their hearts and benefits them tremendously, all because of his knowledge, experience and realisation of the Dharma.

Last time we talked about the benefits of generating bodhicitta.

I.1.4. THE BENEFITS OF GENERATING BODHICITTA

The reason for knowing the benefits of bodhicitta is to motivate us to cultivate it ourselves. Once we are convinced of the benefits of generating bodhicitta and motivated to cultivate it, the next thing we want to know is how to cultivate bodhicitta.

I.1.5. HOW TO GENERATE BODHICITTA

There are three sub-headings for this:

- I.1.5.1. The method of generating bodhicitta
- I.1.5.2. The measurement of generating bodhicitta
- I.1.5.3. The ritual of maintaining bodhicitta

I.1.5.1. The method of generating bodhicitta

There are two main methods:

- I.1.5.1.1. Atisha's method or instruction, which is the sevenfold cause and effect method.
- I.1.5.1.2. Shantideva's method or instruction, which is the method of exchanging self for others.

I.1.5.1.1. Atisha's method or instruction

The sevenfold cause and effect are as follows:

- I.1.5.1.1.1. Recognising all beings as one's mother
- I.1.5.1.1.2. Remembering kindness
- I.1.5.1.1.3. Repaying kindness
- I.1.5.1.1.4. Loving kindness
- I.1.5.1.1.5. Great compassion
- I.1.5.1.1.6. Superior intention
- I.1.5.1.1.7. Mind generation or the effect, bodhicitta.

I.1.5.1.1.1. RECOGNISING ALL BEINGS AS ONE'S MOTHER.

Here there are several questions to tackle.

Firstly, there is a line from Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend* which says:

Each person's own heap of bones
Equals or surpasses Mount Meru.
The earth's soil is not enough to count the number of
mothers
With pellets of soil the size of juniper berries.

The number of times that each sentient being has been your mother is greater than if you were to gather the soil of all three of the three thousand world systems and make it into tiny balls the size of a juniper berry. In other words, the number of times each being has been one's mother is more than the number of the juniper-sized earth balls of the three thousand worlds. In Vasubhandu's *Abhidharmakosha* or *Treasury of Knowledge*, we find that the first thousand worlds of the three thousand world systems are the thousand human worlds with their four continents and Mount Meru. The second thousandth world is one thousand times the first thousandth world, and the third thousandth is one thousand times of the second thousandth world. These three can be respectively called the small, middle and great thousand worlds. So, by recognising all beings as having been one's mother in the three thousand world systems, we are recognising an immeasurable number of beings as having been our mother.

I.1.5.1.1.2. REMEMBERING KINDNESS

Each person has drunk more milk
Than the four oceans, yet still cycles
As an ordinary being in samsara.
Much more than that is still to be drunk.

This is illustrating the extent of the kindness that one has received from each sentient being who has served as one's mother, which is greater than drinking milk equivalent to the water of the four great oceans. Not only that, the amount of milk one will drink will be even greater than that if one continues to be reborn into samsara. Furthermore, each time each sentient being serves as our mother they have also benefitted us in so many other ways by providing happiness and protection from threats and suffering.

I.1.5.1.1.3. REPAYING KINDNESS

There is a line from the text by Chandragomin called *A Letter to a Disciple* that says:

You can see that those who are close to you are
stranded in samsara's oceans being subject to birth
and death. You see that yet you are ignoring them as
if you don't recognise them. But there is no greater
shame if you free just yourself.

Accordingly, we should think that we must free all these sentient beings from suffering and place them in happiness because all of them have been very kind in giving us happiness and eliminating suffering in the past. This is how you should meditate to cultivate a sense of repaying kindness.

I.1.5.1.1.4. LOVING KINDNESS

When we meditate on loving kindness, we need to cultivate love by generating the thought, 'How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings have happiness; may they have happiness and may I be a cause for their happiness'.

Regarding the cultivation of loving kindness, we find this line in the *King of Concentration Sutra*:

The benefits that arise from making offerings of
various objects filling the billions of worlds constantly
to all the supreme beings, will not match the benefit
that will arise from showing a loving mind towards
other beings.

As this sutra says, the benefit derived from cultivating love for other beings is far greater than if you were to make offerings to all the supreme beings, all the buddhas, all the bodhisattvas and so on. And not just one offering but continuously making offerings that could fill the billions of worlds. Yet the benefit you would derive from that is not as great as the benefit you derive from cultivating loving kindness for other beings.

I.1.5.1.1.5. GREAT COMPASSION

Great compassion is the empathy that you feel for all other sentient beings. From the depths of your heart, you genuinely wish them to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. We need to cultivate and keep developing this sense of empathy or compassion for all other beings until it spontaneously arises within us. To produce bodhicitta, we must produce an uncontrived compassion that arises spontaneously and effortlessly.

Initially, feeling such compassion depends upon recognising other sentient beings as being subject to suffering due to illness, birth or death, and how they lack freedom and so on. We feel compassion only when we observe their suffering. If we don't observe their suffering, compassion will not arise.

The compassion which arises as an effect of reflecting or observing the way sentient beings are suffering is called contrived compassion because it depends on making an effort. Nevertheless, through training and habituating our mind with such contrived compassion we can develop it to the point where compassion will arise spontaneously and effortlessly when we see other sentient beings, and will not be contingent on observing their suffering. This is called uncontrived compassion. Likewise, we can have contrived bodhicitta which depends on an effort for it to arise, and uncontrived bodhicitta, which does not depend on any effort, and which arises spontaneously.

I.1.5.1.1.6. SUPERIOR INTENTION

Having cultivated great compassion, wishing all sentient beings to be free from suffering, we need to produce the thought, 'I will single-handedly free all sentient beings from suffering'. This is superior intention.

I.1.5.1.1.7. BODHICITTA

After we have cultivated great compassion followed by superior intention, we cultivate bodhicitta. All six preceding causes are related to each other as causes and effects. Compassion as a wish to free other sentient beings leads to superior intention, where you not only wish others to be free from suffering, but you take on the entire responsibility yourself for freeing them from suffering. Then with this superior intention, you meditate and think about how to free all other sentient beings from their suffering. However, you realise that even though you have a strong will, determination and sense of universal responsibility to free them from suffering, you don't have the capacity to do so. So, who does have such a capacity? You recognise that the only ones who do have this capacity are fully enlightened beings

or buddhas. Having recognised that, you cultivate and resolve to achieve the state of buddhahood for the sake of all other sentient beings. This mind of enlightenment is called bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta generated in this way is called king-like bodhicitta. We learnt earlier that there are two other ways of generating bodhicitta – boatman-like bodhicitta and shepherd-like bodhicitta. I asked you to think over the meaning of boatman-like bodhicitta and shepherd-like bodhicitta and investigate if they are correct states of mind.

With boatman-like bodhicitta, we have the thought of wishing that all other sentient beings and ourselves achieve complete enlightenment at the same time. With shepherd-like bodhicitta we wish that all other sentient beings achieve enlightenment first and we are the last to achieve it. Realistically speaking, is it possible for all to achieve enlightenment at the same time or for you to be the last person to achieve enlightenment? If this is impossible, how can there be these two types of bodhicitta? Bodhicitta must be a correct state of mind – it can't be a wrong mind or consciousness. As mentioned earlier, I hope you discuss this matter.

Prior to engaging in the sevenfold cause and effect method to cultivate bodhicitta, you must meditate on the state of equanimity towards all other sentient beings. This meditation on equanimity is a prerequisite to the sevenfold cause and effect method. In this meditation, we need to equalise our mental attitude to all beings by overcoming attachment to those who we see as our friends, and hatred for those who we see as our enemies and indifference to strangers or those who we see as neither friends nor enemies.

For example, to overcome animosity towards or hatred of an enemy, we need to ask ourselves why we have that hatred. We will find that the only reason is because we remember that person caused us suffering or harm or some sort of loss. So, to overcome that hatred, we need to consider and think of a time when that same person was our friend and benefitted us. If we investigate our relationships, then there is no doubt that we will find a time when she was our friend. As a friend or someone close to us, think of how she benefitted us. In this way, we can counteract any hatred we have now.

Similarly, to counteract attachment to a friend, we need to think about the times he was our enemy, not once but countless times, and caused us great suffering. This will counteract attachment to the same person now. We need to realise that all other sentient beings are the same, all have been our friends, and all have been our enemies. In this way, we try to even out our mental attitudes about friends and enemies and cultivate a state of equanimity.

1.1.5.1.2. Shantideva's method or instruction

The second main method for generating bodhicitta is the method of exchanging self with others.

You have heard that there are two main methods for generating bodhicitta: the methods of the sevenfold cause and effect and exchanging self with others. It would be good to find out whether these two are completely separate methods, or whether they have some common elements. For example, if you apply the method of exchanging self for others, do you also have to apply the sevenfold cause and effect method, such as the first and second causes of recognising all beings as one's mother and remembering the

kindness and so on? At the same time, if you apply the sevenfold cause and effect method, do you have to still apply the method of exchanging self with others? Remember that both methods are causes to generate bodhicitta.

If both methods incorporate elements of the other, then why are these two methods presented separately?

[Student:] *Why are we usually presented with these two methods, when there are actually other methods like the four circumstantial conditions to arouse bodhicitta, or seeing the magnificent body of the Buddha?*

[Response:] Yes, that's true. Simply seeing the Buddha's image can serve as a cause to arouse bodhicitta in some beings because they can be very impressed and inspired and then develop the wish to become a buddha too.

However, that is not the only cause or complete cause. If at that moment they give rise to a contrived bodhicitta, then that shows they already have a strong predisposition to generate bodhicitta. What they generate at that moment is only contrived bodhicitta, and they may have to do a lot more to cultivate uncontrived or true bodhicitta. So, to develop their bodhicitta they must engage in the methods of the sevenfold cause and effect and exchanging self for others.

[Student:] *But at the time of the Buddha, there were people who became bodhisattvas at the mere sight of the Buddha.*

[Response:] Even today that is possible, but they are exceptions because they possess that predisposition from their past bodhicitta practice.

There is a story of the master who had a direct vision of Vajrapani following his meditation retreat which involved a certain ritual. One day a disciple imitated his master's meditation by following the same procedure and he too had the pure vision. This story also shows that this disciple already had a predisposition for that pure vision to occur. So, these are exceptional cases of exceptional special students.

Thank you.

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Edited Version*

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