
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

3 July 2018

With the motivation we have just cultivated, we will now begin our meditation]

[*Tonglen meditation*]

Once again just reinforce your motivation by cultivating the thought, 'I will achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and for this purpose I am listening to this profound Dharma and will put it into practice'.

We have been discussing meditation and its benefits. Always keep in mind that in our meditation practice we are trying to direct all our mental capacity onto a virtuous or wholesome object, and in this way familiarise our mind with this virtuous object, and train it to remain focused on the object. Through this practice we will find that the negative states of mind will diminish and the positive states of mind, such as an increased sense of discrimination, will increase.

We will also be able to recognise how, within our mind, there is something that is very beneficial, and there is something that is very harmful and destructive. When we recognise and develop a conviction in that, it will naturally occur to us to work on developing what is beneficial and then safeguard it. Conversely, as we don't want what is harmful and destructive, we will make an effort to minimise that and try to get rid of it by applying a remedy.

If we examine further, we can see that the mental delusions or mental afflictions that lie within us are the true enemy that harms us and serve as the cause of our suffering and unhappiness. That is why the Lord Buddha said that the only effective way to find happiness is to overcome these delusions or mental afflictions by applying the appropriate remedies.

If we really think about it, this is just common sense and easily understood. The main cause of feeling happy or unhappy lies within our own mind, and we can understand this from our own experience. When a harmful state of mind is present then wherever we are, even if we are alone and no-one else is there to bother us, we will be unhappy and feel very restless. On the other hand, if a positive state of mind is present it can serve as a very good companion. When you have that, then even if you are alone without any friends you can still be happy as your mind serves as a perfect companion.

Even though we may have different views about what brings harm or unhappiness, if we make a closer examination then we will identify that what unfailingly benefits us is a positive state of mind. So, if we are able to cultivate that, it will come to our aid in times of need. As we examine we can see for ourselves that in reality our

own mind is the main source of all our thoughts, deeds and experience of pain and pleasure.

Another thing I often mention is that what we call our mind is always with us as a part of our existence, and its influence on us is incredible. This is a fact. Therefore, if this mind is very positive, wholesome and beautiful, then wherever you are or whatever you do, not only will you be happy and at peace, but you will bring peace and happiness to other people and draw them closer to you to form a friendly relationship. And not just people but even animals will come closer to you with friendship and trust.

On the other hand, people who possess a negative, horrible and nasty state of mind will not only spoil their own mood and cause a loss peace and happiness but will automatically have the same impact wherever they are and whoever they are with. Sometimes their negative impact on others around them can be very severe, hurting and bringing unhappiness to them and even making them cry. Recognising the impact our mental attitudes can have on others as well as ourselves is a part of spiritual practice or meditation.

You can learn and draw inspiration by observing things around you or on TV. I saw on TV a story about a close friendship between a young woman and a seal. Both were very relaxed and happy together and, expressing a deep sense of shared feelings of love, compassion and trust in their interaction.¹

If you want to cheer people up, make them happy, bring joy to their mind, and bring them closer to you, the most effective way is showing them your positive mental attitudes and true feeling of lovingkindness and compassion. You can see how even animals feel and appreciate the love and compassion that people show to them, and we can see how they reciprocate the same feelings. Conversely, when we look into the main cause of bringing harm to other people or hurting their feelings then again, the main cause is within you in the form of the negative mental attitude that you show to others.

I recently saw on the news the suffering inflicted by the live sheep trade. The sheep were locked up in a small space for many days without food and drink and were having serious breathing difficulties. What sort of things had they done to have to undergo such suffering? They were totally innocent. We could see how helpless they were. When we don't have any sense of empathy towards other beings like animals, we can be so cruel and insensitive to their suffering. Maybe the minister in charge of the live animal trade should be sacked!!

I noted a group of protesters against the animal cruelty and I fully support them. If the people responsible for that trade had to go without any food for even three days, they would not survive! It is very, very sad. I can't see any financial benefits from such trade, only great loss. If our nation is led by people like this, who lack compassion and a good sense of discrimination, then the nation is not going to get any better.

Another time I saw a friendship between a man and a crocodile which was quite a decent size. Their

¹ Possibly <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmgkgNR6AME>

relationship was so close that they were touching and kissing each other. This shows how even an animal, which may be typically vicious, can become very gentle and friendly to people who take care of them with love and compassion. Whereas if you hold some sort of resentment or an aggressive mental attitude, then even when you try to feed them, they will run away from you. If you observe carefully, you can see the amazing, unimaginable power of a compassionate mind, and the difference it can make to our relationship with living beings.

How to train in calm abiding (cont.)

Getting back to our topic, we have completed the ninth mental abiding. *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* states that:

When you reach the ninth state, your single-pointed concentration is free of subtle dullness and excitement. You are able to remain in this state effortlessly for long periods, and yet this state is not true mental quiescence: it only resembles it. In order to achieve true mental quiescence, you must meditate single-pointedly again and again to gain further familiarity with it. You must then attain the exceptional bliss that comes with mental and physical suppleness.

As indicated here, the actual state of calm abiding is reached when the highly developed single-pointed state of concentration is also accompanied by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy.

Then the text goes on to say:

Mental suppleness [or pliancy] is the first of the two types to develop, but the bliss due to physical suppleness is the first of the two blisses to develop.

There is not much detail in the explanation in *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, so I recommend that you refer to Tsong Khapa's, *The Great Stages of the Path* where there is a more detailed explanation.

At the ninth level or even in earlier stages of meditation, the meditator already has those states of pliancy, but they are not apparently manifested because they are too subtle.

As noted earlier, mental pliancy arises before physical pliancy. However, in terms of the bliss associated with this mental and physical pliancy, the bliss associated with physical pliancy precedes the bliss of mental pliancy.

The deleterious energy winds within the body are pacified, and you feel comfortable, although you feel a kind of pressure in the scalp or brain, rather like the sensation of a warm hand touching your newly shaven head. You immediately pacify the deleterious states of mind that stand in the way of carrying out any of the virtue you may wish to perform. You have developed mental suppleness.

The meditator's experience of mental pliancy arises first. As they remain in a deep state of concentration, developing familiarity with that concentration, they can experience a kind of bliss or joy that pervades their entire body, which has the effect of pacifying negative wind energy. This experience is described as being like the tactile sensation of a warm hand on a newly shaven head. Then the text goes on to say that immediately after that

there is an experience of what is called mental pliancy which in fact is a state of mental serviceability whereby you have the ability to turn your mind to any desired object without being hindered by any form of mental afflictions. This is how a meditator achieves the state of mental pliancy.

Next:

You then develop physical suppleness as a result of this mental suppleness, and the energy winds are now well adapted and circulating throughout the body. The body is now free of any deleterious states and feels no discomfort while you perform virtuous practices. It can be put to any use you want.

Following the accomplishment of mental pliancy, the bad wind energy is pacified, and the meditator will feel this pacified wind energy pervading their entire body. Just like mental pliancy, they also achieve physical pliancy by getting rid of the negative physical states which block the serviceability of their body. Having achieved this physical pliancy, they will physically feel very light and supple.

The text continues:

The body is supple and as light as cotton wool; you thus experience great bliss from this physical suppleness, and the body has extremely blissful natural physical sensations.

Due to the attainment of physical pliancy, the meditator then experiences a very tactile physical bliss from their meditative experience. This bliss arises following the attainment of the physical pliancy; after physical pliancy is attained, the meditator experiences the bliss associated with that physical pliancy.

Then the text states:

Then, whenever you enter meditative absorption, you have the experience of your body dissolving into the meditation device, and nothing else appears to you, not even your own body, etc. This is the experience of the great ecstasy of mental suppleness, and the mind is so flooded with mental bliss that it is almost unable to stay on the visualization. This problem of the mind being flooded with bliss will clear up, and you then feel that the bliss has lessened somewhat. While in this state, you have gained the immutable type of suppleness that corresponds to the single-pointed concentration which always stays on the visualization.

After the meditator experiences the bliss associated with physical pliancy, they still remain in the state of meditation. Then there comes a time when the meditator will experience a feeling of losing their body into the state of the focus, as he undergoes the experience of losing the object as if nothing is there to appear to the mind. This experience then induces a great feeling of joy and bliss to the point where he feels that he won't be able to hold his focus of the object any longer or be able to anchor the mind on the object, because of that very heightened state of mental bliss and joy.

At that point, the meditator feels as if the bliss appears to subside, but in actuality that is not the case. Rather, what is happening is that the stability of the concentration becomes firmer. At the same time, there is an experience of transcending one's state of pliancy to what is called the

immutable state of pliancy, which is the sign of having attained the actual state of calm abiding.

According to the text:

At the same time, you have also gained the mental quiescence associated with the mandatory access level of the first dhyana state of concentration. This particular access level is termed “mandatory” because it is a path without which it is quite impossible to achieve many types of mundane and supramundane realizations. From this point you are able to achieve the other access levels that follow and are achieved serially—in fact you can achieve all eight of the levels associated with the form-realm dhyana states and the formless-realm states.

The meditator is experiencing for the first time a level of concentration on the higher realm called the first level of the concentration. The meditator also experiences for the first time the actual meditative state of concentration which is called *sam-ten dang-pö nyer-tog* in Tibetan. This is the preparatory stage for achieving the concentration level for the first time.

The benefit of having achieved this state of calm abiding is that it is the basis for achieving all the mundane and supramundane realisations. This initial stage of calm abiding is also called *nyer-tog mi-chok-me* in Tibetan, which literally means ‘a state of not being incapable’, a mandatory meditative state. Without depending on this state of calm abiding, which is also called the preparatory stage for achieving a level of concentration, you are incapable, or you cannot achieve any higher qualities, whether they are mundane or supramundane qualities.

If you are following the Lesser Vehicle of the Buddhist path and if, based on this mandatory meditative state, you cultivate renunciation and wisdom of selflessness and so forth, you can achieve the state of liberation from cyclic existence. If you are following the Greater Vehicle, and then based on this meditative state you generate the bodhicitta mind and the wisdom of emptiness, you can achieve the ultimate fruit of the Great Vehicle. By depending on this state one can also attain all the mundane qualities such as the higher realm of the four concentration levels and the four formless levels.

In a nutshell, **calm abiding is a meditative state of concentration filled with an extraordinary mental and physical bliss of pliancy that has arisen by depending on the nine mental abidings, enabling the mind to remain in the given object as one desires.** His Holiness the Dalai Lama uses the word ‘great and stabilised pliancy bliss’ which ‘doesn’t occur on the ninth mental abiding.

As suggested earlier, you should refer to Tsong Khapa’s *Great Stages of the Path* in which there are quotes from many other great scriptures, and details about the benefits and means to achieve calm abiding. Then you can gain the full authentic understanding.

Here we can notice that when we are in the state of calm abiding, the experience of this bliss of pliancy is induced due to the force of our mind focusing single-pointedly on the object. However, we also talk about the experience of bliss in relation to achieving special insight, in which case, the bliss is induced by the mind analysing its objects.

In special insight the bliss arises due to the force of the mind analysing and discerning reality. Whereas in calm abiding the bliss arises from the mind simply being single-pointedly fixed on the object. Because the bliss that we experience at the time of special insight is greater or superior, the word ‘special’ is used.

Although this is a brief introduction on how to achieve calm abiding, we have touched on most of the important points. Those of you who seriously want to pursue meditation to achieve calm abiding should now have enough background knowledge to go ahead with that meditation.

This topic of calm abiding is the very basis of the whole meditation practice. Without establishing knowledge of, and practice in, these basic things then if we go into more advanced practices such as the generation or the completion stage, we will not make any progress there.

We learned early on that, when you are trying to achieve this state of calm abiding, it is very important at first to stick to a specific object that is suitable for you. However, after having achieved this state of calm abiding on that specific object, you can use any object for your calm abiding meditation. Therefore, we say that there is no object of knowledge which cannot serve as an object of calm abiding; focusing the mind on a single object doesn’t necessarily mean that you can only use that object for the calm abiding.

The use of the term ‘single-pointed’ in calm abiding meditation is really related to that initial object of meditation. It indicates that you have to stick to that and you cannot alter it.

The *Lamp of the Path* goes on to describe some of the benefits of achieving calm abiding, so we will return to the *Lamp of the Path* in our next session.

*40cd. Place the mind on any one
Virtuous focal object.*

*41ab. When the practitioner has gained calm abiding
Higher perception will also be gained.*

Tonight, we will recite the *Samantabhadra Prayer* for Hal Young’s mother who has just passed away. Hal has gone back to his home town for three weeks.

As you read the prayer, just think that you too make the same prayers as those and wish for the fulfilment of all that is contained in the prayer. This prayer contains longer versions of the seven limb prayer which we regularly recite.

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Edited Version*

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experience of transcending one's state of pliancy to what is called the immutable state of pliancy, which is the sign of having attained the actual state of calm abiding.

3. Explain why attaining the state of mental quiescence or calm abiding is termed 'mandatory'.

At the same time, you have also gained the mental quiescence associated with the mandatory access level of the first dhyana state of concentration. This particular access level is termed "mandatory" because it is a path without which it is quite impossible to achieve many types of mundane and supramundane realizations. From this point you are able to achieve the other access levels that follow and are achieved serially—in fact you can achieve all eight of the levels associated with the form-realm dhyana states and the formless-realm states.

The meditator is experiencing for the first time a level of the concentration on the higher realm called the first level of the concentration. The meditator also experiences for the first time the actual meditative state of concentration which is called *Samsam-ten dang-pö Nyernyer-tog* in Tibetan. This is the preparatory stage for achieving the concentration level for the first time.

The benefit of having achieved this state of calm abiding is that it is the basis for achieving all the mundane and supramundane realisations. This initial stage of calm abiding is also called *Nyernyer-tog mi-chok-me* in Tibetan, which literally means 'a state of Notnot- being incapable', a mandatory meditative state. Without depending on this state of calm abiding, which is also called the preparatory stage for achieving a level of concentration, you are incapable, or you cannot achieve any higher qualities, whether they are mundane or supramundane qualities.

If you are following the Lesser Vehicle of the Buddhist path, then and if, based on this mandatory meditative state, if you cultivate renunciation and wisdom of selflessness and so forth, you can achieve the state of liberation from cyclic existence. If you are following the Greater Vehicle, and then based on this if meditative state you generate the bodhicitta mind and the wisdom of emptiness, you can achieve the ultimate fruit of the Great Vehicle. By depending on this state one can also attain all the mundane qualities such as the higher realm of the four concentration levels and the four formless levels.

In a nutshell, **calm abiding is a meditative state of concentration filled with an extrao ordinary mental and physical bliss of pliancy that has arisen by depending on the nine mental abidings, enabling the mind to remain in the given object as one desires.** His Holiness The the Dalai Lama used uses the word 'great and stabilised pliancy bliss' which didn't doesn't occur on the ninth mental abiding.

4. Explain the difference between the bliss of pliancy induced by calm abiding and the experience of bliss produced in relation to achieving special insight.

Here we can notice that when we are in the state of calm abiding, the experience of this bliss of pliancy is induced due to the force of our mind focusing single-pointedly on the object. However, we also talk about the experience of bliss in relation to achieving special insight, in which case, the bliss is induced by the mind analysing its objects.

In special insight the bliss arises due to the force of the mind analysing and discerning reality. Whereas in calm abiding the bliss arises from the mind simply being simply single-pointedly fixed on the object. Because the bliss that we experience at the time of special insight is greater or superior, the meaning of the word 'special' in the context of the term special insight is used.

Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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Reinforce your bodhicitta motivation.

We will continue with the commentary on *Lamp for the Path*. In terms of the outline, we are at the subheading 'The benefits of calm abiding meditation'.

Prior to this, we covered the favourable conditions that we must meet in order to begin calm abiding meditation, and so forth.

THE BENEFITS OF CALM ABIDING MEDITATION

For those of you who have the translation of the *Lamp* commentary, verse 41 reads:

*41ab. When the practitioner has gained calm abiding
Higher perception will also be gained.*

Relating to this, the commentary continues:

Following the meditation instruction as described earlier, through exerting continuous effort in single-pointed concentration like an unbroken stream of water, the yogi will achieve calm abiding, and along with that achieve the power of clairvoyance, and engage in fulfilling the two welfares.

In the earlier sessions, we touched on the reason why we need to achieve the state of calm abiding – to gain special insight. As we will discover later, calm abiding is a condition for gaining special insight and other important qualities, such as the clairvoyant powers. These qualities are all achieved through calm abiding.

When the commentary says, *along with that achieve the power of clairvoyance, and engage in fulfilling the two welfares*, 'the two welfares' refers to fulfilling the ultimate goal for oneself, and the ultimate goal for other sentient beings.

Attaining clairvoyant powers makes it easier to fulfil the two welfares because, in order to benefit others, it is an advantage for the practitioner to know exactly the individual predispositions, interests, spiritual temperaments and thoughts of other sentient beings. When the practitioner has such knowledge, he or she is able to benefit other sentient beings more effectively. Thus, clairvoyant powers are important for benefitting others, and attaining these clairvoyant powers depends on achieving calm abiding.

The commentary continues:

Sharawa said that not only clairvoyance but also non-conceptual wisdom would arise.

This implies that the purpose of achieving calm abiding is not chiefly to gain clairvoyant powers but, more importantly, to gain non-conceptual wisdom, which here refers to the wisdom realising selflessness – this has the capacity to cut completely the root cause of cyclic existence.

As it says here, to produce this powerful wisdom realising selflessness, wisdom has to be conjoined with, or supplemented by, the calm abiding state. It is in fact this **union of calm abiding and special insight** which has the capacity to uproot the cause of cyclic existence.

The commentary next refers to 'Jowo', who is Jowo Je Atisha:

This is well said because Jowo says, 'To achieve clairvoyance power and to generate uncontaminated path, first one should generate calm abiding'.

This is self-explanatory.

TRAINING IN THE PRECEPT OF WISDOM

Then the commentary refers to the next part of the root text outline:

As to the third, How One Trains in the Training of Wisdom has two:

1. Presentation on special insight by proving the necessity of conjoining method and wisdom
2. How one trains in special insight

Presentation on special insight by proving the necessity of conjoining the method and the wisdom

Here we should note the difference between calm abiding and special insight. As we have already discussed, calm abiding is really a state of single-pointed meditative concentration accompanied by a deep experience of the bliss of the mental and physical pliancy. This bliss is induced by the meditator's perfect state of single-pointed concentration.

In order to gain special insight, what the meditator needs to do next is to remain in that perfect state of calm abiding, and within that state be able to utilise his or her wisdom to analyse the truth at the same time.

So special insight arises when the meditator experiences the bliss of pliancy through the force of wisdom analysing the truth while in a perfect state of calm abiding. This bliss of pliancy in association with the gaining of special insight is induced by the force of wisdom analysing the truth, whereas the bliss of pliancy associated with calm abiding is induced by the force of perfect meditative concentration.

We can clearly see here how special insight depends on achieving calm abiding. Without depending on the support of calm abiding, it is not possible to produce such a penetrative wisdom of analysis which can induce a bliss of pliancy culminating in the state of special insight. This is because the perfect mental stability of the focus is required in order to gain special insight. If the concentration is not firm or steady enough, you will easily lose the object of meditation and hence it is impossible to gain special insight. The word 'special' in the context of the term 'special insight' connotes that the kind of bliss of pliancy the meditator experiences upon achieving special insight is extraordinary because it is induced by the force of penetrative wisdom analysing the object, more than the bliss induced by the force of the single-pointed concentration of simply stabilising the mind on the object.

So try to understand the difference between calm abiding and special insight, and why achieving special insight depends first on achieving calm abiding.

Now, back to the commentary. We mentioned two headings, the first of which has three sub-headings:

1. Reason for training in the wisdom of special insight
2. Reason for training in the union of method and wisdom
3. Presentation of the actual path of union

1. Reason for training in the wisdom of special insight

Here 'wisdom' refers to the supermundane wisdom of realising selflessness. We can see here how the root text presents the topics in an orderly manner. For example, soon after teaching about calm abiding, it explains how calm abiding is the cause for gaining special insight, and then goes on to explain what special insight is.

In the root text, verses 41cd and 42 say:

- 41cd. But without practice of the perfection of wisdom,
The obstructions will not come to an end.*
- 42. Thus, to eliminate all obstructions
To liberation and omniscience,
The practitioners should continually cultivate
The perfection of wisdom with skilful means.*

The commentary continues:

Now, if we ask, is it enough simply to generate calm abiding and the clairvoyant mind that arises from its force. Master Chandragomin says (in his *Praise in Confession*):

Over and over, with the forest fire of meditation,
The jungle of faults may be burned, yet
The fixed root of 'self' being unconsumed,
It comes to life in advance, as though moistened by rain.

The quote by Chandragomin points out why we need to gain special insight. In this quote, when it says, *over and over, with the forest fire of meditation*, the analogy is that a mundane state of concentration only has the capacity to prevent the manifest and very gross forms of delusions.

We touched on this earlier, when we were discussing calm abiding. On the basis of the calm abiding gained through the ninth stages of mental abiding you can move forward to achieving all the higher realm's levels of Concentration and Formless through relying upon the mundane path having the aspects of grossness and peacefulness. By relying on such a mundane path, however, you can only prevent the arising of manifested forms of mental affliction while on the high level mental states of concentration.

Chandragomin continues, *the jungle of faults may be burned, yet the fixed root of 'self' being unconsumed*. This clearly indicates that, while depending on a mundane state of meditative concentration one will be able to prevent some delusions to arise but only temporarily, as it will not 'burn' the root of the delusions, which *comes to life in advance, as though moistened by rain*. Similarly, if the understorey of a forest is very wet then, when the fire is gone, the root of a forest tree *comes to life in advance, as though moistened by rain*.

This is further explained when the commentary says:

Although it is possible to subdue manifested afflictions through applying the worldly concentration ...

The term 'worldly or mundane' here should not be confused with the general meaning of the same in terms of the differences between the worldly and the spiritual, or the mundane and the supermundane. Here, *worldly concentration* specifically refers to the different high level mental states of concentration which enable one to traverse through the higher planes within cyclic existence, such as from the state of being on the desire realm to the concentration realm to the formless realm. At each level, one engages on the path viewing the level below as gross, and the one above as peaceful.

Here, the commentary clarifies the meaning of the root text when it says:

Although it is possible to subdue manifested afflictions through applying the worldly concentration, without applying the perfection of wisdom of suchness it is impossible to eliminate the seed of both of the two types of obstructions.

When it says, *subdue manifested afflictions*, we also referred to this in our early discussion concerning the different types of object for calm abiding, one of these being the object for abandoning the mental afflictions. By applying worldly concentration - sometimes called the 'worldly or mundane special insight' - although the root cause of the afflictions is not affected, when you experience the abandonment of the manifest form of the afflictions, you feel as if the afflictions are permanently abandoned. Of course, they are not permanently abandoned because, as the commentary says, *without applying the perfection of wisdom of suchness it is impossible to eliminate the seed of both of the two types of obstructions*.

Practices in which one focuses on, for example, the four noble truths and their sixteen aspects, are the means by which one counteracts the root cause of the mental afflictions.

The commentary continues:

Therefore, one needs to continually engage in the yoga of the perfection of wisdom of suchness along with the skilful means of giving and so forth in order to eliminate mental afflictions, such as desire and so forth, and obstructions to omniscience, which are in the form of latencies of dualistic misconception.

Here, *dualistic misconception* refers to the manifest form of obstructions to omniscient mind, whereas the *latencies* are not a manifest form, but are propensities of the obstruction to omniscient mind.

We have talked about the 'seed' of the mental afflictions before. I have already explained the difference between the seed and the latency of mental afflictions so many times that by now you should know it! The 'seed' of something means something which can produce the result similar to its cause.

The above paragraph from the commentary explains the meaning of the verse in such a way that you could almost trace every word of the root text in the commentary. Basically, it's saying here that we need to rely on special insight or the wisdom of selflessness because it is the direct antidote to the root cause of all the mental afflictions. What is the root cause? It is self-grasping. So,

these two – self-grasping and the wisdom of selflessness – directly counteract each other.

As an example, if you had to completely destroy a tree, it's not sufficient to just prune the branches and leaves, because if the root remains under the ground, the tree will keep growing.

In the same way, there's not much point in simply abandoning the manifest form of the mental afflictions, because even though temporarily you may not experience them, those delusions will arise again for as long as the root is there. That is the main meaning.

The commentary continues with a quotation by Shantideva:

The antidote to afflictive and
Omniscience obstructions is emptiness.
If you wish to quickly attain the all-knowing state,
Why don't you meditate on it?

(With reference to the verses 41cd and 42) The first two lines imply that without the realisation of emptiness it is impossible to eliminate any mental afflictions. Therefore, it implies that even hearers and solitary realisers should have the realisation of subtle emptiness.

This clearly confirms that to achieve the state of liberation, *even hearers and solitary realisers* must have the realisation of selflessness. The next bit of the commentary says:

The next four lines imply that the differences between the Great and Lesser Vehicles are not made on the grounds of philosophical standpoints; they imply that those who transcend on Great Vehicle train themselves in the wisdom conjoined with vast skilful means.

As we already know, these four lines (verse 42) imply that even the followers of the Lesser Vehicle must have the realisation or wisdom of emptiness. Therefore, the difference between the Lesser and Great Vehicles is not based on the grounds of the wisdom aspect; rather, as it says here, the difference is based on the grounds of the *vast skilful means* or the method side.

2. Reason for training in the union of method and wisdom

The commentary continues:

The second is Reason for Training in the Union of Method and Wisdom which relates to verse 42cd.

**42cd. The practitioners should continually cultivate
The perfection of wisdom with skilful means**

What is the reason? The answer is provided in verse 43.

**43. Wisdom without skilful means
And skilful means without wisdom
Are referred to as bondage.
Therefore do not give up either.**

This shows the necessity of the union of both method and wisdom. The commentary continues:

Those who aspire to achieve the complete enlightenment have to rely on both method and wisdom, not one without the other. In alignment with this the Vimalakirti Nirveda Sutra says, 'Wisdom not supported by method is bondage as well as method not supported by wisdom is bondage'. This section responds to the fifth question of Nagtso's system.

Earlier on, there were a number of questions raised by the translator, Nagtso, so here, as it says, *this section responds to the fifth question of Nagtso's system.*

This is a reminder to us as to why there's a need for both method and wisdom on the path. One way to understand this is in terms of the ultimate result or goal of the spiritual path, which can be categorised into the two bodies, or kayas, of the Buddha – truth body and form body. Wisdom is the main cause to achieve the truth body, whereas method is the main cause to achieve the form body. We can also understand this by looking at the structure of the entire path, from beginning to end, in terms of the two truths as the basis (object/truth to be known), the two of method and wisdom as the path (subjective mind that realises the truth), and the two kayas of the truth body and form body as the result.

So is it clear why you need to train in both method and the wisdom? Wisdom refers to the wisdom realising emptiness or selflessness, and method refers to generating bodhicitta, and so forth.

3. Presentation of the actual path of union

The third, which is the presentation of the path of union, has two subheadings:

1. Brief explanation
2. Detailed explanation

Brief explanation

The commentary reads:

The first: With regard to meditating on the union of the method and wisdom, it is necessary to know the meaning of them (method [skilful means] and wisdom) individually. To answer this, the text says in verse 44:

**44. To eliminate doubts concerning
What is wisdom and what is skilful means,
I shall make clear the difference
Between skilful means and wisdom.**

The key point to be explained here is implied in the line, 'I shall make clear the difference'.

What needs to be clarified?

The meaning of skilful means and wisdom may appear to be mixed, and this needs to be differentiated clearly or correctly so that the features and divisions of each one are not mixed. The purpose of doing this is to eliminate not understanding, wrong understanding and doubts with regard to the meaning of skilful means and wisdom. Potowa was supposed to have said, 'The beginning and the end parts of the *Lamp for the Path* have a few words, but are of great significance where lies the cream of butter'.

Detailed explanation

The second Detailed Explanation has three:

1. Identifying the method
2. The purpose of becoming familiar with it
3. Identifying the wisdom

Identifying the method

Regarding the first [root text, verse 45]:

**45. Apart from the perfection of wisdom
All virtuous practices such as
The perfection of giving are described
As a skilful means by the victorious ones.**

Here, the method refers to all the virtuous white Dharma conjoined with bodhicitta such as the perfection of giving as well as the four other perfections, but not the perfection of wisdom. This is what is taught by the victorious ones of three times as the method or skilful means.

So, the five perfections other than wisdom (the sixth perfection) are considered here as the method side. With the mind or spirit of bodhicitta, the bodhisattva engages in the six perfections, the first five of which are the method side, and the last one being the wisdom side. Having said that, if we look at the perfection of joyous effort, it can have the aspect of both method and wisdom.

The purpose of becoming familiar with it

The commentary continues:

Regarding the second [verse 46]:

**46. *Whoever, under the influence of familiarity
With skilful means, cultivates wisdom
Will quickly attain enlightenment -
Not just by meditating on selflessness.***

Beginning with topics such as impermanence and the law of karma and then the practice of giving and so forth, as one steadily becomes familiar with the method then, through the force of bodhicitta, one meditates to gain insight into wisdom. Such wisdom will have the capacity to cut through the grasping of the sign with respect to any external or internal objects of observation. This wisdom is also very powerful in overcoming obstructions, and thereby will make it quicker to achieve the peerless state of enlightenment. However, meditating on selflessness alone without the support of the method, one will not be able to achieve the peerless state of enlightenment as it says,...

As it says here, wisdom alone is not enough. That's why the commentary says, *beginning with topics such as impermanence and the law of karma. Impermanence is a topic of meditation that belongs to the person of small scope, and the law of karma belongs to the middle scope. The practices of giving and so forth, as one steadily becomes familiar with the method then, through the force of bodhicitta are related to the person of great scope.*

This indicates the need to progress through all those stages of the path. Once one has made good progress on the method side, especially with the bodhicitta mind, and so forth, as the commentary says, *one meditates to gain insight into wisdom. Then one may choose a specific type of object and meditate to gain the wisdom realising the ultimate truth of that particular object.*

Here, there's also the implication of the need to accumulate both merit and wisdom in order to attain the wisdom of selflessness.

The commentary continues:

...*'Partial cause produces partial result, Full cause produces full result; Hence, it is said how can an intelligent one be content with the partial cause?'*

When it says the *partial cause produces partial result...*, it's referring to method and wisdom. You have to employ the complete path of method and wisdom, otherwise whatever means we apply, if they represent only a partial cause, then the result will be also only partial, not the full result.

This can also be understood in terms of worldly education. If you were to only focus on one specific area, but not have a complete understanding of a topic, you will only have a partial knowledge or education.

We will find that the knowledge of Dharma enhances the knowledge of the world and supports us in living a better worldly life. However, worldly knowledge doesn't help us understand the Dharma. Practising the Dharma in worldly life, such as maintaining positive thinking, being honest and compassionate is effective for living a successful happy worldly life.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama commented that, although he has hardly studied modern science, he's not nervous about discussing science with scientists and receiving questions from them. His Holiness says that he always keeps his mind clear and open to others; this helps him understand the other's view and find something to say to their questions. Surely it all has got a lot to do with the His Holiness's rich knowledge of Dharma!

We must always keep our mind clear and open. It's the wrong meditation approach if our meditation is narrowing our mental outlook, rather it should be widening our mind. I advise you to read the commentarial texts, and in that way you will acquire broader knowledge which is important. You must read Tsongkhapa's *Great Stages of the Path*. In the sections on calm abiding, there is a detailed explanation about manifested afflictions and so forth.

I don't read English, but I understand that these days there are a lot of Dharma books available in English and many are available as electronic copies, so these days people don't need to carry heavy books around. There are electronic copies of the large corpus of Tibetan texts as well. A friend of mine in America says, 'Just ask me. Whatever book you want, I'll send to you electronically'.

The friend made the suggestion that, when you travel, you don't want to carry too many books. But I still end up carrying a heavy load of books when I travel!

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 Sandup Tsering.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
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Edited Version*

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Homework

Answers

Teaching: 10 July 2018

1. Explain the benefits of achieving Calm Abiding.

THE BENEFITS OF CALM ABIDING MEDITATION

For those of you who have the translation of the *Lamp* commentary, verse 41 reads:

*41ab. When the practitioner has gained calm abiding
Higher perception will also be gained.*

Relating to this, the commentary continues:

Following the meditation instruction as described earlier, through exerting continuous effort in single-pointed concentration like an unbroken stream of water, the yogi will achieve calm abiding, and along with that achieve the power of clairvoyance, and engage in fulfilling the two welfares.

In the earlier sessions, we touched on the reason why we need to achieve the state of calm abiding – to gain special insight. As we will discover later, calm abiding is a condition for gaining special insight and other important qualities, such as the clairvoyant powers. These qualities are all achieved through calm abiding.

When the commentary says, *along with that achieve the power of clairvoyance, and engage in fulfilling the two welfares*, 'the two welfares' refers to fulfilling the ultimate goal for oneself, and the ultimate goal for other sentient beings.

Attaining clairvoyant powers makes it easier to fulfil the two welfares because, in order to benefit others, it is an advantage for the practitioner to know exactly the individual predispositions, interests, spiritual temperaments and thoughts of other sentient beings. When the practitioner has such knowledge, he or she is able to benefit other sentient beings more effectively. Thus, clairvoyant powers are important for benefitting others, and attaining these clairvoyant powers depends on achieving calm abiding.

The commentary continues:

Sharawa said that not only clairvoyance but also non-conceptual wisdom would arise.

This implies that the purpose of achieving calm abiding is not chiefly to gain clairvoyant powers but, more importantly, to gain non-conceptual wisdom, which here refers to the wisdom realising selflessness – this has the capacity to cut completely the root cause of cyclic existence.

As it says here, to produce this powerful wisdom realising selflessness, wisdom has to be conjoined with, or supplemented by, the calm abiding state. It is in fact this *union of calm abiding and special insight* which has the capacity of uprooting the cause of cyclic existence.

The commentary next refers to 'Jowo', who is Jowo Je Atisha:

This is well said because Jowo says, 'To achieve clairvoyance power and to generate uncontaminated path, first one should generate calm abiding'.

This is self-explanatory.

2. Explain the relationship between Special insight and Calm abiding and the different levels of bliss associated with each.

Presentation on special insight by proving the necessity of conjoining the method and the wisdom

Here we should note the difference between calm abiding and special insight. As we have already discussed, calm abiding is really a state of single-pointed meditative concentration accompanied by a deep experience of the bliss of the mental and physical pliancy. This bliss is induced by the meditator's perfect state of single-pointed concentration.

In order to gain special insight, what the meditator needs to do next is to remain in that perfect state of calm abiding, and within that state be able to utilise his or her wisdom to analyse the truth at the same time.

So special insight arises when the meditator experiences the bliss of pliancy through the force of wisdom analysing the truth while in a perfect state of calm abiding. This bliss of pliancy in association with the gaining of special insight is induced by the force of wisdom analysing the truth, whereas the bliss of pliancy associated with calm abiding is induced by the force of perfect meditative concentration.

We can clearly see here how special insight depends on achieving calm abiding. Without depending on the support of calm abiding, it is not possible to produce such a penetrative wisdom of analysis which can induce a bliss of pliancy culminating in the state of special insight. This is because the perfect mental stability of the focus is required in order to gain special insight. If the concentration is not firm or steady enough, you will easily lose the object of meditation and hence it is impossible to gain special insight. The word 'special' in the context of the term 'special insight' connotes that the kind of bliss of pliancy the meditator experiences upon achieving special insight is extraordinary because it is induced by the force of penetrative wisdom analysing the object, more than the bliss induced by the force of the single-pointed concentration of simply stabilising the mind on the object.

3. Explain what Master Chandragomin says here:

Now, if we ask, is it enough simply to generate calm abiding and the clairvoyant mind that arises from its force. Master Chandragomin says (in his *Praise in Confession*):

**Over and over, with the forest fire of meditation,
The jungle of faults may be burned, yet
The fixed root of 'self' being unconsumed,
It comes to life in advance, as though moistened by rain.**

The quote by Chandragomin points out why we need to gain special insight. In this quote, when it says, *over and over, with the forest fire of meditation*, the analogy is that a mundane state of concentration only has the capacity to prevent the manifest and very gross forms of delusions.

We touched on this earlier, when we were discussing calm abiding. On the basis of the calm abiding gained through the ninth stages of mental abiding you can move forward to achieving all the higher realm's levels of Concentration and Formless through relying upon the mundane path having the aspects of grossness and peacefulness. By relying on such a mundane path, however, you can only prevent the arising of manifested forms of mental affliction while on the high level mental states of concentration.

Chandragomin continues, *the jungle of faults may be burned, yet the fixed root of 'self' being unconsumed*. This clearly indicates that, while depending on a mundane state of meditative concentration one will be able to prevent some delusions to arise but only temporarily, as it will not 'burn' the root of the delusions, which *comes to life in advance, as though moistened by rain*. Similarly, if the understorey of a forest is very wet then, when the fire is gone, the root of a forest tree *comes to life in advance, as though moistened by rain*.

4. Why is there not much point to simply abandoning the manifest form of the mental afflictions?

The commentary continues:

Therefore, one needs to continually engage in the yoga of the perfection of wisdom of suchness along with the skilful means of giving and so forth in order to eliminate mental afflictions, such as desire and so forth, and obstructions to omniscience, which are in the form of latencies of dualistic misconception.

Here, *dualistic misconception* refers to the manifest form of obstructions to omniscient mind, whereas the *latencies* are not a manifest form, but are propensities of the obstruction to omniscient mind.

We have talked about the 'seed' of the mental afflictions before. I have already explained the difference between the seed and the latency of mental afflictions so many times so by now you should know it! The 'seed' of something means something which can produce the result similar to its cause.

The above paragraph from the commentary explains the meaning of the verse in such a way that you could almost trace every word of the root text in the commentary. Basically, it's saying here that we need to rely on special insight or the wisdom of selflessness because it is the direct antidote to the root cause of all the mental afflictions. What is the root cause? It is self-grasping. So, these two – self-grasping and the wisdom of selflessness – directly counteract each other.

As an example, if you had to completely destroy a tree, it's not sufficient to just prune the branches and leaves, because if the root remains under the ground, the tree will keep growing.

In the same way, there's not much point to simply abandoning the manifest form of the mental afflictions, because even though temporarily you may not experience them, those delusions will arise again for as long as the root is there. That is the main meaning.

5. Explain the necessity of the union of both method and wisdom.

This shows the necessity of the union of both method and wisdom. The commentary continues:

Those who aspire to achieve the complete enlightenment have to rely on both method and wisdom, not one without the other. In alignment with this the Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra says, 'Wisdom not supported by method is bondage as well as method not supported by wisdom is bondage'. This section responds to the fifth question of Nagtso's system.

Earlier on, there were a number of questions raised by the translator, Nagtso, so here, as it says, *this section responds to the fifth question of Nagtso's system.*

This is a reminder to us as to why there's a need for both method and wisdom on the path. One way to understand this is in terms of the ultimate result or goal of the spiritual path, which can be categorised into the two bodies, or *kayas*, of the Buddha – truth body and form body. Wisdom is the main cause to achieve the truth body, whereas method is the main cause to achieve the form body. We can also understand this by looking at the structure of the entire path, from beginning to end, in terms of the two truths as the basis (object/truth to be known), the two of method and wisdom as the path (subjective mind that realises the truth), and the two *kayas* of the truth body and form body as the result.

So is it clear why you need to train in both method and the wisdom? Wisdom refers to the wisdom realising emptiness or selflessness, and method refers to generating bodhicitta, and so forth.

Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

17 July 2018

We will begin with our usual meditation practice. As you know, it is very important we begin our practice with a proper motivation. So, try to cultivate the bodhicitta mind as your motivation.

With the cultivation of our motivation we are also focussing on the goal of our practice, which in the instance of bodhicitta as a motivation, is to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. When we take refuge in the Three Jewels, our goal is to liberate all beings from cyclic existence, particularly the three lower realms.

[Meditation]

We have just done what is called the 'giving and taking' meditation, and it is really very beneficial to do this meditation regularly and be able to do it effectively. As part of engaging in this meditation, we chant a prayer, which summarises what to reflect on in this meditation. In this way we are meditating through the medium of spoken words. As Geshe Chekawa said in his *Seven Point Thought Transformation*, 'Practice every activity by these words'.

In order to do this meditation, you first need to have a clear visualisation of all other sentient beings in front of you. We should become familiar with imagining that all sentient beings in front of us lack happiness or are afflicted with suffering.

In order to cultivate love, which by definition is the wish for other sentient beings to have happiness, you first need to have this image of all sentient beings who are desperate for happiness and joy. Likewise, as a way to cultivate compassion, you have got to have a strong image of all sentient beings who are subject to various kinds of suffering. If we become familiar with the thought of all other sentient beings as being deprived of happiness or being subject to suffering, then every time we begin this meditation we will be able to easily bring this image of all sentient beings to mind. That will then serve as a good cause to induce love and compassion for them.

In visualising other sentient beings, it is important that we include all sentient beings regardless of whether they are our friends, enemies or if they are strangers to us. So that our love and compassion for other beings is unbiased think that all are equally subject to suffering or deprived of happiness. If this meditation is done effectively it will also give us a very positive experience and benefit us as much as it benefits other beings.

Let consider how sincere we are in doing this meditation, and how effective the meditation is. In this meditation we are supposed to have cultivated a wish that all sentient beings have happiness, which is love, and that all sentient beings be free from suffering, which is compassion. If we ask ourselves who all those sentient beings are, we will find that 'all sentient beings' is just a generic term, having no reference to any particular sentient being or beings. That's why, in real terms, it is difficult for us to show true love and

compassion for even a single person. Therefore, it is really important to train ourselves in cultivating and developing love by focussing specifically on some beings in real life.

You have heard many times that the actual practice of cultivating love and compassion refers to cultivating this attitude towards real sentient beings such as those with whom we live and interact. Despite the fact that we engage in meditation on love and compassion quite regularly, it is questionable whether we are actually making any progress. For example, the moment you step out of this gampa and see someone that you dislike or remember has said something bad to you, you immediately forget about the love and compassion cultivated in the meditation and feel hatred and resentment. This shows that what we do in real life and what we do in meditation are complete opposites. So, this kind of spiritual practice or meditation is not much of benefit in real life situations.

We are deceiving ourselves into thinking that we have cultivated love for all sentient beings, because when we think of actual people there are lot of individuals who we resent or hate. So in practical terms, showing love and compassion to all is very difficult. As you hear frequently in the teachings, sometimes we should focus on particular beings and work on cultivating love and compassion for them.

We should be measuring how we are doing in our spiritual practice against real-life situations. If we are making progress, then in everyday life we should be calmer and more self-controlled and enjoying more stable peace and happiness. Hence, it is of paramount importance that we integrate our spiritual and meditation practice, such as cultivating love and compassion, into real-life situations, and thus be able to control our thoughts, emotions and deeds.

In our case, Dharma and meditation practice is only possible when we aren't facing any adverse situations, and when we face adverse circumstances such as someone provoking us, all our Dharma practice goes out the window. In fact, it's more important to practise the Dharma when we confront some adverse situation, because that's the time we need the support of our practice. Although in the situation may be challenging, we have to practise the Dharma even more so than when there are no adverse, unfavourable situations. Regardless of how long we have been following the Dharma or practising meditation, if our mental attitude or outlook when we face life's challenges is same as it was before we followed the Dharma, then our practice of Dharma has not been effective.

There is the story of practitioner who, when asked, 'What you are meditating on?' replied, 'I am meditating on developing patience'. When the other person said, 'That is just rubbish' or something like that, the practitioner immediately became quite irate. He said, 'I am practising patience' and then lost his temper! He might have cultivated patience during meditation when there were no unfavourable conditions, but when he faced an unfavourable situation outside of his meditation he was not able to practise.

Someone who was going through a troubled relationship once told me how while she was meditating she felt peaceful and was really happy. However, when she saw her husband soon afterward, she lost all self-control and peace of mind. She admitted it was then difficult to practise Dharma.

The essence of spiritual practice is to observe our thoughts and deeds at all times, and to subdue those that are negative

and destructive. You have heard this many times, and you need to remember it, and really think about it over and over again. Atisha said that the best of all instructions is to watch your mind at all times.

Help others, don't harm them. Dharma teaches about patience. No patience means that when they harm you, you harm them, and you don't benefit them. Geshe Chengawa said if we put all the teachings of the Greater and the Lesser Vehicle together then they come down to the two points of benefiting other sentient beings and preventing harm to other beings.

I often say to myself 'I won't harm others, I will help others'. Thinking 'I will help others, I won't harm others' gives me a very good feeling. Open up your mind. You think, 'I like benefits, I don't like being harmed'; all sentient beings think the same. Thinking, 'just as I wish all sentient beings help me, I will do the same. I won't harm anyone' gives a very good feeling.

Open your thinking. You are one person; there are many others. Think of other people's happiness. They are not happy, they don't like suffering. Go beyond yourself. Think of the happiness of others. You like happiness, and don't like suffering. They are same as me. Everyone is the same. When you get up in the morning say 'Today I will help, and I won't harm. That is my practice today'.

Practically speaking, it is probably not necessary to have a vast knowledge because the fundamental point of turning your mind towards the Dharma is really calming your own mind. What's most important is that our approach to the Dharma has some sort of effect on our mind.

3. Identifying the wisdom

Going back to the commentary, we are at the third subheading. In relation with this, we refer to this verse from the root text:

47. *Through realising that the aggregates,
constituents
And sources are not produced;
Understanding the emptiness of inherent
existence
Is described as wisdom.*

The commentary reads:

The first line indicates the observed object of wisdom. The second line implies the aspect (of the wisdom), whereas the last two lines identify the wisdom.

The thirty-five things – the five aggregates, the eighteen constituents and the twelve sources – imply the subject or focus.

What are the five aggregates, the eighteen constituents and the twelve sources.

Can somebody list the five aggregates? [Answer] Form, feeling, recognition, compositional factors, and consciousness.

The eighteen constituents are: [Answer] the six objects of observation, the six sense powers or organs, and the six sense consciousnesses.

And the twelve sources? [Answer] The six internal sources are the six sense powers and the six external sources are the six sense objects.

All the phenomena are included in these thirty-five classes of phenomena, so they are the bases of the view of selflessness.

The commentary continues:

The truth or aspect of those things is that they are not inherently something to be ascertained, realised and known.

This line indicates that what is to be realised is that these thirty-five things are the bases for grasping at inherent production, which serve as the basis for other grasping.

The Tibetan term *she ja* translated as 'object of knowledge' includes all things that exist. The term, 'object of knowledge' indicates an object and that there is something to be known. From that perspective what is to be known with regard to the object is the two truths, which are conventional and ultimate truth. So what is to be ascertained and realised here is the lack of inherent production.

Next the commentary states:

The truth or aspect of those things is that they are not inherently something to be ascertained, realised and known. This is because the principal cause of wandering around samsara is grasping at the true existence of things as they appear. Within grasping at true existence, grasping at the inherent production serves as the basis for other grasping. Therefore, it must be eliminated, and for this, the realisation of the absence of inherent production is necessary

First the commentary explains what qualities you have to realise with respect to those thirty-five objects; what you have to realise is the lack of inherent production of those things. Then it explains why we have to realise that lack of inherent existence with respect to those thirty-five objects. Next it goes on to say how grasping at the inherent production or true existence of those thirty-five objects serves as the main cause for sentient beings to be subject to birth in cyclic existence.

We can see here how these thirty-five objects encompass all the objects of knowledge. For example, with respect to the form aggregate, form is something that can appear to our mind. If you look at this glass and how it appears to our mind then it has the appearance of existing in its own right, existing by itself, and having a very concrete and true existence.

Not only can that glass (or any other object) appear to our eye sense consciousness as existing in that way, but our mind also grasps at that object as appearing as the true nature of that object. As it says in the commentary, *grasping at true existence, grasping at the inherent production serves as the basis for other grasping*. Here, *other grasping* specifically refers to all other forms of mental affliction that stem from grasping at the inherent existence of the object. *Therefore*, the commentary says, *it must be eliminated*. Here 'it' refers to grasping at true existence.

The commentary then says, *and for this, the realisation of the absence of inherent production is necessary*. The use of the term 'inherent production' is a clear indication that the basis establishing this view of selflessness is related to compounded or conditioned or impermanent phenomena. It doesn't mean that permanent phenomena are not selfless. Refuting inherent production with respect to all impermanent objects implicitly refutes selflessness with respect to permanent objects.

We have to understand that the realisation of the absence of inherent production and the grasping at inherent production are states of mind that directly oppose each other. If you cultivate this realisation of the absence of

inherent production, then you will automatically be counteracting grasping at inherent production.

The realisation of the absence of inherent production, which is considered as a state of mind, is a correct state of mind. It is a valid cognition, whereas the opposite, which is grasping at inherent existence, is a wrong state of mind and does not have a valid basis to sustain that view.

The commentary continues:

Thus, through realising non-production, one realises the absence of inherent existence of all things too. Of the two, method and wisdom, this is described as wisdom, as well as the reference to the main training of wisdom.

The commentary clearly indicates that of the two, method and wisdom, the realisation of the lack of inherent production is the wisdom aspect as well as a reference to the main training of wisdom.

Here we need to remember the threefold trainings, which are the trainings of moral ethics, concentration and wisdom. The training of moral ethics refers to the various vows, the training of concentration mainly refers to calm abiding, and wisdom mainly refers to special insight. Then we should also remind ourselves how this threefold training relates to the practice of controlling or calming the mind. With the training of moral ethics, we can remove all the gross forms of mental distractions and afflictions; with calm abiding we can remove sinking and excitement as we have discussed, and thereby remove subtle distractions, and with special insight we can overcome the root cause of mental afflictions.

It is good to give a bit of thought to how each one of these threefold trainings relates to taming our mindstream.

And then commentary continues with

Sharawa also said, 'When realising that nothing is tenable to have an existence upon the final analysis of reasoning, one is not realising in the meditation that something that existed before has become non-existent; rather, one is realising that something which is innately empty or non-inherently existent as being empty of inherent existence'.

So in the final analysis of reasoning, one is not realising in the meditation that something that existed before has become non-existent.

What does *final analysis of reasoning* mean?

Student: inaudible.

What you are you actually looking for? Use the example of one object.

Student: That's a table. Ultimate analysis doesn't search for whether the table exists or not, as in a conventional analysis. In ultimate analysis we have to first understand what is appearing falsely to our mind i.e. a table existing from its own side, independently. That is what you search for.

When you talk about ultimate analysis of how the table appears in our mind, what are you searching for?

Student: You are searching for the appearance of that table, whether the table is existing as it is appearing from its own side to the innate self grasping of ignorance.

So you are looking at whether whatever appears to our mind really exists or not? If it does not, then what is it that you are looking for?

Student: We are looking for the mode of existence of the table, which is a table that exists from own side, independently of any other thing. That is the self of table. We are looking to see if we can

find that self of the table, that nature of the table existing in and of itself, independent of anything else.

To realise the emptiness, you just have to go through the final analysis of what our mind is doing and how it processes what it apprehends. Just have a think about that and you will find out.

The commentary continues

This perfectly explains the meaning of the line, 'Understanding the emptiness of inherent existence'. (Verse 47).

Hence, the nature of the Mahayana path is described in the Maitreya's *Ornament for Clear Realisation*,

Not abiding in the existence due to wisdom,
Not abiding in nirvana due to compassion.

The wisdom realising selflessness ensures that you don't fall into the extreme of cyclic existence. The line *Not abiding in nirvana due to compassion* basically shows the framework of the Mahayana path, which is the combination of the wisdom of emptiness and great compassion.

If you gain the wisdom realising selflessness, then you don't fall into extreme of cyclic existence. Because a follower of the Lesser Vehicle has a direct realisation of the selflessness, they achieve the state of liberation from cyclic existence. Therefore they are free from the extreme of falling into the existence (samsara). *Not abiding in nirvana* refers to the extreme of nirvana or the extreme of peace. Although the follower of the Lesser Vehicle achieves liberation they fall into the extreme of peace or nirvana because they do not have this great compassion. Mahayana followers are free from that because of their great compassion.

The commentary then states:

The Sublime Continuum also says, 'Having cut off all the craving to the self by wisdom'. These refer to the two of method and wisdom.

We will continue with this next week.

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 Sandup Tsering.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
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Edited Version*

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Homework

Answers

Teaching: 17 July 2018

1. **'All the phenomena are included in these thirty-five classes of phenomena, so they are the bases of the view of selflessness.'**

List the 35 thirty five classes of phenomena

47. *Through realising that the aggregates, constituents
And sources are not produced;
Understanding the emptiness of inherent existence
Is described as wisdom.*

The commentary reads:

The first line indicates the observed object of wisdom. The second line implies the aspect (of the wisdom), whereas the last two lines identify the wisdom.

The thirty-five things – the five aggregates, the eighteen constituents and the twelve sources – imply the subject or focus.

What are the five aggregates, the eighteen constituents and the twelve sources.

Can somebody list the five aggregates? [Answer] Form, feeling, recognition, compositional factors, and consciousness.

The eighteen constituents are: [Answer] the six objects of observation, the six sense powers or organs, and the six sense consciousnesses.

And the twelve sources? [Answer] The six internal sources are the six sense powers and the six external sources are the six sense objects.

All the phenomena are included in these thirty-five classes of phenomena, so they are the bases of the view of selflessness.

2. **'.....Within grasping at true existence, grasping at the inherent production serves as the basis for other grasping. Therefore, it must be eliminated, and for this, the realisation of the absence of inherent production is necessary. The use of the term 'inherent production' is a clear indication that the basis establishing this view of selflessness is related to compounded or conditioned or impermanent phenomena.'**

Does this mean that permanent phenomena are not selfless? Explain.

We can see here how these thirty-five objects encompass all the objects of knowledge. For example, with respect to the form aggregate, form is something that can appear to our mind. If you look at this glass and how it appears to our mind then it has the appearance of existing in its own right, existing by itself, and having a very concrete and true existence.

Not only can that glass (or any other object) appear to our eye sense consciousness as existing in that way, but our mind also grasps at that object as appearing as the true nature of that object. As it says in the commentary, *grasping at true existence, grasping at the inherent production serves as the basis for other grasping*. Here, *other grasping* specifically refers to all other forms of mental affliction that stem from grasping at the inherent existence of the object. Therefore, the commentary says, *it must be eliminated*. Here 'it' refers to grasping at true existence.

The commentary then says, *and for this, the realisation of the absence of inherent production is necessary*. The use of the term 'inherent production' is a clear indication that the basis establishing this view of selflessness is related to compounded or conditioned or impermanent phenomena. It doesn't mean that permanent phenomena are

not selfless. Refuting inherent production with respect to all impermanent objects implicitly refutes selflessness with respect to permanent objects.

We have to understand that the realisation of the absence of inherent production and the grasping at inherent production are states of mind that directly oppose each other. If you cultivate this realisation of the absence of inherent production, then you will automatically be counteracting grasping at inherent production.

The realisation of the absence of inherent production, which is considered as a state of mind, is a correct state of mind. It is a valid cognition, whereas the opposite, which is grasping at inherent existence, is a wrong state of mind and does not have a valid basis to sustain that view.

3. What are the three fold trainings? Explain how the three fold training relates to the practice of controlling the mind.

The commentary clearly indicates that of the two, method and wisdom, the realisation of the lack of inherent production is the wisdom aspect as well as a reference to the main training of wisdom.

Here we need to remember the threefold trainings, which are the trainings of moral ethics, concentration and wisdom. The training of moral ethics refers to the various vows, the training of concentration mainly refers to calm abiding, and wisdom mainly refers to special insight. Then we should also remind ourselves how this threefold training relates to the practice of controlling or calming the mind. With the training of moral ethics, we can remove all the gross forms of mental distractions and afflictions; with calm abiding we can remove sinking and excitement as we have discussed, and thereby remove subtle distractions, and with special insight we can overcome the root cause of mental afflictions.

It is good to give a bit of thought to how each one of these threefold trainings relates to taming our mindstream.

Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

24 July 2018

As we have already set the correct motivation, we can now begin the meditation.

[Tonglen meditation]

Enforce your bodhicitta motivation by thinking, 'I will attain the precious state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings, and for that reason I will listen to this profound teaching and put it into practice'.

How to train in special insight Identifying the wisdom (cont.)

As the commentary says:

These refer to the two of method and wisdom. The *Lamp for the Path* clearly stipulates the certainty of the number, the order and the nature of the two.

We have quoted the root text which refers to the necessity of just these two: method and wisdom, then refers to the order of the method and wisdom and the nature of the method and wisdom.

The commentary explains the certainty of the number saying here:

How? First, the Mahayana path is subsumed within the two of method and wisdom, and there is no need of more than the two nor can it be less than two.

It continues:

The first [referring to the number required in the Mahayana path] (no need of more than the two) is implied in verse 42.

Verse 42 says:

*Thus, to eliminate all obstructions
To liberations and omniscience,
The practitioners should continually cultivate
The perfection of wisdom with skilful means.*

This verse is saying that the two obstructions can be eliminated by *long familiarity with method and wisdom*. Method primarily refers to great compassion, and wisdom to the wisdom realising emptiness. These two encompass the entire practice of the Mahayana path. A previous session stated that there are two bases. These refer to the two truths which are the main subject to be understood on the path. The two paths refer to the *method and the wisdom* and the two results refer to the two bodies of a buddha to be attained by the path.

The verse refers to two obstructions. In terms of the Hinayana or Lesser Vehicle, the main obstruction is afflictive emotions. On the Mahayana path the main obstruction is the obstruction to knowledge or omniscient mind. These obstructions are what *can be eliminated by long familiarity with method and wisdom*. *Long familiarity* implies that in order to achieve full enlightenment, we must be prepared to exert effort on the path for a long period of time. For example, in terms of cultivating compassion or wisdom, even if it takes

many lifetimes, we have to be motivated to continually exert ourselves. Even if we can't, it is beneficial to make an aspirational prayer, 'may I be able to exert the effort to cultivate compassion and wisdom, no matter how long it takes, until I achieve full enlightenment'.

Previous teachings have highlighted the importance of having a combination of method and wisdom on the path, but here it says that the method and wisdom cannot be one without the other. It also affirms method and wisdom in terms of number (which is two), and how everything in the path of the Mahayana is included in these: *there is no need of more than two*. We have to understand that just by depending on these two it is possible to achieve complete enlightenment by fully overcoming the two main obstructions, therefore *there is no need of more than the two*. It also says, *nor can it be less than two* which means the path cannot be completed if either method or wisdom is missing.

The commentary says:

The second (nor can it be less than the two) is implied in verse 43, 'Wisdom without skilful means ...'

This verse presents familiarising oneself with the method prior to meditating on wisdom. This is also indicated by the subsequent order by which the six perfections are put into practice.

The commentary states that let alone achieving full enlightenment, without method or wisdom one cannot even reach the first level on the bodhisattva's path. It says:

This is also indicated by the subsequent order by which the six perfections are put into practice.

This is indicated in Verse 43.

**43. Wisdom without skilful means
And skilful means without wisdom
Are referred to as bondage.
Therefore do not give up either.**

Then as it says¹:

In alignment with the same meaning ...

The commentary clearly says here that familiarity with method is done prior to meditating on wisdom. This order is also applied to the six perfections from the perfection of giving, moral ethics, patience, joyous effort, concentration and wisdom, which comes at the end.

The commentary says that the root text *The Lamp for the Path* indicates method comes before wisdom, and that this is aligned with the subsequent order of the six perfections in Shantideva's *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

The commentary quotes two lines from the *Bodhicharyavatara* which say: 'All these branches of the doctrine of the Victorious One are expounded for the sake of wisdom'. The commentary quotes this verse and refers to the root text, *The Lamp for the Path* where it states the order of method and wisdom: method first followed by wisdom.

The full verse in Chapter 9 of Shantideva's *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* is: 'The able one explained all these different means for the purpose of wisdom,

¹ Trans: When you translate Tibetan into English the order of the words can change, and that's why there is some discrepancy in the order being presented here, and the order in which this commentary is read.

therefore those who wish to pacify suffering should generate wisdom’.

The intention of the Buddha’s teachings is to liberate all beings from cyclic existence and from lower rebirths. To achieve the state of liberation, the main path is the wisdom of realising selflessness. Then what it says here is that the limbs of the other five perfections are taught by the Buddha in order to gain the wisdom.

The commentary continues:

Having said that [referring to the fixed order of method and wisdom], there are some exceptions to this as is said ...

The commentary indicates that there are some exceptions. Recall that when you studied Chandrakirti’s text *Supplement to the Middle Way* it talked about the order of the followers of the Mahayana path, depending on whether they are dull or sharp-minded (sharp faculty). There was talk about some Mahayana followers who initially cultivated compassion, then the bodhicitta mind and then the wisdom realising emptiness, which is in accordance with what is mentioned here i.e. method first and then wisdom. However, there are those with sharp minds who gain the realisation of emptiness first, and then generate the bodhicitta mind. So, when it says ‘there are some exceptions’ it is referring to Mahayana followers with a sharp mind or sharp faculty.

You need to be clear about the order in which method and wisdom are pursued. Essentially it depends on the level of your mental faculties. In terms of the way the texts present it, both *The Lamp for the Path of Enlightenment* and Shantideva’s *The Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, explicitly say that method comes before wisdom. However, this is the order for a follower with less mental faculty. Although not explicitly mentioned, the approach for the follower with a sharp mind is indicated indirectly. In Chandrakirti’s *Supplement to the Middle Way* the order for followers with sharp faculties is explicitly mentioned – wisdom is taught before method.

There’s a difference in the way that those with sharp faculties and those with less-sharp faculties approach the path. Before generating the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, those with sharp faculties need to gain the conviction that it is possible to achieve enlightenment. For those with less-sharp faculties this is not important as these people generate their aspirations based primarily on their faith in the path. Those with sharp faculties need to establish in their mind the possibility of achieving the state of liberation before they aspire for it. In order to understand this, they have to understand the fact that the root cause, or the main obstruction to achieving the state of liberation is an erroneous view of self. Therefore, they have to see the possibility of uprooting that erroneous view, for which they first need to gain an understanding of selflessness.

What’s mentioned here also touches on the importance of remembering the qualities of the Three Jewels, such as the qualities of the Buddha. If we recognise and have admiration for or conviction in all the qualities possessed by the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, then we would feel inspired and want to achieve the same qualities. In other words, we won’t have a genuine aspiration to achieve the

state of buddhahood if we have not recognised the qualities of a buddha.

Here we can notice some sort of sequential order we need to follow in order to make progress along the path. If we consider the progressive order of those with sharp faculties, we can see that before they generate an aspiration to achieve the state of buddhahood, they must fully gain a knowledge of the qualities of a buddha and the Three Jewels and reflect upon these. Not only that, they need to gain an understanding of why they need to achieve buddhahood in order to benefit other sentient beings. Based on your own knowledge and reasoning you can truly see the importance of benefiting other sentient beings and how to fully benefit them, and that it is necessary to achieve the state of buddhahood.

The commentary continues:

The certainty in terms of the nature (of the method and wisdom) is presented in the following two verses:

45. *Apart from the perfection of wisdom
All virtuous practices such as
The perfection of giving are described
As a skilful means by the victorious ones.*
46. *Whoever, under the influence of familiarity
With skilful means, cultivates wisdom
Will quickly attain enlightenment –
Not just by meditating on selflessness.*

The commentary quotes just the first line of verse 47. If you refer to the root text, which we have already covered, you can understand it:

47. *Through realising that the aggregates,
constituents
And sources are not produced;
Understanding the emptiness of inherent
existence
Is described as wisdom.*

The commentary continues:

As to how to practise these two (method and wisdom) ... ‘Just like taking a walk, initially one step at a time, then like the two wings of a bird, combine the two together and becoming familiar with it, is how one reaches enlightenment’. Thus, one should train accordingly.

Again, there is an implication of the order of method and wisdom. Even though it is necessary to consolidate both method and wisdom together to reach full enlightenment, initially the order in which one applies these two is method first followed by wisdom.

There is also an implication here that even though the main goal is the state of buddhahood, that this is not something which comes from above, all of a sudden. Here it implies that reaching enlightenment is a step-by-step, gradual process with a sequential order of development. Although the method and wisdom are initially developed and enhanced separately, towards the end of the path they need to be merged and developed jointly.

In practice, we need to progress on the path from the bottom to the top. This means you need to start the practice from where you are at the moment, in terms of making an effort to eliminate negativities, even if it is one small negativity, and cultivating positive qualities, even

if it is just a small one. We have to slowly progress from that base level. Just as there are two main practices on the path characterising method and wisdom, at the end or resultant stage there are also two - the *rupakaya* or the form body which is the final result of the method, and the *dharmakaya* or the truth body which is the final result of wisdom.

It's good to familiarise yourself with reflective meditations on the stages of the path *or* lam-rim. Reflect on these topics in sequential order by beginning with the precious human rebirth and finishing with the state of complete enlightenment.

Alternatively, you can reflect on the lam-rim topics in reverse order, by beginning with the state of complete enlightenment, then moving back to its cause on the tenth bodhisattva level, reflecting how this depended on the ninth bodhisattva level and so forth until you go back to the first level, then to the path of preparation, which depends on the path of accumulation, and that depends on cultivating the bodhicitta mind.

Finally, you should look at all the causes of the bodhicitta mind as you study the seven-fold cause and effect sequence. From that perspective the bodhicitta mind depends on the immediately preceding cause, superior intention, which in turn is derived from compassion. One goes back to renunciation, which in turn arises from the awareness of the suffering nature of cyclic existence, particularly of lower rebirths. In this way you think about the law of cause and effect to prevent a lower rebirth, then back to thinking about the precious human rebirth. That is the reverse order. Then you can do it from top to bottom again. You need to be able to complete lam-rim meditations in these two orders over and over again until you become very familiar with it. You can see how much there is to meditate on!

If you have an outline of the lam-rim text *The Path to Bliss* it is good to look at it and use it as a reference for your meditation. It's good to remember all the detail in the lam-rim outline as it can really help you do the meditation. Then, if you decide to meditate on the precious human rebirth, you can immediately remember what you have to think about it in terms of the outline. For example, it talks about the difficulty and rarity of finding such a rebirth and there are more sub-headings underneath that, so you can then reflect on these. That's a very good way.

We have to remind ourselves of the fact that, whether we like it or not, one day we have to leave this existence. We know it doesn't matter where and what form of rebirth we take, as long as we are born within cyclic existence we are subject to suffering. For example, a human rebirth brings the suffering of birth, sickness, ageing, death and so forth. Cyclic existence is in the nature of perpetual suffering, therefore we must motivate ourselves to integrate our Dharma practice, as the Dharma is the only true means we have of freeing ourselves from cyclic existence.

Right now, we may enjoy freedom and choices, but we won't have this when we face death because everything fails to support us at that moment. Our friends cannot help, nor our possessions, nor our body. They cannot

even accompany us after death. We cannot take even a portion of our possessions with us, nor any parts of our body. The only thing that can help us at the moment of death is our faith in Dharma. That is the only thing that is of benefit. Therefore, there is an opportunity for us to prepare ourselves right now, so that even if we cannot prevent death, we can face death and die happily, without any feeling of regret. If this is not possible, at least we will not be too distressed or frightened.

The degree to which we can actually apply our Dharma practice at the time of death depends on our level of familiarity with the practice. Therefore, if you start to practice now and familiarise yourself with the various contemplations, then there is no doubt that you will be able to do the same contemplation at the time of death with ease. As I said before, even though we cannot prevent death, through our practice we can ensure that at least we can face it without regret or fear.

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 Sandup Tsering.

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Edited Version*

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Homework

Teaching: 24 July 2018

1. What is verse 42 referring to? What are the results of practicing the two paths?

Verse 42 says:

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To liberations and omniscience,
The practitioners should continually cultivate
The perfection of wisdom with skilful means.*

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2. Explain verse 43.

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3. There's a difference in the way that those with sharp faculties and those with less-sharp faculties approach the path. Explain.

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4. Explain how to reflect on the meditations on the stages of the path *or* lam-rim.

It's good to familiarise yourself with reflective meditations on the stages of the path *or* lam-rim. Reflect on these topics in sequential order by beginning with the precious human rebirth and finishing with the state of complete enlightenment.

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