
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

12 September 2017

As usual, let us spend some time on our meditation practice. [Tong-len meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: "For the sake of all mother sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose, I will engage in listening to the teachings of the lam-rim and putting them into practice well".

Geshe-la: Did you have a good discussion last Tuesday?

Students: Yes, yes, thank you.

Geshe-la: So, as the discussion went well, when I ask you a question, you should be able to give the answer!

In relation to the twelve interdependent links, Jeremy could give an example of how one set of the twelve interdependent links finishes in two lives, and Damien could give an example of them finishing over three lives.

Don't be shy in giving your response, it would be a virtuous act: there's no need to be shy when engaging in virtue. As I say regularly, one should be shy when engaging in non-virtuous acts, not when doing virtuous acts.

So, in the set of twelve interdependent links, how many will be exhausted in this lifetime, and how many will be exhausted in a future lifetime?

Damien: Over two life cycles, it's six and six. They are ignorance, action, consciousness, then craving, grasping and existence over the first life. Then, in the second life, there is name and form, six senses, contact, feeling, birth, ageing and death.

Geshe-la: What kind of karma would that be?

Damien: One of the five heinous crimes or some really great virtuous karma.

Geshe-la: Does it necessarily have to be a heinous crime that exhausts the twelve interdependent links in two lifetimes?

The literal translation of the term 'heinous crime' is actually 'karma of immediate retribution'. That means you will experience the results in the very next lifetime, without an intervening lifetime. So the results of the karma that is created will be experienced in the very next life.

I'm asking you specifically to give an example of how the effects of a karma created in this lifetime would be experienced or exhausted in the next lifetime - for example, if you create the karma to be reborn as a human.

If, in this life, you create the projecting karma to be reborn as a human, then you will be reborn as a human in another lifetime. However, 'another life' doesn't necessarily mean the immediate next life; it could be any

lifetime after that. If the projecting karma is created in this lifetime, and you are not reborn as a human in the very next life, but in a lifetime after that, then that would be exhausting the twelve links of that specific projected karma over three lifetimes. So, for one set of twelve interdependent links to be exhausted, it will not take more than three lifetimes.

Can you explain *how* it is exhausted in three lifetimes?

Damien: The first lifetime would be ignorance, karma and consciousness, then there is either a gap or there's some period of time to the second life. Then, in the second life, there will be craving, grasping and existence at the end of that life. Then, in the next life there will be name and form, six senses, contact, feeling, birth, ageing and death.

Geshe-la: What we need to understand from this discussion of how the twelve interdependent links are exhausted over various lifetimes is that, at the present moment, within our consciousness, we would have many imprints of the projecting karma to be reborn as humans. for example. In fact, we have a lot of imprints of different projecting karmas in our consciousness right now, including non-virtuous karmas to be reborn in the lower realms.

With this understanding, we can rejoice in the imprints of virtuous karmas and further strengthen those. For the non-virtuous karmas, we need to engage in purification practices to purify the projecting karmic imprints within our mind leading to rebirth in the lower realms.

In terms of the twelve interdependent links, what activates the imprints is the link of **craving**. We need to understand that craving is the main link that activates the imprints in one's mind. So, while we have virtuous projecting karma and non-virtuous projecting karma in our minds now, without the links of craving and grasping, those imprints will not be activated. Therefore, we need to understand that attachment is the main factor that propels us into the next life.

Actually, both craving and grasping, followed by existence, are the links that activate the imprints in one's mind. In this way, we can understand that craving and grasping are the main causes to be reborn in cyclic existence.

As presented in the four noble truths, the truth of origination is delusions and karma, which are the causes of all suffering. However, in the context of the twelve interdependent links, one can understand that delusions are the main cause of cyclic existence and suffering.

The Vaibhashika accept that the main conditions or causes to be reborn in cyclic existence are delusions and karma. Therefore, they posit that arhats who have abandoned delusions and karma will not take rebirth again, because they don't have the causes for that. So, when an arhat 'passes beyond sorrow', for Vaibhashikas, this means that when they pass away, they will not take rebirth again.

Since the Vaibhashika don't posit the possibility of taking rebirth in order to benefit other sentient beings, they would argue that when the Buddha passed away, or entered nirvana, he would never take rebirth again. It is good to understand the Vaibhashika position. They assert that arhats are not reborn again, and don't assert

taking rebirth intentionally through aspirational prayers. So, according to the Vaibhashika, even the Buddha would not take rebirth again after passing into nirvana. They assert that, in order to take rebirth, one has to have the causes, which are karma and delusions.

We need to understand why the Vaibhashika assert certain things, rather than being surprised and saying, "Oh, why would they assert that?" They have their own reasons for their assertions.

Of course, in the Great Vehicle system, we assert that there is birth even after the delusions and karma have been eliminated; one can still take intentional or controlled rebirth out of aspirational prayers. Again, because we assert this, we have to be able to prove that this is the case.

The Vaibhashika also assert that the form body of the Buddha is in the nature of true suffering.

At our last session, we came to the point in the commentary where it was going into the presentation of the great scope.

THE EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION OF THE GREAT SCOPE

This has two sub-headings, namely:

- The extensive explanation of the path of perfection
- The brief explanation of entering into the mantra¹

The extensive explanation of the path of perfection

This has two further sub-headings, which are:

- Explanation of the path
- Explanation of the fruit (translated last time as the result)

Explanation of the path

Again, this is subdivided into two, which are:

- Promise of the explanation
- Explaining the perfect path

PROMISE OF THE EXPLANATION

The root verse is quoted:

5. *Those, who through their personal suffering
Truly want to end completely
All the suffering of others
Are persons of supreme capacity.*

As presented in the commentary:

If you ask, 'how do the followers of great scope eradicate sufferings of other beings?' ...

The definition or explanation of a great scope being was presented earlier: it is a being whose intention is to eradicate the sufferings of all other sentient beings. Thus, the hypothetical question here is 'how do the followers of the great scope eradicate sufferings of other beings?'

The commentary continues:

In order to fulfil the excellent goal for others, it is necessary to achieve the highest enlightenment, which is the means (to fulfil the excellent goal for others).

As presented here, in order to eradicate the sufferings of other sentient beings, it is essential that, firstly, one achieves the highest state of enlightenment oneself. As explained previously, without achieving that state of enlightenment oneself, there is no way that one can alleviate the sufferings of other sentient beings.

As further explained in the commentary:

To imply that such a means to fulfil the excellent goal for others is the instruction imparted by the noble Lama, the text says, ...

Then the next verse is quoted:

6. *For those excellent living beings,
Who desire supreme enlightenment,
I shall explain the perfect methods
Taught by the spiritual teachers.*

This encompasses the pledge, or the promise, to compose the text.

The commentary then explains:

These lines also imply (the author's) promise of explanation - of the means of achieving the highest enlightenment to those noble sentient beings who wish to achieve the enlightenment.

To understand the implication here of *highest enlightenment*, we can refer to our understanding of the hearers' and solitary realisers' state of liberation, which can also be termed 'enlightenment'. In accordance with the explanation here, those personal goals are not the highest state of enlightenment.

When the commentary refers to *those noble sentient beings who wish to achieve the enlightenment*, the term 'noble sentient beings' refers to beings of the great scope. Thus within the three scopes - small, medium and great - this refers particularly to beings of the great scope.

Then as the commentary further explains, quoting from Sharawa:

Sharawa said, the term Noble sentient beings refer to those whose (Mahayana) nature has been awakened, and thus possess an extraordinary sense of responsibility.

The awakening of Mahayana nature is said to occur whenever great compassion is developed within one's mind. What is explicitly mentioned here is superior intention, which is translated in the commentary as *an extraordinary sense of responsibility*. When superior intention is developed, that is the main sign that the Mahayana nature has been awakened. However, even prior to generating the superior intention, the point where great compassion is developed within one's mind is the time when the Mahayana nature is awakened. Next the commentary explains:

The lines (verse 6) "who desire supreme enlightenment" indicate an aspiration to achieve enlightenment and the lines (verse 5) "Truly want to end completely, All the suffering of others" indicate an aspiration to achieve the welfare of other beings.

The line in Verse 6 which reads, *who desire supreme enlightenment*, specifically indicates the aspiration to achieve enlightenment.

The line from Verse 5, which reads, *truly want to end completely all the suffering of others*, specifically indicates the aspiration to achieve the welfare of other beings.

¹ Trans: The language used in some of these headings might differ from last week's translation, but they are basically the same point.

These two aspirations – the aspiration to alleviate the sufferings of all living beings and, for that purpose, aspiring to achieve enlightenment oneself – sum up the mind generation of bodhicitta.

Then the commentary further explains:

Hence, these verses present the fully-fledged definition of bodhicitta as mentioned in the *Ornament of Clear Realisation* (by Maitreya Buddha).

What is being referred to here is expressed in a verse from *The Ornament of Clear Realisation*, that defines bodhicitta:

Mind generation is the desire for
Perfect complete enlightenment
For the welfare of others.

The definition of bodhicitta presented in *The Ornament of Clear Realisation* is an altruistic mind that combines the two aspirations of aspiring to free other beings from all suffering; and, for that purpose, aspiring to achieve enlightenment.

As explained on many occasions in the past, the two aspirations can be understood as aspirations to accomplish the two purposes – of others, and of oneself.

These two purposes can be further understood in conjunction with the sevenfold cause and effect process for developing bodhicitta. For the six earlier parts of the technique – remembering all beings as one's mother (1), remembering their kindness (2), wishing to repay their kindness (3), developing great love (4) and great compassion (5) – one trains one's mind specifically to aspire to fulfil the purpose of others, which is perfected when one develops superior intention (6).

When one develops this superior intention based on love and compassion, one then resolves: "I myself will take on the responsibility to free all beings from all suffering, and place them in the highest state of happiness". When one makes that commitment to solely take on the responsibility oneself, that is the optimum level of development of the wish or aspiration to fulfil the purpose of others. Having developed the superior intention, one looks into whether one actually has the ability to free all beings from suffering and place them in the ultimate state of happiness. Then, one realises that right now, at this time, one doesn't have that full ability.

One further investigates if that is possible: how can one achieve that ability? That is when one develops a strong, keen yearning to achieve enlightenment. It is only when one becomes enlightened, having removed all faults and obtained all perfect qualities oneself, that one can fulfil the purpose of others. When one aspires to achieve enlightenment oneself, for the sake of other sentient beings, that is what is referred to as 'aspiring to fulfil the purpose of achieving enlightenment oneself'.

The sevenfold cause and effect sequence of training the mind to develop bodhicitta, which comes from Atisha's instructions, is explained further in the text.

Then the commentary points out:

... and also it presents it as the 'Entrance Door to Mahayana'.

This indicates that the mind generation of bodhicitta is like the entrance to the Mahayana, because once one

develops it within one's mind, one becomes a Mahayanist. If one has not developed the awakening mind or the mind generation of bodhicitta, one will not become a Mahayanist.

The commentary further mentions:

Despite the fact that Jowo (Atisha) was a great scholar in five fields of knowledge ...

As presented earlier, Atisha was a great master of all the sciences.

... the mode of presentation of the text is supported by authentic scriptural sources and reasoning to indicate that this is not a self-creation but is following the words of Lama Serlingpa and other lamas.

The indication here is that these words are not improvised, but accord with the words of authentic lamas, such as Lama Serlingpa, and other great masters. The main point here is that the Dharma comes from an authentic source.

Next, the commentary states:

As Potowa says, this in a way shows that the teaching of Jowo (Atisha) is a pith spiritual advice for us.

So Potowa mentions that the teaching of Atisha is a pith spiritual advice for us, for the following reason :

If we express our gratitude towards lamas by recognising not only small or large but all our happiness or positive qualities as an outcome of the lamas' kindness, then the lamas' blessings would flow automatically and our qualities would increase.

These are also points about relying on the spiritual teacher.

Hence, one should always remember any qualities gained is the blessing of the Lamas and in this way one receives lamas' blessing all the time.

The indication here is that when we remember that whatever qualities we have achieved are due to the kindness of our teachers, we will constantly be receiving their blessings.

Furthermore, the commentary says that:

Since Potowa interpreted this section as Remembering the Kindness of the Lamas, Geshe Sharawa wrote in detail on how to rely on the lamas here.

Regarding the lines in verse 6, the commentary says:

In short, (verse 6) "*For those excellent living beings...*" these two lines identify the vessels (listeners) who receive this Dharma. "*I shall explain the perfect methods Taught by the spiritual teachers*" are two lines identifying the nectar like Dharma.

Then it reads:

Moreover, "*the perfect methods*" indicate the subject matter, "*I shall explain*" indicates the purpose (of composing the text), "*Taught by the spiritual teachers*" indicates the unique way of presenting the subject matter, "*supreme enlightenment*" indicates the ultimate purpose, "*I shall illuminate the lamp For the path to enlightenment*", indicates an extensive explanation.

These are specific points relating to verse 6.

The commentary continues:

The following questions arise, as early in the text, (verse 1) "*I shall illuminate the lamp For the path to enlightenment*", and (verse 2) says "*I shall write clearly*

distinguishing, Their individual characteristics". In here too it says, (Verse 6) "I shall explain the perfect methods". Are these repetitive?

The question raised here is that it seems that the author's pledge is repeated three times - "I shall illuminate the lamp for the path ..." in the first instance; secondly, "I shall write clearly distinguishing"; then thirdly "I shall explain the perfect methods". So the question here is *are these repetitive?*

The commentary explains:

No, there is no such fault. The line in (verse 1) where it says "I shall illuminate the lamp For the path to enlightenment," indicates the author's promise of the explanation for the whole text in general and the line in (verse 2) where it says "I shall write clearly distinguishing..." indicates that the difference between the three scopes person is explained separately. Whereas the line in (verse 6) where it says "I shall explain the perfect methods" is to indicate the explanation of the unmistakable means to achieve the highest enlightenment specifically for the followers with the nature of Great Vehicle.

As indicated in the commentary with respect to the line in Verse 6:

"For those excellent living beings," that can also be treated as the synthesis for the rest of the text.

The commentary further explains:

Thus, in here, the Mahayana mind-generation's (bodhicitta) definition, classifications and methodology of training are in accordance with the view of the Three Great Charioteers - that is the Seven-fold Cause and Effect, and Exchanging and Equalising one for others as a means to cultivate the precious mind of enlightenment as part of one's stage by stage progression along the path to enlightenment.

So:

Following this view one should put all one's effort and human capacity in meditation to generate bodhicitta.

The commentary further says:

In relation to this, the Great Jowo (Atisha), at the time of passing away said to Tonpa (Dromtonpa), "from now onward don't receive Dharma from the Indian scholar Serdod, he would teach to corrupt the four tantras, but regard the sutras as the Spiritual Guide and have a Noble Mind."

So it the instruction given is to *regard the teachings, the sutras as the spiritual guide and have a noble mind* or a gentle mind.

The next passages show some poignant moments in the accounts of the great masters:

Then, also when Tonpa (Dromtonpa) was passing away, his head was resting in the lap of Potowa and he felt tear drops running through his hair and soothingly advised to Tonpa, saying, "Don't be sad, have a Noble Mind and be a special person in this very life time."

Then, as mentioned here, Jowo replied in the affirmative, saying:

"Yes Jowo, I will." (Potowa) replied and then asked, "What does it mean to have a Noble Mind?"

The answer was uttered with effort by Dromtonpa, just before he passed away. Here, the commentary notes, he

was in a feeble state, but trying to use some force in his voice to say it:

With an effort he (Dromtonpa) said it twice, "it means bodhicitta."

So that is what a 'noble mind' means.

The commentary continues:

Potowa recalled this experience later in saying, "at that time I felt as if putting a stake [or ritual dagger] in my heart."

Basically, the commentary is saying that this was very potent advice.

Next, the commentary reads:

Langri Tangpa stated that bodhicitta becomes stabilised when there is more sense of reverence to those who harm you than to those who benefit you;...

Of course, this is a very significant point - one can genuinely show *reverence* and respect to those who harm you. That would be a sign of having generated bodhicitta. So when training one's mind to develop bodhicitta, one needs to practise developing mindsets such as repaying harm with kindness.

The indication here is that the bodhicitta mind becomes stabilised and firmer when one is able to show respect to those who harm you, rather than retaliating. We can see that these are incredibly meaningful ways of practising bodhicitta in our everyday lives; they are ways to utilise our normal encounters with others as an opportunity to practise developing or establishing bodhicitta.

As further explained by Lumpawa in the commentary:

"we consider the generation and completion stages as the pith instruction, but really the extracted gist of the Jowo's instructions is cultivating loving kindness, compassion and bodhicitta."

This is also a pith instruction.

Then:

Even our All-knowing Je Tsongkhapa said in his *Spiritual Songs of Experience* ...

Then quoting from this text *Spiritual Songs of Experience*, the commentary reads:

"Generating the mind is the central axle of the supreme vehicle path;

It is the foundation and the support of all expansive deeds;

To all instances of two accumulations it is like the elixir of gold;

It's the treasury of merits containing myriad collections of virtues;

Recognising these truths the heroic bodhisattvas

Uphold the precious supreme mind as the heart of their practice.

I, a yogi, have practiced in this manner; You, who aspire for liberation, should do likewise."

THE EXPLANATION OF THE PERFECT METHOD

This has two sub-headings:

- Aspirational instructions
- Engaging instructions

Aspirational instructions

The first of these has three headings, which are:

- The preliminary

- The actual
- The completion (which is the advice)

The preliminary

The first of these has a further three sub-headings which are:

- Accumulating merits
- Taking extraordinary refuge
- Training in the three minds

Accumulating merits

The commentary continues:

Of these three, relating to the first one, the text says, from Verse 6, “I shall explain the perfect methods.”

That is followed by a question:

What is the perfect method to achieve Complete Enlightenment?

The answer is twofold:

The method can be elaborated into two which are the excellent thought and the excellent deed. The thought here relates to Mind-generation (bodhicitta), an arising of which is, as indicated here, dependent upon accumulating merits.

This is indicated in many other teachings, and specifically when we recently studied the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*. The second chapter specifically relates the way to generate the bodhicitta mind by first engaging in purification and accumulating merit, which are the basis for generating the mind of bodhicitta.

The following explanations are in line with the lam-rim teachings, which we can leave for our next session.

The preliminary practices explained in the lam-rim teachings include setting up the altar in particular, by first cleaning the area, then arranging the representations of the holy body, speech and mind, and then making offerings. It is good for you to read that section in the lam-rim, which you can then relate to the explanation here.

The six preliminaries are very practical: by first cleaning the area, arranging the altar nicely, and then making offerings establishes the basis for one to engage in practice. It would take too much time for me to go into detail on this topic here. If you read that section in the lam-rim, then when the explanations are given here, you can relate to it and understand their significance.

In the lam-rim teachings the significance of cleaning the area is explained through quotes from the *Ornament of the Sutras*. When we understand the significance, it brings much more meaning to the action. Most of the older students have already received the lam-rim teachings, so you can relate those points to the passages here. One can then incorporate all of one’s understanding into this topic.

It will also restore your understanding of the teachings you have received before, which may have become a little dormant. This teaching will rekindle what you have understood previously.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltzen is used with the kind permission of Samdup Tsering.

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Edited Version*

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Atisha's 'Lamp for The Path' - Study Group 2017

Homework

Teaching: 12 September 2017, Assigned: 19/09/2017

1. Explain how one set of 12 interdependent links can be exhausted over two lifetimes.
2. Explain how one set of 12 interdependent links can be exhausted over three lifetimes.
3. What is the Vaibhashika view on future rebirths for an arhat after abandoning Karma and Delusion?
4. What is the main sign that the Mahayana nature has been awakened?
5. What are the two aspirations present in the definition of the mind of Bodhicitta and what are the two purposes that they aspire to accomplish? How are these two purposes divided amongst the seven-fold cause and effect sequence for developing Bodhicitta?
6. When Drontompa was passing away, he tried to comfort his disciple Potowa and said "*don't be sad, have a Noble Mind and be a special person in this very life time*". What did he mean by the word 'Noble'?
7. List the 6 preliminary practices

Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

19 September 2017

As usual, let us engage in our meditation practice. [*tong-len meditation*]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and then put them into practice well.

When generating this motivation, we can recall the visualisation done during our *tong-len* meditation practice, where we focused on all sentient beings. Our goal is to alleviate the sufferings of all living beings and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, and it is for that purpose that we strive to achieve enlightenment. The stronger our wish to alleviate the sufferings of sentient beings and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, the easier it will be for us to generate true love and compassion for them.

We also need to remember that thinking about the welfare and generating love and compassion for all sentient beings is an optimum means to accumulate extensive merit.

As explained in the teachings, this is a very profound practice where one is able to accumulate extensive merit in a short time.

We can understand from this how a pure Dharma practitioner's way of thinking and conduct is invaluable. The practitioner's mind is an incredibly highly precious and valuable state when these thoughts predominate.

ACCUMULATING MERITS (CONT.)

Last week we ended with this hypothetical question in the commentary:

What is the perfect method to achieve Complete Enlightenment?

The Tibetan term for enlightenment *dzog-jhang* has a very specific connotation. *Dzog* literally means complete or entire and, in this context, relates to achieving the complete state of perfection by developing all possible qualities. *Jhang* has the connotation of pacifying or removing, which relates to having removed all faults and obscurations, i.e. the deluded obscurations and the obscurations to omniscience have both been completely abandoned.

Having raised this question about the perfect method to achieve complete enlightenment, the commentary explains:

The method can be elaborated into two which are the excellent path and the excellent deed.

The referent method here is to achieve complete enlightenment, and one needs to understand that it consists of none other than pacifying all faults and

achieving all possible good qualities. Recall that the purpose is to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings, and lead them to highest happiness. However, in order to do that, one needs to first achieve enlightenment oneself.

A bodhisattva is a being whose **mind** is imbued with bodhicitta, the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all beings, and their **conduct** and deeds are to engage in the six perfections. These are the essential points here.

As the commentary further explains:

The thought here refers to the Mind-generation (bodhicitta), arising of which is, as indicated here, dependent on one accumulating merits.

The definition of mind-generation or bodhicitta was also explained very clearly in last week's session.

As the commentary specifies, the development of bodhicitta is dependent upon accumulating merits. This clearly explains that the person who wishes to generate the awakening mind or bodhicitta needs to be someone who has a great stock of merit. Bodhicitta cannot be generated by those who have amassed a lot of negativities, the imprints of which are still prevalent in their minds.

Therefore, the preliminary practices of purifying negativities and accumulating merit are of great importance. The first chapter of the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* explains the benefits of bodhicitta, the second chapter explains the way to generate that mind by engaging in practices of confession and purification, and the third chapter specifically presents the way to accumulate merit through the seven limbs of practice, such as prostration and so forth.

In the past I have explained¹ the meaning of this prayer:

I go for refuge to the Three Jewels
I confess all negativities individually
I rejoice in the virtues of all beings.

These three lines specifically indicate the means of accumulating merit by first going for refuge to the Three Jewels, while *I confess all negativities individually*, and *rejoicing in the virtues of all beings* is a means to accumulate merit. In essence, what is being explained is that the mind-generation of bodhicitta can only be developed within a being who has purified their negativities and who has accumulated a great stock of merit. It does not arise in those who have great negativities still prevalent in their mind.

When we think in these terms we realise that generating bodhicitta is not easy when one still has a lot of negativities yet to be purified. However, we can still move in the right direction by making aspirational prayers, and engaging in regular practices and dedicating towards that end of generating bodhicitta. These are the methods that we can employ at our level. As the commentary indicates, the generation of bodhicitta is dependent upon accumulating merits.

¹ See the teachings of 12 November 2013 and 3 December 2013.

The text explains the means of accumulating merit in the following lines:

7. *Facing paintings, statues and so forth
Of the completely enlightened one,
Reliquaries and the excellent teaching,
Offer flowers, incense - whatever you have.*
8. *With the seven-part offering
From the [Prayer of] Noble Conduct,
With the thought never to turn back*

Setting up an altar to receive offerings²

The commentary explains:

To explain here how to, and in front of what to make offerings, the offerings are made in front of the visual representations of the holy body, speech, and mind. The representations of the holy body includes such objects as the image of the fully Awakened Shakyamuni Buddha in the form of paintings, [which also refers to thangkas] engravings, [on wood or metal], mouldings or statues made out of clay, [statues which are moulded, or made out of clay].

The **holy body** is represented in these forms.

Here we need to understand that these representations of the holy body are placed upon the altar. Other explanations indicate that one first needs to have a clean area, and then place these representations of the holy body on the altar. We also need to understand that the images that we place on the altar represent the holy enlightened being. Regardless of the material value of the image, whether it's made of clay or expensive material such as bronze or gold, all images have to be respected and treated equally.

This is a very important point. Otherwise you might think, 'Oh, the clay statue is less valuable so not so important, and you put it to one side in favour of an image which is more expensive and which you think is more precious. This would be a mistake, as there would be a danger of accumulating a negative karma for disrespecting an image of the Buddha.

The main point to understand here is that whatever the form of the image on one's altar, it needs to be regarded as the actual Buddha. One needs to visualise the actual Buddha and other enlightened beings as being present. This is really important as it will instil a strong reverence towards the image. It will also help to instil a conscientious mind based on knowing shame and embarrassment, which prevents one from engaging in non-virtuous deeds. We need to understand that having an altar and visualising the actual buddhas as being present will help one to maintain a more conscientious mind, and to refrain from negative deeds.

The term 'embarrassment' refers to refraining from misdeeds out of consideration and respect for others, while 'shame' refers to refraining from misdeeds because of personal values. These two states of mind help us to avoid engaging in negativities, and accumulate virtues. This is also explained clearly in *Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*.

Next is the representation of the **holy mind**. As the commentary explains:

The representation of holy mind includes a stupa containing precious relics.

It's good to understand here that the stupa represents the holy enlightened mind. If one has a stupa, then one places that to the right of the statue on the altar.

The representation of holy speech includes holy dharma scriptures such as the twelve branches of excellent teaching.

The representation of the **holy speech** are the teachings of the Buddha. In short, any Dharma book can be a representation of the Buddha's teachings, and this is placed on the left side of the altar. A representation of the holy speech of the Dharma could be a text such as the *Vajra Cutter Sutra*, or a lam-rim text such as *the Great Treatise on the Graduated Path to Enlightenment*. Many of you already have that text, so it would be good to place it on the altar.

Offerings are placed in front of these visual representations of the actual enlightened body, enlightened speech, and enlightened mind of the Buddha, which are also referred to as the indestructible or vajra body, speech, and mind. As indicated earlier it is important to have the conviction that these representations indicate that the actual holy body, speech, and mind are actually present.

Manifest offerings

The commentary begins its explanation on **offerings** with this hypothetical question:

What are the objects of offering?

This is a significant question because you might have an altar with representations of the holy body, speech, and mind, but if the types of offerings have not been explained then you might start to think, 'Oh, if I should be making offerings, then what kind of offerings should I make? The commentary explains:

The essential objects are offerings of flowers, incense, light, perfume, and food.

So the answer to the question is that there are five types of offerings.

Flowers should be beautiful and fragrantly scented - they should not have a foul smell. Traditionally these are placed in front of the altar, but there are also other forms of flower offerings such as ornaments and the jewelled crowns adorning the representations of the enlightened beings.

If the representation of the enlightened being is in an ordained form, then the flowers can be visualised as flower garlands hanging from the top of a canopy.

These different forms of offerings can also be incorporated into an understanding of the tantric teachings and explanations as well, and it would be good to have this understanding.

The essential point of offering flowers and other offerings is that whatever the offering may be, they should be beautiful. The actual offering is generating the thought that making these offerings generates uncontaminated bliss in the mind of the enlightened being, which pleases the mind of the enlightened being. So the actual offering

² This and the following headings have been introduced for ease of reference.

is that combination of the enlightened being experiencing uncontaminated bliss and being pleased with that. The literal meaning of the Sanskrit word 'puja' is 'to please'. So the actual meaning of 'offering' is to please the enlightened beings.

When making offerings it is good to consecrate them by reciting the mantra OM AH HUM three times. This will suffice for blessing the offerings, as well as presenting the offerings. Those of you who engage in tantric practice would be aware that offerings are consecrated or blessed initially through the recitation of OM AH HUM, which represents the three points of the indestructible vajra body, speech, and mind of the enlightened being. Through the power of these three, all offerings can be blessed and consecrated, thus creating a pure offering.

There are more detailed explanations of each of the syllables OM AH HUM, but in a very simple way if one can implement the following visualisation when blessing the offerings, then that will make it very meaningful.

When reciting the OM AH HUM the first time, one visualises that through the power of the mantra the ordinary colour, shape and smell of the offerings are purified.

When reciting OM AH HUM for the second time, one visualises that the purified offerings then transform into uncontaminated pure offerings that generate bliss in the minds of the enlightened beings.

With the third recitation of OM AH HUM one imagines that these pure uncontaminated offerings increase to fill the entire space.

Having consecrated the offerings in such a way then, as mentioned earlier, the actual offering is when one generates the conviction that the enlightened beings experience uncontaminated bliss. A more profound understanding is that the real offering is that it generates non-dual bliss and emptiness in their mind.

The main implication of 'increasing' is that the offerings are inexhaustible. We may wonder how placing a limited number of offerings on the altar could be sufficient to be regarded as extensive offerings. So after consecrating them one visualises that the offerings multiply and increase numberless times, so they become an incredibly vast amount of offerings, and one accumulates extensive merit.

There is an explanation of 'increase' in a more literal sense of filling to the brim and overflowing. There are accounts where when one of the previous Panchen Lamas was consecrating an offering it actually started to overflow because of the power of the consecration.

There are different types of **incense**, but an important point is that they need to be fragrant.

It is said that **light** offerings are presented to the eyes. However, we can place the light offerings in front of the altar.

The main purpose of offering **perfume** is so it can be applied to the holy bodies, but some perfumes can also be offered solely for their fragrance.

The **food** offering of course is offered for consumption by the mouth.

These offerings should be of finest quality. As mentioned earlier, the actual offering is when one generates the mind that each of these offerings generates a newly formed uncontaminated bliss in the mind of the enlightened being. However, we should not misinterpret this to mean that the enlightened beings obtain a newly formed uncontaminated bliss that they have not obtained before, because they have, in fact, already obtained unceasing uncontaminated bliss.

But making these offerings generates a newly formed uncontaminated bliss in addition to the uncontaminated bliss that the enlightened being is perpetually experiencing. This is an incredible means of implanting the seed to obtain uncontaminated non-dual bliss and emptiness within our own mind, and again is a means to accumulate extensive merit.

These are essentially the main objects of offerings, and, as it's part of our regular practice, it's good to understand what they represent and how to offer them.

Next, the commentary posits another hypothetical question.

Is it appropriate to offer whatever object one wishes to offer?

We see here how immaculate this presentation is. Indeed, the fourth Panchen Lama was a great scholar and master, and here he is giving a very practical and reasonable presentation of these teachings so that our ordinary minds are able to engage in the practice.

The point of this question is to remove doubts about whether we can offer what is affordable or not. The answer, as the commentary explains, is:

Yes, one should be offering whatever objects are at one's disposal.

Our offerings should be whatever objects we can comfortably offer. There are specific explanations of appropriate offerings such as offering one third of whatever one owns. These, again, are all significant points to understand.

As further explained in the commentary:

Jowo said, if one has a packet of white rice, offering it completely and wholeheartedly means one has a noble mind of enlightenment.

The main part of any offering is that it should be offered wholeheartedly. If one offers in that way it means that one has a noble mind of enlightenment, while not offering it completely and wholeheartedly means that one does not have a noble mind of enlightenment. This relates back to the point made earlier, which is that by making offerings one accumulates merit, which is a suitable basis for generating the mind of bodhicitta. If one lacks merit, then one will not be able to generate the mind of bodhicitta.

As further explained here,

These are the actually arranged substances of offering, so they are called manifest objects of offering. Sharawa said that what you offer to lama and the Three Jewels should be the same, whereas Lagsowa said that offering to the lama should be superior.

That covers what are called the actual or manifest offerings.

Mental offerings

Then the commentary goes on to explain:

As to the mental offering, this refers to the seven practices as described in the Samantabhadra aspirational prayer ...

We know Samantabhadra's aspirational prayer as the seven-limb practice. These seven limbs are:

... namely, prostration, offering, confession, rejoicing, requesting, supplication, and dedication.

As the commentary further explains:

These seven are also called offering because to make offering means to please the object to whom it is offered, and these seven practices please and delights the very special objects.

The seven-limb practice

It is also good to understand that one performs a **prostration** with all three of body, speech, and mind. The prostration of one's body is the actual physical act of joining our palms together, kneeling down and prostrating on the floor; reciting praises and salutations to the enlightened beings is the prostration of speech; while generating genuine reverence and faith while doing the prostrations is the prostration of mind.

Again, there's a literal meaning of each syllable of the Tibetan word for prostration which is *chag-tsal*. The first syllable *chag* has the connotation of eliminating all negativities, while *tsal* has the connotation of receiving the blessings of the body, speech, and mind of the enlightened beings. When we understand that prostration encompasses these two points, it makes the practice much more meaningful.

There are some other significant points to recall when doing a prostration. When one places one's palms together on the crown of one's head, it symbolises purifying negativities that we have created through one's body. At that point, one contemplates that all the negativities created through one's physical body are purified, and one obtains the blessings of the indestructible holy body. Next, placing one's palms together at the throat signifies the prostration of speech. Here one thinks that the negativities created through one's speech are completely purified and one obtains the indestructible speech of the holy enlightened beings. Thirdly one places the palms at one's heart, which represents the prostration of mind, thinking that all the negativities that one has accumulated through one's mind are completely purified, and one obtains the non-dual bliss and wisdom of the enlightened beings within one's own mind. Thinking in this way makes the prostrations really significant.

It is also good to understand that prostrations serve as a specific antidote for overcoming pride. That is quite obvious as anyone with a big ego would not even consider doing a prostration, or show respect for others. Therefore, engaging in the practice of prostration helps to overcome pride.

The teachings also explain that one accumulates the equivalent merit to become a universal monarch.

Earlier there was an explanation of what we call actual or manifest offerings. In the seven-limb practice there is another very, very significant **offering**, which is the offering of one's practices such as observing morality, engaging in generosity, the practice of patience, and so forth. So, the practices that one engages in are an actual offering. It is as the great Milarepa said, 'I don't have any material possessions to offer, but what pleases my holy guru's mind is the offering of practice, and that is what I can offer'.

As mentioned before, this is very significant. If one does not have much practice to offer then of course the next best thing is to present material offerings. But it is far better to offer both material offerings and offerings of practice, as this will make the offering much more meaningful. Making offerings is said to be a specific antidote to overcoming miserliness.

Engaging in the practice of **confession** and purification is an antidote to negativities created through one's body, speech, and mind, such as the ten non-virtues that have been accumulated over beginningless lifetimes.

Confession and purification occurs when it is intact with the four opponent powers. So keep that in mind. For it to be intact the four opponent powers need to be integrated into the purification practice. More specifically, to purify the degeneration of bodhisattva vows, one engages in the practice of the thirty-five buddhas. The opening lines of the Thirty-Five Buddhas of Confession Prayer begin with the purification of the bodhisattvas' moral downfalls. Purifying the degeneration of tantric vows is done through the Vajrasattva practice. Both purification practices have to incorporate the four opponent powers.

When the purification practice is done properly and takes effect it is said that one will not have to experience the ill effects of the negativities one has created. One can understand that purification practices are an antidote for overcoming all negativities.

The next limb is **rejoicing**. It is said that the practice of rejoicing enables us to increase whatever virtues and merit that we have accumulated. Rejoicing is said to be a specific antidote for overcoming jealousy.

Next comes **requesting**. Here we are requesting to turn the wheel of the Dharma, or requesting the teachings. Engaging in this practice is said to be a specific antidote for overcoming the negativities of disparaging the Dharma that one would have accumulated in the past.

Supplication means making requests for the lamas and the teachers to not pass into nirvana. This practice is said to be incredibly powerful as it creates the causes and conditions for one's own long life; it is said that the best practice for one's own longevity is making requests to the lamas to live long. It is through this practice that one can obtain what is called the *siddhi* or attainment of immortality.

The final part of the seven-limb practice is **dedication**. The significance of engaging in the practice of dedication is that it will secure the virtues that one has accumulated so they don't go to waste. While rejoicing is a specific practice that enables one's virtues to increase, dedication is a specific practice that enables one's virtues and merits to remain secure and not decline.

The greatest form of dedication is to dedicate whatever virtues and merits one has accumulated to become a cause for the Buddha's teachings to flourish and remain for a long time, and for sentient beings to happy, and for their suffering to be removed.

Dedicating to the long life of the virtuous teachers is highly significant because it automatically means that one is dedicating for the teachings to remain for a long time, and if the teachings remain for a long time that will become the means for sentient beings to obtain happiness. It is good to understand this co-relationship. Dedicating for one's teachers to have long life and so forth is said to be an unsurpassable and incredibly powerful dedication.

Of course, there has to be something to dedicate, meaning that one has to have actually engaged in a practice for it to become a dedication. An aspirational prayer on the other hand can be made at any time and it doesn't require an actual substance. It is good to understand this distinction.

The Samantabhadra practice

In the teachings, there is often a reference to making offerings such as those made by Samantabhadra, which refers to mentally transforming the offerings. So there's a specific practice of visualisation where one mentally transforms the offerings so that they become inexhaustible.

The way to do that is to visualise the bodhisattva Samantabhadra in the form of a monk. Samantabhadra holds a jewel in the palms of his hands at his heart. From this jewel, numerous light rays radiate out, and at the tips of these numerous light rays there are various types of offerings, such as flowers, incense, and so forth, as presented earlier. Then from each of these offerings numerous light rays radiate out with further offerings at their tips, and from each of these even more light rays. Through this visualisation one can imagine that the whole universe is filled with these offerings. This is how to visualise the inexhaustible and expansive offerings of Samantabhadra.

To do this practice on a personal level you can visualise yourself as Samantabhadra, with your palms together at one's heart. Then visualise holding a jewel and from the jewel held at your heart light rays radiate forth, as mentioned earlier. At the tip of each light ray are the individual offerings such as the flowers, incense, light, perfume, and music. From each of these further light rays radiate out and so on, and in this way one makes numberless offerings to the infinite numbers of enlightened beings. This is a means for accumulating extensive merit through what are called the mentally transformed offerings.

While there are extensive ways of making offerings such as these mentally transformed offerings, the lamas have advised that at our level it is good to find whatever means possible to make actual material offerings. That is because if we were to just resort to making mentally created and transformed offerings then we might be creating the karma to be able to see many nice things in the future but not to be able to actually use or enjoy them ourselves. This might be a situation that some of us are

experiencing now, seeing many things around but don't have the karma to use them.

One accumulates merit with both types of offerings, but there are different ways to accumulate merit and different results to be experienced.

From this presentation, you should understand that Samantabhadra offerings are mentally created or transformed offerings.

This specific list of practices is called the seven-limb practice, and the connotation of 'limb' needs to be understood as being a cause for enlightenment. All of these offerings of the seven limbs have to be intact to be a cause to achieve enlightenment. If one does not engage in these practices of accumulating merit through the seven-limb practice, then enlightenment will not be possible. If even one is missing then one will not be able to traverse to the state of enlightenment. The traditional analogy is an ox cart: if one of the wheels are missing it will not be able to move. A contemporary example can be a car which needs four wheels to move: if one of the wheels is missing it can't move.

The seven bowls that are offered on the altar can also represent the seven-limb practice. So if the question 'Why do you have seven bowls?' arises, that can be a suitable answer.

Classifications of the seven limbs

If the seven-limb practice were to be categorised into **two divisions**, then confession is the practice of purification, while the remaining six are practices to accumulate merit.

They can also be categorised into **three divisions** which are purification, accumulating merit, and increasing. Here confession is the limb of purification, and the limb of increasing is rejoicing. Increasing relates particularly to increasing one's own virtues. Of course, one can rejoice in the virtues of others as well, and dedicate that, which is also a means of accumulating merit, but increasing here specifically refers to rejoicing in having accumulated virtues oneself.

More specifically it said that when one rejoices in one's own virtue, it becomes a means to increase one's own merit, but rejoicing in the merit of others cannot help to increase their merit. So increasing merit refers to one's own merit or virtues.

The four remaining limbs are the accumulation of merit.

There is a further classification into **four divisions**, which are purification, increasing, accumulation of merit, and to prevent the degeneration of that merit so that it is not wasted, which is the dedication.

It is good to understand these specifics of the practices of accumulation of merit and purification, because when we engage in any practice ourselves, we will be able to understand their significance, which will enhance our practice and make it more meaningful.

There's also a classification of **nine limbs of practice**, where generating bodhicitta and taking refuge are added to the seven limbs. Those of you doing the Yamantaka practice should recall that the seven-limb practice in the sadhana incorporates these two limbs as well.

The main point, however, is that the seven-limb practice specifically relates to the Samantabhadra practice.

There are many more points that can be incorporated into this teaching. For example, as part of the mental prostration one can visualise manifesting oneself with many bodies. Visualising having countless bodies while doing prostrations with one's own physical body can represent all of one's previous lives where one has accumulated extensive negative karmas. It is in this way that previously created negative karma can be purified.

Then one can expand each body so that it has many heads with each of them reciting the praises and the confessional prayer together many times, and each of them with many hands, doing prostrations all together. With this visualisation, one can expand the amount of merit that is accumulated with each prostration. It is good to remember these points and incorporate them into one's practice.

In summary, you have been introduced to the way to engage in the practice of prostrations. You have also learnt how to engage in making offerings, and you have learnt how to engage in the practice of confession to purify negative karma. In addition, you have also learnt how to increase your virtues by engaging in the practice of rejoicing. If you wish to receive the Dharma you have to make requests for the Dharma to be taught, so you have also learnt how to make requests for the lama to live long.

You have learnt the way to secure the virtues you accumulated during the practices of prostration making offerings, rejoicing, and purifying negative karmas through confession and purification, so that these virtues are not dissipated and do not go to waste. Through the first six practices of the seven limbs one accumulates virtue and merit, and as a way to not let that go to waste, one secures this virtue and merit with a dedication.

We regularly recite the seven-limb prayer so it is good to know the significance of the practices and how to engage in them. The following verse from the *King of Prayers* lists the seven limbs concisely.

May any small merits that I have amassed by thus
Prostrating, making offerings, confessing, rejoicing,
And asking the buddhas to remain and teach
Dharma,
Be dedicated to supreme and perfect enlightenment.

Memorising this verse will be an easy way to remember what they are.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltzen is used with the kind permission of Samdup Tsering.

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Edited Version*

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Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

26 September 2017

As usual let us engage in our meditation practice.
[Meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings, based on the bodhicitta intention.

Accumulating merit

In our last session, we covered the seven limb practice, which explained how each limb also serves as an antidote to overcome a particular fault or affliction. I don't think we covered dedication, which is said to be an antidote to overcome wrong views. For someone who holds wrong views – for example, holding the view that the karmic law of cause and effect does not apply – there would be no inclination for them to actually dedicate merits.

The commentary mentions that:

These seven are well known in Mahayana, however in Hinayana there is only a mentioning of three ...

When the seven limb practice, as presented in the King of Prayers, is accompanied by the motivation of bodhicitta, and the practice of the six perfections, then it becomes a unique practice of the Mahayana. Take for example the practice of prostration. While engaging in the practice of prostrations oneself, if one exhorts others to also engage in the practice of prostration, then the practice of prostration is accompanied with generosity. When one's practice of prostration is not stained by self-interest, it is a practice of morality. To bear the effort required by the prostration, and not to become discouraged, is the practice of patience. To engage in the practice joyfully becomes the practice of prostration accompanied with joyous effort. To focus on the practice with an unwavering mind is the practice of concentration. Finally, incorporating the understanding of the three circles, i.e. that the agent, activity, and the goal are all empty of any inherent existence, becomes the practice of prostration accompanied with wisdom.

The commentary says:

These seven are well known in Mahayana.

This is not to say that the Hinayana Vehicle doesn't have these practices; rather, a practice becomes a unique Mahayana practice when it is adorned with bodhicitta and the six perfections.

The commentary continues:

However, in Hinayana there is only a mentioning of three daily practices of prostration in the beginning, chanting sutra in the middle and dedication at the end.

This practice is also incorporated in our tradition, as we begin every practice with salutations, followed by the actual practice, and then do the dedications at the end. This is called the three practices of the beginning, middle and end.

The core practice of chanting the sutras and dedicating at the end is incorporated in many of our traditions. In many monasteries, for example, during a puja when the sangha partake in a meal (or tea) that is served, there is a tradition of reciting the *Heart Sutra* afterwards as a means of dedication to the sponsors who offered the meal. This is part of the traditional practice.

Taking extraordinary refuge

The commentary then explains:

The second is Taking Extraordinary Refuge. "In the *Definitive Collection of Essence* it is said, "those with Mahayana nature shall take refuge first in order to protect those who are unprotected, and then generate an aspirational mind.

Extraordinary refuge refers to taking refuge not merely as a means to seek protection for oneself, but going for refuge specifically to request the objects of refuge to guide and protect all sentient beings, by leading them out of suffering and guiding them to the ultimate state of happiness. Taking refuge with that intention then becomes **extraordinary refuge**, which is all the more powerful when it is accompanied with bodhicitta.

Causal and resultant refuge¹

Taking or going for refuge implies that one completely trusts the objects of refuge to be able to protect oneself and all living beings. When one takes refuge as a means to obtain that ultimate state of refuge oneself – i.e. enlightenment – this is called reliance on the **resultant refuge**. Whereas reliance on the **causal refuge** is when one relies on the objects of refuge as an external entity of guidance and protection.

When one relies on the causal refuge, it is essential to understand the implication that, by taking refuge in objects of refuge already established in another's continuum – such as the Buddha – one is seeking refuge from a supreme being to protect oneself and others from all fears, and lead one and others to that ultimate state. Hence, by relying on the **causal refuge**, the reliance on the **resultant refuge** is also implied. One needs to understand that going for refuge is a reminder of one's own potential to obtain the ultimate states of the objects of refuge.

The text mentions here that:

Accordingly, it is indicated that prior to cultivating mind generation it is necessary to take an extraordinary refuge,

What is being explained here is that, for it to be an **extraordinary refuge**, one must first generate the bodhicitta motivation. We can see from this explanation that the prayers we recite before every practice, with refuge and generating bodhicitta, followed by the seven limb prayer, is a profound way of engaging in practice. Thus, the root text explicitly presents that before taking extraordinary refuge one needs to cultivate the mind generation of bodhicitta. The line indicating this is:

8d. *Till you gain ultimate enlightenment.*

9. *And with strong faith in the Three Jewels, Kneeling with one knee on the ground*

¹ This and subsequent headings have been introduced for ease of reference.

*And your hands pressed together,
First of all take refuge three times.*

Verse 9 is a clear presentation of how to engage in the practice of taking refuge. Of course, if we don't engage in the practice, then it will not have much effect on ourselves.

Duration of taking refuge

The next explanation is presented with a question:

For how long does one take refuge?

The commentary explains:

In the common path, it is for as long as one lives

This means that in the teachings that relate commonly to both the Lower Vehicle and Great Vehicle paths, it is until the end of one's life.

Here the duration is until reaching the ultimate essence of enlightenment.

Here indicates that the duration of exceptional refuge, or the Mahayana refuge, is until reaching the ultimate essence of enlightenment.

...or in other words, until achieving the Truth body (Dharmakaya).

The essence of enlightenment refers to two - with respect to the place as an essence of enlightenment or to the realisation as an essence of enlightenment. The first has two types - for example Bodhgaya as a place, an essence of enlightenment of emanation body and Akanishta pure land as a place, an essence of enlightenment of a Perfect Resource Body.

What is to be understood here is that taking refuge until...the essence of enlightenment can refer to going for refuge until attaining enlightenment at a place like Bodhgaya in the form of a supreme emanation body, or in the Akanishta pure land in the form of the Perfect Resource body (also translated as the complete enjoyment body). The second refers to going for refuge until obtaining the 'the wisdom truth body', which is what we normally relate to when saying 'until achieving the complete state of enlightenment'.

The commentary then presents:

With respect to taking refuge, the points to consider are the types of motivation for taking refuge, the object, the thought and the action of taking refuge.

These four points are incorporated in verse 9.

The commentary explains:

The causal motivation is, out of great compassion for all sentient beings, to unwaveringly take refuge in Three Jewels until achieving the essence of enlightenment.

The **causal motivation** is when out of great compassion for all sentient beings, one unwaveringly, with a very steady focused state of mind, *takes refuge in the Three Jewels until achieving the essence of enlightenment*, which means until one achieves enlightenment.

The objects (of refuge) are Buddha, Dharma and uncommon Sangha of Irreversible Arya Bodhisattvas.

The object of refuge is the Buddha, which is the same for all vehicles, but the uniqueness is the Dharma, which encompasses the true path and true cessation according to the Mahayana path of cessation. The Sangha refers to the irreversible arya bodhisattvas.

The commentary continues:

The thought refers to remembrance of individual qualities of each of the Three Jewels and having strong and sincere faith and devotion coupled with joy.

Again here, *remembrance of individual qualities* is where we think about the qualities of each individual object of refuge: for example, with the Buddha Jewel, thinking about specific qualities of the Buddha's enlightened body, the qualities of his enlightened speech and the qualities of his enlightened mind. Remembering the qualities of the Buddha is a way to help generate the bodhicitta attitude, because that is what we are aspiring to achieve.

We need to understand that there is a correlation between these topics: thinking about the qualities of the Buddha; generating the mind of bodhicitta; thinking about the specific qualities of the true path and true cessation; and how practising the true path serves as an antidote for overcoming certain mental obscurations and defilements, which then allows one to obtain the cessation.

In going for refuge to the arya sangha - those who embody the true path and true cessation - we need to recall that those who actually possess the true path and true cessation are unimaginably valuable, as through them we receive instructions and teachings in such a way that we can engage in the practice ourselves. This is how we need to understand what was explained previously.

In emphasising *by remembering the qualities of each of the Three Jewels and having strong and sincere faith and devotion coupled with joy*, the commentary goes over the **motivation** for taking refuge, the **object** of the refuge, and then the **thought**.

The **conduct** or **action** is explained next in the commentary.

As part of the physical conduct one kneels down on both knees or squats down, places ones cloak over the shoulder and have both hands folded together in prayer gesture and then takes refuge.

One either kneels on both knees or on the left knee. This is the respectful conduct for taking refuge. One should also fold the hands together, not with the palms flat, but with the thumbs tucked in to form a triangle shape.

The commentary raises this question:

At what occasions and how often does one take refuge? In the beginning of the ceremony to generate an aspirational bodhicitta, there is an actual formula of taking refuge, which is conducted or repeated three times. Upon the completion of the third repetition, one receives the Refuge vow.

Before taking the vow of aspirational bodhicitta, one should take refuge. The actual formula of taking refuge and generating aspirational bodhicitta is presented later in the text itself.

Many of you who have attended His Holiness's teachings would have been given textbooks that include the formula for taking refuge and generating the aspirational bodhicitta vow. To those who have those texts, refer to them and see how it is done.

A quotation from the *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras* by Maitreya reads:

The supreme refuge is a protection from all harms, bad migration, perverted path, transitory collection view and lesser vehicle.

The commentary explains the meaning:

As indicated here, the small scope refuge is to protect from receiving harms in this life time, falling into bad migration in future lives and from unskillful perverted paths;...

This has also been explained previously, that going for refuge for protection, is of the **small scope**.

...the middling scope refuge is to protect and liberate oneself from the suffering of samsara which in nature is constituted of the collection of contaminated conditioning aggregates;...

With the **middling path**, the main points are to incorporate going for refuge to the Three Jewels and understanding what samsara means and how the contaminated conditioning aggregates serve as a basis for it. Understanding this is a way to be free from samsara. This is what contributes to middling scope refuge.

The text further explains:

...the great scope refuge means to take refuge in the uncommon Three Jewels by fearing for lesser vehicle, in order to free all sentient beings from the fears of samsara.

Don't misinterpret this. When the commentary mentions *fearing for lesser vehicle*, this is not putting down the Hinayana Vehicle. Rather, if a bodhisattva were to adopt the Lesser Vehicle path, it would mean they were giving up the intention to work for all sentient beings and follow a path focused mainly on achieving liberation for one's own personal purpose. That would be the greatest obstacle to achieving the ultimate goal of serving all sentient beings, and it is for that reason that a bodhisattva fears the Lower Vehicle path.

Taking refuge and aspirational bodhicitta

The question presented next is in line with what I often emphasise:

Now the question is - is there any difference between taking extra-ordinary refuge and aspirational bodhicitta?

It may seem like focusing on all sentient beings for the sake of enlightenment, and aiming towards enlightenment for the purpose of all sentient beings are exactly the same. Therefore, it is reasonable to raise the question here of whether there is any difference between the exceptional, extraordinary refuge and aspirational bodhicitta.

Master Kamawa states that Extraordinary Refuge is a wish to achieve Buddhahood to free sentient beings from suffering, hence there is no difference to aspirational bodhicitta in terms of its entity except a different ceremonial prayer formula.

The explanation presented here is that as far as the wish to achieve buddhahood to free sentient beings from suffering is concerned, there is no difference between aspirational bodhicitta and extraordinary refuge. That is, there is no difference in its entity but there is a difference in the prayer formula.

From Potawa, the commentary explains:

Potawa makes a distinction by saying that aspirational bodhicitta is a wish to achieve Buddhahood for the sake of sentient beings but reflects a mental attitude similar to an attitude of a merchant who is self-guided, in that liberating sentient beings with the attainment of Buddhahood.

The aspirational bodhicitta explained here is where one aspires to achieve that state of enlightenment oneself for the sake of liberating all sentient beings from suffering.

The commentary continues:

Whereas with an extra ordinary Refuge one wishes to liberate sentient beings from sufferings but relies on Three Jewels by recognising them as having the capacity (to liberate sentient beings) hence one is like a merchant who relies on others' support.

Therefore, extraordinary refuge is where one relies on the external factor, the objects of refuge themselves, to liberate sentient beings from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness.

Next the commentary quotes from Maitreya's *Ornament of Mahayana Sutra*:

Maitreya's Ornament of Mahayana Sutras also says, "Because of wishing the object (Buddhahood), taking the vow (refuge) and this too is dependent on compassion." It is mentioned here that because of wishing to achieve Buddhahood, one is vowing to go for the refuge. The well-versed scholars should do further study and analysis on this.

The commentary further mentions that:

As to the causes of taking refuge, the object, nature, precepts and benefits of taking refuge, should be studied from the presentation on the stages of the path.

Here we can recall the topics presented in the small scope, beginning with death and impermanence, then the sufferings of the lower realms, and then going for refuge. These points are specifically presented in the lam-rim under the topic of refuge.

The commentary explains

To imply that the necessity of mind-training prior to the actual ceremony of mind generation (bodhicitta), the text goes,

The next verses read:

10. *Next, beginning with an attitude
Of love for all living creatures,
Consider beings, excluding none,
Suffering in the three bad rebirths,
Suffering birth, death and so forth.*
11. *Then, since you want to free these beings
From the suffering of pain,
From suffering and the cause of suffering,
Arouse immutably the resolve
To attain enlightenment.*

This is a presentation of the seven-point cause and effect sequence of training in bodhicitta. The source of the presentation of this in the lam-rim teachings is none other than these teachings of the *Lamp on the Path* by Atisha. This is the point we need to understand.

You need to remember what each of the seven specifically represent. That is for you to remember and understand, and bring to class next time.

We can conclude the teachings here tonight with a recitation of King of Prayers. The seven limb practice is presented in the King of Prayers, so it is good for us to do that practice.

Maybe Damien would recall, there was an old lady I used to go and have meals with in the past, and about last Tuesday, I started to wonder where she was and whether she was still around. She has a daughter called Barbara who came here twice. Her friend also knew Geshe Tangye, a geshe from France, and when he visited Melbourne, she brought him along to visit me twice.

A few days ago, Llysse came up with an envelope saying it was from Geshe Tangye. The message was that if I could hand it to Barbara, to do so, but if not then I could keep it myself. There was no address on it.

I knew Barbara used to live in Moonee Ponds, so then I had to find out her address. Without really having the means to look for Barbara, on the following Friday I got a message from her saying that her mother (who is 96 years old) was in a nursing home, physically very frail but mentally still very clear

Anyway, it was such a coincidence when Barbara contacted me. It seems there is definitely some sort of karmic link between us, because I got the letter from Geshe Tangye asking me to give it to Barbara. But in my attempt to find her, she contacted me about her mother and requested prayers, saying she might pass away soon. I feel she came to teachings here for a year or two, so that might have definitely helped her.

What I noticed about that family is that the mother had never drank alcohol or smoked and her daughter doesn't smoke or drink. I found it very remarkable that a whole generation had this good conduct of refraining from these substances. Her very good state of mind also relates to that I think.

The prayers we do this evening can be dedicated to Barbara's mother. I don't know her name, but also dedicate it for all other sentient beings, as presented here in the teachings. We make dedications for all beings who are experiencing particular sufferings and difficulties, and for them to be free from all their ailments and led to happiness. In this way, all beings with whom we have a connection, directly or indirectly, who equally want to be happy and be free from sufferings, can actually engage in the practice of doing these prayers and we dedicate them for that purpose.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen is used with the kind permission of Samdup Tsering.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Jill Lancashire
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Edited Version*

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Atisha's 'Lamp for The Path' - Study Group 2017

Homework

Teaching: 26th September 2017, Assigned: 3rd October 2017

Describe how you can incorporate the six perfections with the limb of prostration.

What must a practice be adorned with in order to become a unique Mahayana practice?

What are the three practices of the beginning, middle and end that are in common with both the Hinayana and Mahayana vehicles?

What is meant by extraordinary refuge? What is meant by causal and resultant refuge? How long does one go for refuge?

Describe the practice of each of the four points (motivation, object, thought and action) mentioned in verse 9 below?

*And with strong faith in the Three Jewels,
Kneeling with one knee on the ground
And your hands pressed together,
First of all take refuge three times.*

What are the differences between the small, middle and great scope refuge?

Is there any difference in taking extraordinary refuge and cultivating aspirational Bodhicitta?

List the seven-point cause and effect sequence for generating Bodhicitta.

Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

3 October 2017

As usual let us spend some time in our meditation practice.

[Tong-len meditation]

We need to set the proper motivation for receiving the teaching, which is primarily based on the bodhicitta motivation. Since we are studying the topic of how to develop bodhicitta, I need not elaborate on the motivation as you are already familiar with it.

However, familiarising yourself with bodhicitta, or the mind aspiring to achieve enlightenment, really means making a genuine attempt to actually develop it, until one reaches a point where merely hearing the word 'bodhicitta' instils such a strong compassionate emotion that one's hair stands on end! Even though we may not be able to develop actual bodhicitta just yet, we can definitely reach a point in our practice where we experience this strong emotion.

THE EXPLANATION OF THE PERFECT METHOD

Aspirational instructions

The preliminary

Training in the three minds¹

The three minds are love, compassion and bodhicitta. Verses 10 and 11 are introduced with this statement:

To imply that the necessity of mind-training prior to the actual ceremony of mind generation (bodhicitta), the text goes,

Prior to actually engaging in the ritual to generate aspiring bodhicitta, one needs to have a good understanding of what bodhicitta means, and thus the necessity of training the mind.

This is a crucial point. Prior to the actual ceremony (which will be presented later in the text), one needs to train one's mind. We need to understand that the emphasis on training the mind implies that it is indeed possible to generate bodhicitta. This is the personal instruction that we need to take from this statement.

10. *Next, beginning with an attitude
Of love for all living creatures,
Consider beings, excluding none,
Suffering in the three bad rebirths,
Suffering birth, death and so forth.*
11. *Then, since you want to free these beings
From the suffering of pain,
From suffering and the cause of suffering,
Arouse immutably the resolve
To attain enlightenment.*

The commentary then presents the explanation of these verses:

The first two lines indicate loving kindness, three lines after that indicate the object of compassion, and three lines after that indicate mental aspect of

compassion, as well as practically implying the method of training in the mind of enlightenment.

The first two lines indicate loving kindness, the next three lines show the object of compassion, and three lines after that indicate the aspect of compassion. As I have mentioned previously, the aspect of love is the wish for beings to be endowed with happiness, while the aspect of compassion is the wish for sentient beings to be free from suffering.

Loving kindness

Then the commentary continues its explanation with a question:

What does one do after completing the uncommon refuge ceremony as part of accumulating merits?

In order to generate the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta, one needs to have accumulated a great stock of merit. That is because, without having accumulated merit, there is no suitable basis for generating bodhicitta.

It is explained here that as part of the ritual for taking the aspiring bodhicitta vows, one needs to have first accumulated merit and taken what is called an *uncommon* or exceptional *refuge*. The commentary explains that one needs to meditate on compassion and so forth prior to the actual ceremony, which is presented further on.

As explained here:

One needs to meditate on compassion, but prior to it one needs to cultivate loving kindness towards all motherly sentient beings.

The commentary then gives an explanation according to Sharawa:

Sharawa said in his Sang-dro (Secret Deliberation), 'one with childish mind meditates on and cultivates a mental attitude which is a very uncommon loving heart-felt sense of endearment by remembering the kindness of all sentient beings'.

The point being presented here is that one needs to cultivate the loving kindness that views sentient beings with endearment, holding them dear with a very affectionate mind. Prior to developing compassion, it is necessary to cultivate this heartfelt affectionate love.

The seven point cause and effect sequence of developing bodhicitta is being presented here, so it is good to actually understand the process in detail. The first three in the sequence are **recognising** sentient beings as one's mother, **remembering their kindness**, and wishing to **repay their kindness**. Developing these three states of mind are said to establish the basis for benefiting other sentient beings. That is because the mind generation of bodhicitta is based on two main thoughts: the purpose of others, which is to benefit sentient beings; and the purpose for oneself, which is to achieve enlightenment. The fourth of these seven points is developing **endearment love** that is based on the first three points.

If we separate them into cause and effect, the first six are the causes, whilst the seventh, which is actual bodhicitta, is the effect.

The way that these seven points depend on each other can be understood in the following way. Prior to generating **bodhicitta**, one needs to have developed **superior intention** where one takes the personal responsibility to free all sentient beings from every suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness. Before developing superior intention, one has to have developed **great compassion** for all sentient beings, which in turn is based on having first

¹ The other two headings in this section were 'Accumulating Merits' and 'Taking Extraordinary Refuge'.

developed **endearment love** for all sentient beings. Then, as mentioned earlier, in order to develop this very affectionate *heartfelt sense of endearment* for all sentient beings, one needs to have first developed the first three points – recognising all beings as one’s mother, remembering their kindness, and wishing to repay their kindness.

As we reflect on this presentation, we can see how logically it is presented. In order to develop the wish to repay kindness, one needs to have first recognised that kindness. But in order to recognise that kindness, one needs to have first recognised all beings as having been one’s mother, because a mother’s kindness is the greatest love of all. We can see how logical this presentation is. When one thinks about how all other sentient beings have been one’s mother, that will naturally instil a strong wish to repay their kindness, and one begins to see all beings as very appealing, holds them very dear and develops the *heartfelt sense of endearment* for all sentient beings. That is the type of love that is developed here.

As further explained in the commentary:

According to this statement, it appears that that sense of endearment is loving kindness which therefore is the cause to compassion which is one of the seven-fold cause and effect instruction (to generate bodhicitta).

The point being made here is that, in general, there is no certainty about the sequence for developing great love and great compassion. However, great compassion definitely has to be preceded by the love that is a heartfelt sense of endearment; the mind of endearment definitely has to precede the development of compassion.

As the commentary clarifies:

It is however not necessary to generate a form of great loving kindness of wishing others to have happiness as a cause or prior to generating compassion however it is necessary in the case of the loving kindness (as a sense of endearment) as presented in this text. Hence, in here this (loving kindness as a sense of endearment) must also be meditated prior to generating compassion. Langri Tangpa said to Chenga, ‘in my whole life I meditate only on loving kindness’. In respond to this, Chenga took off his hat, and with affectionately nodding his head commended to Jowo, ‘your manner is just excellent’.

These are important points about the practices of the great masters. Further:

Chenga said to Nyugrumpa, ‘to be honest loving kindness is only one that can defeat the enemy.’

Here, *defeating the enemy* could be related to the account where the Buddha overcame hordes of demons through the power of his concentration on compassion. In this context, defeating enemies is not achieved just by concentration or other powers, but specifically by generating love for others. This is indeed the best way to overcome enemies. I think this is the main point being presented here. The term ‘enemy’ can also be understood as the negative or unruly minds of others, which can be overcome by expressing love for them.

Then as further explained:

Hence, simply hearing the word “loving kindness” relaxes and soothes one’s heart’.

This is a very significant statement. For the great masters who really perfected their meditation on love, just *hearing*

the word ‘loving kindness’ soothes their mind. We can see how meditating on love made their minds much more relaxed and expansive. These are significant points for us to contemplate. As indicated clearly here, meditating on love is the best remedy for overcoming mental heaviness and tightness. All kinds of uncomfortable emotions and negative states of mind can be completely relieved by generating loving kindness and further meditating on love. This is what we need to understand from these instructions.

What we need to take as a personal instruction from this presentation is that meditating on love and compassion is the optimum way to overcome unruly states of mind. It is the best remedy to overcome afflictions such as anger, attachment, pride, jealousy and competitiveness, as well as all forms of unrealistic hopes and doubts. Of course, the ultimate antidote is the wisdom realising emptiness. However at our level, meditating on love and compassion is a manageable and most effective antidote to overcome these unruly states of mind. Therefore, meditating on love and compassion should be the essential focus of our practice. I am not very impressed with those who may put this essential practice aside and engage in some other forms of meditation. Even making attempts to develop single-pointed concentration is not all that admirable if it is devoid of love.

The main point to be understood here is that we need to relate to the benefit and value of love and compassion on a personal level. Cultivating love and compassion within ourselves will benefit us as well as others. Needless to say, simply talking about the value of love and compassion will not be of much help in transforming our unruly minds. It is crucial that we apply love and compassion on a personal level and implement it into our daily practice.

The way to personalise this practice and implement it is, for example, to replace our normal angry state of mind with love and compassion. When there is a disagreement with someone, it would be a great pity if we immediately resorted to the mind of anger when we have access to the practices of love and compassion. If we put aside our understanding of love and compassion and reverted to our habitual emotion of anger, that would be a great loss indeed. As we all naturally wish for gain and do not want to experience any loss, we need to be reasonable with ourselves, and generate compassion for the other instead of feeling hostility and anger. If we prefer to experience a loss, then fine, we can get angry! If you want loss, then carry on feeling angry towards others. But if you wish for gain, then generate compassion for others, because that is the ultimate gain.

These aren’t just mere words. I try to really apply this in my own practice, and as I do that, I find that there is definitely great benefit. It is based on finding such personal benefit that I feel the need to share this advice with you. If you don’t have an understanding of love and compassion, and knowledge of how to generate love and compassion, then there is not much more that you can do. However, you all have the understanding and knowledge of how to generate love and compassion, so it is a matter of actually putting it into practice. If you don’t put into practice what you already know and understand, then you will experience a great loss.

These quotations from the great masters are all ways to illustrate the benefits of love and compassion. The commentary continues:

Again, Langri Tangpa said, ‘Although one doesn’t know which of the six rebirths one will take rebirth, it

doesn't matter where one is born as long as one doesn't forget to benefitting other sentient beings'.

This is a pith instruction. It all comes down to the essential point of benefiting others, which lies at the heart of all these instructions. As I often say to you, these teachings seem to back up what I usually say. The points in this presentation are essential for you to consider.

The commentary emphasises this point:

One needs to be like that (not losing the thought of benefiting sentient beings).

These are not mere words from these great masters. Indeed, Geshe Langri Tangpa was a great master who actually developed the mind of bodhicitta. We can see this in the succinct and powerful words of his 'Eight Verses of Mind Training'. Really thinking about and contemplating these verses and reciting them can bring us many blessings.

Then the commentary presents the seven point cause and effect sequence for generating bodhicitta:

Upon the cultivation of loving kindness, a sense of endearment is felt strongly at one's heart through reflecting on recognition of all beings as one's mother...

At first glance, recognising *all beings as one's mother* may be difficult to comprehend; it would be hard to ask someone to accept this at face value. But if we use some reasoning and logic to investigate it, then it will start to dawn upon us that this is not just a possibility but is, in fact, how it is.

First, by reflecting on this life, we can all acknowledge we have a physical body. So we need to contemplate the causes of the body that we have now. We can trace it back to the time of conception where our parents were the immediate cause of this body. Next, we also acknowledge that we have a mind. Our awareness or mind is not physical, and therefore could not have been produced by our parents, and it has its own preceding causes. If, at the time of conception, the parents are not the producers of the mind or consciousness, then what would the preceding causes of the mind be?

As presented in the teachings, the preceding causes of a mind, which is of course not physical, can only be another, earlier moment of mind or consciousness. It has to come from a previously existent mind. Prior to the moment of conception, our life as we know it had not yet been established; therefore, the consciousness would have had to exist previously. That previous moment of consciousness at the time of conception would have had to exist prior to the moment of conception. When we trace the consciousness back beyond the moment of conception, we gain an understanding that the consciousness would have had to exist in a previous life.

If the mind existed previously, then it would have to have had a birth. Therefore, there had to have been a previous birth prior to this one. By contemplating in this way and tracing back our consciousness, we begin to see how there is no beginning to the mind. The main point is that, as we trace our consciousness back into the previous existence of the immediate past life and prior to that, the mind would have had to already exist. As we trace it back, we come to understand that there has been no beginning, and we cannot trace back to the first moment of consciousness. Therefore, we can conclude that we have had countless past lives.

Prior to this life as a human, we could have had a different type of existence, and before that, another existence. In each

of these rebirths, there would have to have been a mother to give birth to us. Therefore, as we have had countless past rebirths, we have to have had countless mothers. So all sentient beings would have been our mother at some point in time.

Next comes remembering the kindness of one's mother, which we need to base on our mother in this life. She nurtured us prior to our birth, she gave birth to us, and then nurtured us through our childhood. Once we recognise how extremely kind our mother in this life has been, then we apply that understanding to all sentient beings, who have at some time been our mother, and who have also been extremely kind to us.

When we think about the kindness of our mother in great detail, we come to the point of having a deep and genuine wish to repay her kindness, not being able to bear seeing her experiencing any suffering and not doing anything about it. When that is instilled in one's heart, then that genuine wish to repay the kindness of one's mother is applied to all beings in a similar way. This is how to contemplate the first three causes of developing love and compassion.

The reasoning of those who accept past and future lifetimes is based on this logical syllogism: the mind of a newborn child - has a previous moment of cognition - because it is cognition. By virtue of the mere fact of being a mind, its previous moment must also have been a mind. What is being asserted is that the only cause for a mind can be a previous moment of mind. This is the reasoning that is presented in the teachings.

Those who believe in God would say that humans and so forth are created by God. There are no further reasons other than they are the creation of God. Our reasoning is based on the definition of consciousness. Indeed, scientists are beginning to accept that there is something beyond the physical matter of the brain, and they are beginning to wonder if it is consciousness. They cannot find any sort of atom or molecule within the brain that they can pinpoint as the consciousness. That, in itself, proves that while consciousness is accepted, it is not to be found in physical matter. Our mind is thus a non-physical entity, and its cause also has to be a previous moment of a non-physical entity.

The general stance of scientists seems to be related to the functions of the brain. However, when they are further pressed with questions like, 'If the brain consists of white matter, then which part of it is the mind?', they don't have a clear response. These days, there is a coming together of the Buddhist presentation of mind and awareness, and scientists who are trying to understand the nature of the mind. Scientists are beginning to make room for other possibilities as to what the mind is.

Once, when we attended his teachings in Perth, His Holiness was talking about his discussions with scientists, and their descriptions of the mind and so forth. Afterwards when Geshe Loden and I were having tea together, we discussed the explanations according to the scientists' point of view and the Buddhist point of view. Geshe Loden said that, according to the scientists, the eye consciousness is found at the back of the brain.

Testimonies about people remaining fresh even after their clinical death is bringing up further questions about what is keeping the bodies fresh. If brain function, which they view as the mind, has ceased, then what is keeping the body fresh? These sorts of events are starting to make scientists ponder even further about what the mind actually is.

The basis of the scientific thesis is that the brain is the mind. While scientists are not yet ready to say that the brain is not the mind, they are beginning to acknowledge that there might be something beyond the brain that has the function of the mind. It does seem that they are beginning to open up to that possibility.

I also recall that after His Holiness the Dalai Lama's presentation at one of the 'Happiness and its Causes' conferences, there was a presentation by a renowned Italian neuroscientist. Although he didn't say the brain is not the mind, he implied that there seems to be something beyond the actual physical grey matter, which is something to ponder and requires further investigation. I suspect that he couldn't claim that the brain is not the mind because there would be a lot of opposition from the scientific community.

We have side-tracked a bit, however the main point is that developing bodhicitta is based on recognising all beings as being one's mother, then remembering the kindness of one's mother, and wishing to repay that kindness. As one cultivates that recognition of all beings as having been one's mother in countless past lives, and therefore equally kind to one, one then naturally develops a very pure, unbiased wish to benefit all sentient beings. When one sees all beings as being equally kind to oneself, then the wish to repay their kindness, and the wish for them to be happy will be felt equally and without bias. This is a very unstained and pure sort of love.

Contemplating the kindness of all beings is naturally followed by the wish to repay that kindness. At that point, one develops what is translated here as a real sense of endearment for all beings. When that sense of endearment is developed, then one naturally and spontaneously will have a wish for them to be happy. The stronger the sense of endearment towards the other, the more natural and spontaneous will be our wish for them to be happy. That spontaneous and unceasing wish for them to be happy is what is called 'love'.

A woman once asked a master how to develop this endearing love. She had a son named Teligo, so the master replied, 'Just as you have endearing love for your son Teligo, you need to develop the same love towards all other sentient beings'. The teachings explain that just like a mother loves her child, one develops the same affectionate love for all sentient beings. The spontaneous, unconditional, affectionate love of a mother for her child is something that we can all readily relate to.

When the commentary says *Upon the cultivation of loving kindness, a sense of endearment is felt strongly at one's heart*, the word 'strongly' also has the implication of naturally and spontaneously feeling endearment or loving kindness. This is based on recognising all beings as having been one's mother. This is followed by remembering their kindness and wanting to repay their kindness. Then one commences to meditate on compassion.

Here we can incorporate the four immeasurables into the practice. Having meditated on the earlier points, one reaches a point of having a spontaneous and strong wish for all beings to be happy. This is followed by the wish, 'How wonderful it would be if all beings were to be happy. May they achieve that state of happiness. I will personally make sure to lead them to that state of happiness'. It is when these sentiments are strongly developed that one develops the endearing love that is focused on all sentient beings. This is called 'great love'.

If one has developed this spontaneous and unceasing love that is based on a wish for other beings to be happy, then how could one develop a mind of intentionally wishing to harm them? Here we can see how the wish for beings to be happy is a direct opponent or antidote to wishing for sentient beings to be harmed. So we can see how incredibly valuable such a mind is, as it prevents us from causing any harm towards sentient beings.

The object of compassion

What follows next is the actual object of the compassion, which we can leave for our next session. The root text and the commentary explain this quite clearly. It is also important to remember that Lama Tsongkhapa adds to this the seven point cause and effect technique. Prior to engaging in the practice of meditating on the seven point cause and effect, the unique presentation of Lama Tsongkhapa is to first train the mind in developing equanimity towards all sentient beings. This is really a significant point, because for as long as one lacks that sense of equanimity towards sentient beings, one cannot possibly develop equal love for all sentient beings – it would only be a biased or partial love. Thus, by training one's mind in developing equanimity, seeing all sentient beings as equal, one develops an unbiased and equal love and compassion for all sentient beings.

We can also then see the significance of these points in the six-session guru yoga practice, where equanimity comes first in the verse on the four immeasurables. Those of you who regularly practise the six-session guru yoga will be aware that it begins with taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, which is followed by the four immeasurables. This is in line with what has been presented here. We can see here how the six-session yoga practice is meticulously tailored to implement the teachings presented here.

The four immeasurable thoughts are then followed by generating aspirational bodhicitta. Following that, the practice goes over the bodhisattva vows of engaging bodhicitta. So we can see how this is in line with the presentation of the *Lamp on the Path*. We can see how they complement and enhance each other. When reciting the six-session yoga, one can see how the other commitments and vows that one has taken can be subsumed into that practice, which is based on bodhicitta.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltzen is used with the kind permission of Samdup Tsering.

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Atisha's 'Lamp for The Path' - Study Group 2017

Homework

Teaching: 3 October 2017, Assigned: 17/10/2017

1. Under the heading 'training in the three minds' what are these three?
2. List the seven fold cause and effect stages in reverse order and briefly explain how each is dependent on its prior cause.
3. How does one develop a heartfelt sense of endearment for sentient beings?
4. What are some of the benefits of meditating on love and compassion? Give examples of how we could practically put the practice of love and compassion into action.
5. What contemplation can help us see the reality and recognition that all sentient beings have been our mother?
6. How do we develop an appreciation of the kindness of mother sentient beings and the resultant wish to repay their kindness?
7. At what stage in the seven fold cause and effect practice can we incorporate the 4 immeasurables meditation?
8. What practice has been uniquely added by Lama Tsong Khapa prior to engaging in the seven fold cause and effect meditation and why?