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# Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

7 November 2017

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

[Meditation]

Please generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings.

Does everyone know what the bodhicitta motivation means? Do the newer students understand that word 'bodhicitta'?

A new student responds: I don't know the meaning of bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta is a Sanskrit word. In essence, it is the ultimate intention to benefit other sentient beings. Although this brief statement encompasses its meaning, there is, however, a much more elaborate explanation.

The material that we are studying now sits in the classification of Buddhist doctrine called the Mahayana or Great Vehicle. Mahayana is also a Sanskrit word which means 'Great Vehicle'. The literal translation of the word bodhicitta is 'mind of enlightenment', however it refers specifically to the mind that aspires to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Thus, it is an altruistic intention to benefit other beings. In order to be classified as belonging to the Great Vehicle doctrine, a practice has to be based on this altruistic intention to benefit other sentient beings, and the best way to benefit other sentient beings is to lead them to the state of ultimate happiness, where all suffering has been eliminated. This implies that one aspires to lead other beings to the ultimate state of happiness where all qualities are acquired, and all defilements or faults are completely eradicated. We call that state buddhahood or enlightenment.

When, through their altruistic practice and development an individual being experiences a genuine transformation, where their mind becomes imbued with that spontaneous and continuous aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings - for the purpose of leading all other living beings to that ultimate state of happiness as well - then they become a bodhisattva.

'Bodhisattva' is generally translated as a 'noble being' who holds the mind of bodhicitta unceasingly. In brief, a bodhisattva is a being who has developed the mind of bodhicitta and engages in noble deeds, such as the practices of the six perfections of generosity, morality, patience, joyous effort, concentration and wisdom.

In the text that we are studying, *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, we have covered the explanation of how to generate the aspirational mind to achieve enlightenment, and now the text further explains that it is

not sufficient to merely develop an aspiration to achieve enlightenment. As a means of further developing and strengthening this aspiration, one must progress to developing engaging bodhicitta. So, the text now presents the vows of engaging bodhicitta. More specifically, it is a presentation of the way to develop engaging bodhicitta by taking the engaging vows.

*Engaging instructions*

**Manner of taking engaging vows (cont.)**

The three subheadings here are:

- The suitable life form for taking the vows, [which is also translated as 'suitable basis'].
- The object from whom one is receiving the vows
- The ceremony of taking the vows

You can see here the very logical sequential presentation of the material. First there is a description of the suitable life form or basis necessary to take the vows. Then comes the description of the object from whom one takes the vows, and finally there is the actual explanation of the ritual of taking the vows.

*The suitable life form for taking the vows*

The following verse in the root text explains the suitable basis for taking vows:

**20. Those who maintain any of the seven kinds  
Of individual liberation vows  
Have the ideal (pre-requisite) for  
The bodhisattva vow, not others.**

The commentary explains the meaning of this verse as follows:

Regarding this, the commentary to *Twenty Vows* by Acharya Bodhibhadra states, "the individual liberation vows are the branches of the Bodhisattva vow from the perspective of the whole lot alone. Hence, the point here is that those who possess other-vows of individual liberation are suitable vessels for perfectly receiving bodhisattva vows, and receiving the precept instruction too. This means that the other ritual relating to refraining from or not refraining from killing and so forth, alone is not presenting here as a suitable vessel for receiving bodhisattva vows."

Having quoted from *Twenty Vows* by Acharya Bodhibhadra, our commentary explains that:

The meaning of this statement is briefly mentioned in the self-commentary. Those who possess permanently or until their last breath any of the actual seven individual liberation vows from full layperson vow to full ordination vow or any common vows of refraining from natural misdeeds, have the fortune to take upon bodhisattva vow but not others.

That is what the verse means. As presented here, the seven individual liberation vows are the full layman's vows, the full laywoman's vows, the probationary nuns' vows, the vows of novice nuns and novice monks, the full ordination vows of monks and the full ordination vows of nuns. These are referred to as the seven practices of self-liberation vows.

*Natural misdeeds* are naturally occurring misdeeds or negativities such as taking the life of others, stealing, and sexual misconduct, for example. Anyone engaging in these deeds will incur negativity regardless of whether they have taken vows or not, or whether they are

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ordained or not. There are also misdeeds in relation to decree. These are misdeeds in relation to the vows or precepts the person has taken. When a lay person engages in certain activities that are prohibited for the ordained for example, it will not be a misdeed because they have not taken such vows.

The commentary emphasises that any of the seven individual liberation vows taken for life will be a basis for receiving the bodhisattva vows.

Then the commentary mentions that:

Since the individual liberation vow is other than bodhisattva vow, it is referred to here as other vow.

This refers back to the seven questions that were raised by Nagtso earlier, although we didn't go through all of them. The third question related to whether a self-liberation vow has to precede the bodhisattva vow or not. The answer is, as explained here, strictly speaking one does not need to have taken a self-liberation vow in order to receive the bodhisattva vows. However, in order for it to be an excellent basis for receiving the bodhisattva vow then it is necessary to have first taken the self-liberation vows. Having either of the self-liberation vows provides a perfect base for receiving the bodhisattva vows. This accords with the sequential presentation of the vows. An individual with lay person's vows, for example, can take the *getsul* or novice vows and then at an appropriate time they can take the full ordination vows. Based on the earlier vows, such an individual would be an excellent basis on which to receive the bodhisattva vows.

As the commentary indicates:

Moreover, the purpose of the bodhisattva vow is to benefit others and for (fulfilling) this, it is imperative to prevent harm and its basis towards others, ...

The 'harm' refers to the three non-virtues of the body and the four of speech, i.e. killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, refraining from lying, divisive speech, harmful speech and idle gossip. These are the seven non-virtues that cause harm. The 'basis' for these seven are three non-virtues of the mind i.e. covetousness, harmful intent and wrong views. These ten are referred to as the harm and the basis for bringing harm to others.

As specified here, *it is imperative to prevent* any of these ten which cause harm to others. Thus, avoiding these ten forms a suitable basis on which to take the bodhisattva vows. This emphasis implies that one does not need to have taken the self-liberation vows in order to receive the bodhisattva vows. However, at the very minimum, these bodhisattva vows have to be based on refraining from engaging in the seven harms and the three bases of causing harm to others.

This is logical because in the bodhisattva vows one is making the commitment to bring only benefit to other beings. So without making a strong commitment to completely refrain from harming other beings, one cannot possibly engage in the means to benefit other sentient beings. It is all quite logical. As the commentary states:

... the Self-commentary says, "that is to say a special life suited for holding moral vow."

This means that one has to have a commitment to observe the avoidance of these seven harms and three bases.

Now, why is one-day layperson vow not mentioned as the suitable basis (to receive Bodhisattva vow)? The reason is because its duration is short and it is not distant from non-virtues and desire. Therefore, it is not suitable life-basis for receiving bodhisattva vow.

Although they are part of the self-liberation vows, one-day vows are not included in the seven because they are of very short duration, as they are only taken for twenty-four hours.

The implication here is that the suitable basis for receiving and then holding the bodhisattva vows, has to be a lifelong commitment to moral conduct. A short commitment such as, 'Oh, I will avoid causing harm to others for a day or two' will not be a sufficient basis for the bodhisattva vows. As many other teachings emphasise, morality is absolutely essential for any progress in one's practice, and this is also emphasised here with an analogy. Just as the ground serves as the basis for all animate living beings and inanimate objects such as trees, plants and so on, likewise morality serves as the basis on which all other vows and realisations can be developed.

Next the commentary presents another qualm:

Since the individual liberation vow will become nullified when the death occurs, how can it be a suitable basis?

This is really a very reasonable qualm or doubt that is being raised. What it is basically saying is that the commitments of the self-liberation vows only exist until the time of death. So when death occurs one will lose any self-liberation vows that one has taken. The question here is: if one loses them then how can they be a basis for the bodhisattva vows?

As the commentary explains:

In response to this, the Great Yogi says, "a walking stick helps an old man to stand up but afterwards the stick doesn't fall because the old man holds it.

This is a very vivid analogy. An old person has to depend on a stick to stand up, but once they are actually standing up they are preventing the stick from falling down, because they are holding it up.

The commentary further explains:

Likewise, initially the individual liberation vow serves as a basis for one to receive it (bodhisattva vow), and then afterward, one is able to refrain from harmfulness or not staggered until reaching to the state of enlightenment due to bodhisattva vow."

In relation to the analogy presented earlier, the self-liberation vows basically encompass refraining from harming others and from engaging in the bases of that harm. That is then further held by the bodhisattva vows. Receiving the bodhisattva vows, and then practising them, also encompasses refraining from harming others and the bases as well. So while refraining from harming others and its bases serves as the initial basis for receiving bodhisattva vows, once the bodhisattva vows are taken, that in turn will hold and protect the self-liberation vows encompassed by those bodhisattva vows.

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The commentary then states:

From this, it is obvious that in the past there was a usage of the terms a suitable or unsuitable life-basis for the vow. This explanation also presents the response to the third question of the Nagtso's system. As an implication of the special kind of life-basis (to receive Bodhisattva vow) the root text says;

21. *The Tathagata spoke of seven kinds  
Of individual liberation vow.  
The best of these is glorious pure conduct,  
Said to be the vow of a fully ordained person.*

The commentary then raises another qualm or doubt:

As to those who have any of the seven individual liberation vows, are there any differences among them in terms of higher and lower?

In response to that, the commentary then explains:

Regarding this as mentioned in the Vinaya sutra, 'The Tathagata spoke of seven kinds of individual liberation vow,' the vow of celibacy is higher than layperson vow and then from among the vows of celibacy, the glorious and excellent one is the full ordination vow which signifies the full commitment and devotion to the Victorious Doctrine. Hence, the full ordination vow is asserted as the most desirable life-basis to receive bodhisattva vow.

As explained here, the seven classes of self-liberation vows can be categorised into layperson's vows and ordination vows. Of these two classes, the ordination vows are supreme, and within the ordination vows, full ordination vows are superior to the novice vows which are superior to probationary vows.

The reason for that is:

... the glorious and excellent one is the full ordination vow which signifies the full commitment and devotion to the Victor's Doctrine [or the Buddha's doctrine].

As a way to back up this assertion *the full ordination vow is asserted as the most desirable life-basis on which to receive bodhisattva vows as it is full commitment and devotion to the Victor's Doctrine.*

The emphasis here is on following the doctrine of the Buddha, and the self-liberation vows are the way to enter and adopt the Buddha's doctrine. There is no other way; taking full ordination vows is making a full commitment to the Buddha's doctrine.

In summary, *the most desirable or suitable life-basis on which to receive the bodhisattva vows is the vows of a fully ordained monk or nun.*

One example of the demarcation between the two types of vows is the third of the seven misdeeds, which is refraining from sexual misconduct. When a layperson takes the vow of refraining from sexual misconduct it only refers to specific forms of misconduct. When one takes the ordination vows then the sexual misconduct entails abstaining from all sexual contact, which is the vow of celibacy.

We can see here how the Buddha presented the sequence of vows in accordance with the capacity of those who take those vows. If the Buddha had required that lay people abstain from all sexual contact, then that would have made it very difficult for lay people to take those

vows. What is manageable for lay people is to refrain from sexual misconduct, not the sexual act itself.

When someone feels they have the capacity to take the ordination vows then they make a commitment to abstain from sexual contact altogether. In this way, we can see how the Buddha very meticulously and very skilfully guided disciples, so that the earlier vows serve as the basis for the later vows. It is said that the self-liberation vows are the basis for receiving not only bodhisattva vows, but they also establish a suitable basis for tantric vows.

To get a better understanding, in the self-liberation vows, beginning with the lay vows and then ordination vows, there is a commitment to **avoid taking a human's life**. This vow is not all that difficult to observe, as anyone in their right mind naturally refrains from taking another human's life. Breaking the vow means taking a human's life, so maintaining that vow is not difficult.

As mentioned earlier, for a layperson, the vow of **refraining from sexual misconduct** does not involve abstaining from sexual contact altogether, but refers to specific acts of sexual misconduct. Likewise taking the vow to **avoid stealing** is quite easy to observe for most people.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, **refraining from lying** would not be a problem for most people, however the fifth vow of **avoiding intoxicants** might be problematic for some. His own senior tutor, Ling Rinpoche, allowed those who found it very difficult to abstain from drinking altogether to have a drink occasionally. His Holiness says he follows that tradition. After giving this explanation at his teachings in Bodhgaya, which I attended, His Holiness encouraged those who were willing to take all five lay vows, since it is not too difficult to observe all five of them. However, one doesn't have to decide to take all five lay vows at the same time, as there is a tradition of choosing whichever of the five you feel confident you can observe. These are points to consider.

If, having taken lay vows, one breaks one of the five vows, such as taking the life of another person, then that can be confessed and purified. If one breaks the vow of sexual misconduct then that can again be confessed and purified, and likewise with stealing, drinking or lying. But if one were to break all five vows then one will have to retake them all again, in order to restore the vows to an intact state.

We can easily see the significance of observing these vows, as doing so will produce a more harmonious and conducive environment. This can be clearly understood when we think about the opposite when these vows are not observed. The greatest fear in any society is that one's life is under threat. Taking the life of others is taking their most precious possession. Likewise, when it is known that there are thieves in a particular area, then that also brings lots of anxiety as everyone in the area is living in constant fear. This clearly brings about so much harm.

Wherever there is any kind of area that it is known to be unsafe, with threats to one's life or one's possessions, one will have to always be cautious and on guard and uncomfortable in that area. Some of you might have had

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the experience of being in an area where you have a bit of money, and it is known that there are robbers and pickpockets about. You become very anxious then, don't you? You really have to always be on guard and cautious, so you are never really comfortable. Whereas if you are in an area where there are no known thieves and robbers around, you can be very relaxed even if you do have some money and possession. This is how we can see that observing these vows of intentionally refraining from harming others brings about a very peaceful atmosphere.

In terms of refraining from lying, His Holiness says, 'Oh, you don't have to worry too much about that'. What he is saying is that the lying here refers to a very specific lie which is **lying about the attainment of superhuman qualities**. One will be breaking the vow of lying when one lies in order to deceive others by explicitly stating or implying to others that one has obtained certain kinds of realisations or attainments when in fact one has not. So it is this specific lie about the attainment of superhuman qualities which would break the vow of avoiding lying.

For example, if someone were to ask you, 'Are you clairvoyant? Can you read the minds of other people?' and you don't have that ability, then you would break your vow if you said, 'Yes, I can', or even if you nodded your head to imply that you can. According to the Vinaya text, one does not have to verbalise a lie to break this vow of lying. There are also physical gestures one could use to imply that one has clairvoyance when in fact one doesn't. This is a lie that breaks one's vow.

It is the same with calm abiding. If someone asks whether you have attained calm abiding and you imply that you have, then you have broken your vow. Sometimes others raise a question. During the Kalachakra teachings in Bodhgaya a young Tibetan who was sitting near me asked, 'Oh, Geshe-la, have you attained calm abiding?', and my response was, 'No, I have not attained calm abiding, however I do have a happy mind'. This young man was not just an ordinary Tibetan, but he had once been a monk and had studied quite extensively. As he had studied a lot of logic he did not accept my answer right away. He said, 'Well then, how does one get a happy mind?'. In response to that I said, 'When you reduce your discursive thoughts, the mind becomes clearer and then the mind naturally becomes happier'. He then spent a few minutes thinking about this point; my answer seemed to have made an impact on him.

Later, I got to know him better, and I found out that he had been a monk in a Namgyal Monastery for about eleven years, and studied the debating text quite well. That is how we got to know each other, and since then I have had other encounters with him. As we got to know each other, he really took a liking to me and wanted to introduce his wife and his two children to me after a teaching session. However, at that time, there were some others from Malaysia who were asking me questions and I was involved with them. Later he commented, 'Oh, Geshe-la, you seemed to be really busy with your disciples, so I didn't get to introduce my wife and children to you'.

There was another young monk who took it upon himself to help me with getting down from the dais, although I didn't really need any help. He also tried to help the young monks who took a liking to me. Later he said, 'Oh, that person you were having a conversation with earlier is actually very well-known. He was very good with his studies and debates and is known to be a scholar in his own right'. Later I heard that he works in America in, I think, the Tibetan National Radio Broadcasting Corporation, where he is the head of the organisation.

He was also the organiser of His Holiness' Kalachakra event in Washington and was apparently quite closely connected with Richard Gere and Samdong Rinpoche. He told me that Richard Gere can be quite miserly, 'so I didn't charge him'. Of course, he would have been saying that in jest because Richard Gere, as many of you know, has been very generous in helping the Tibetan cause; he has given a lot of his own time and money to spread awareness of the Tibetan cause.

I got to know Richard Gere a little bit when I was at Varanasi, when I met him and had some meals with him. When I said I was from Australia, he said, 'Oh, I've never been to Australia, I would like to come there some day', but he hasn't made a trip here so far. In our conversation he made comments like, 'Oh, it would be very nice if His Holiness gave a teaching on the Four Noble Truths'. I understood from this that he is interested in developing a good foundation of Dharma knowledge.

We seem to have got side-tracked from the point about the lie of deceiving others about one's realisations. We need to be very mindful of this, as these days there seem to be many self-proclaimed lamas who are engaging in this kind of behaviour.

As a way to back up the earlier points about ordination vows the commentary quotes the *Moonlight Sutra*.

"with the excellent thing (vow) of full ordination,  
Cultivate the excellent noble mind of enlightenment."

Quoting from the sutra, the commentary continues:

It also says, "of the three - is the full ordination the best or mediocre?"

Here, *of the three* refers to within the three levels of ordination vows: probationary vows, novice vows and full ordination vows. It is saying that of these three, full ordination vows are the best.

"The vessel illuminating the Jewel light  
Of the Victorious Doctrine  
Is a saffron robed child of Shakya clan  
Displaying great austerity"

In saying *the vessel illuminating the jewel light of the Victorious Doctrine is a saffron robed child of Shakya clan* the term 'child' is used in the sense of a king's heir. Just like a crown prince acting as a substitute for his father, a saffron-robed monk acts as a substitute for the Buddha. A saffron robed monk refers specifically to a monk who has taken full ordination vows, which is said to be a precious state. In these times, we can see that how, with his extensive deeds propagating the Buddha's doctrine, the Dalai Lama definitely represents the Buddha. This is how we need to understand the implication of these lines in the commentary.

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In places where the Buddha has taught it is essential for a substitute to preserve the Buddha's doctrine and make it flourish in order to benefit other beings. In these times we need look no further than His Holiness the Dalai Lama for a substitute for the Buddha.

The commentary then presents yet another qualm:

Now if you ask, when the person with an individual liberation vow takes upon a bodhisattva vow, does his/her (former vow) change its status (into latter one) or he/she will have both the vows?

Basically, the answer is that the earlier vows do not change later vows. Rather, the individual would hold both vows. Further:

In the Nesurpa's Tenrim (The Stages of the Doctrine) it is said that Jowo holds the view of vows being added progressively that he/she will have both the vows.

The main point is that an individual can hold two separate sets of vows.

Then as the commentary further explains:

Because they both are no other than a moral sense of restraint, and that abiding in any of seven individual liberation vows characterises a moral sense of restraint, they are one. They can also be treated as separate on the ground that individual liberation vows are regarded as a substance, which enables the individual to prevent and stop harming others. However, bodhisattva vows are not regarded as a substance but it enables the individual to only benefit others.

The bodhisattva vows are not vows as understood in some of the lower schools, which assert vows to be a type of form. The main thing to remember is that one has two separate sets of vows. As the commentary also mentions, this answers the fourth of the seven questions mentioned earlier, which asks whether the vows change or transform into another vow, or maintain their own identity?

The final assertion here is that one has both sets of vows. With this understanding, we need to understand that a lay man or woman who wishes to become ordained will first take the lay vows. Then based on those lay vows, they will take the novice vows. When they take the novice vows, they still have the lay vows that they took earlier. So the earlier lay vows will still be intact and then on top of that they will have novice vows. Later when the novice takes the full ordination vows then they would have the basis of the lay vows and the novice's vows, on which they lay the full ordination vows. That is how they will have all three sets of vows in their mind.

However, one needs to be able to make the distinction between a lay person who takes the lay vows, and the novice. Although a novice will have the lay vows in their mind they are not a lay person observing the lay vows. That distinction has to be understood. The monk who has full ordination vows would have the novice vows as well but he is not a novice; he is a fully ordained monk. This distinction can be understood if one is acquainted with some form of debate, otherwise it might be a bit confusing.

It is said that the bodhisattva vows are based on the restraint of the self-liberation vows, but the self-liberation

vows are not the bodhisattva vows. They are vows of restraint but not the actual bodhisattva vows. That point also has to be understood.

This will be explained more in detail later on.

The order of taking the bodhisattva vows will be explained further on, but first one has to make some sort of pledge to observe ethics or morality. While not the actual bodhisattva vow, this forms the basis on which one will take the actual bodhisattva vow. This distinction will be explained later.

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

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo*  
*Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett*  
*Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*  
*Edited Version*

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4. Give an example of how the Buddha presented the sequence of vows in accordance with the capacity of those who take those vows.

5. *Now if you ask, when the person with an individual liberation vow takes upon a bodhisattva vow, does his/her (former vow) change its status (into latter one) or he/she will have both the vows?*

## Homework

(7/11/2017) Assigned: 14/11/2017

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1. What does "bodhicitta motivation" mean?

### Answer

Bodhicitta is a Sanskrit word. In essence, it is the ultimate intention to benefit other sentient beings. Although this brief statement encompasses its meaning, there is, however, a much more elaborate explanation.

The material that we are studying now sits in the classification of Buddhist doctrine called the Mahayana or Great Vehicle. Mahayana is also a Sanskrit word which means 'Great Vehicle'. The literal translation of the word bodhicitta is 'mind of enlightenment', however it refers specifically to the mind that aspires to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Thus, it is an altruistic intention to benefit other beings. In order to be classified as belonging to the Great Vehicle doctrine, a practice has to be based on this altruistic intention to benefit other sentient beings, and the best way to benefit other sentient beings is to lead them to the state of ultimate happiness, where all suffering has been eliminated. This implies that one aspires to lead other beings to the ultimate state of happiness where all qualities are acquired, and all defilements or faults are completely eradicated. We call that state buddhahood or enlightenment.

When, through their altruistic practice and development, an individual being experiences a genuine transformation where their mind becomes imbued with that spontaneous and continuous aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings – for the purpose of leading all other living beings to that ultimate state of happiness as well – then they become a bodhisattva.

2. Avoiding the ten non-virtues is a suitable basis on which to take the bodhisattva vows.

- Name the ten non-virtues
- State why they are referred to as the harm and the basis
- State why avoiding them is a suitable basis on which to take the bodhisattva vows

### Answer

*"Moreover, the purpose of bodhisattva vow is to benefit others and for (fulfilling) this, it is imperative to prevent harm and its basis towards others, ..."*

The 'harm' and refers to the three non-virtues of the body and the four of speech, i.e. killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, refraining from lying, divisive speech, harmful speech and idle gossip. These are the seven non-virtues that cause harm. The 'basis' for these seven are three non-virtues of

the mind i.e. covetousness, harmful intent and wrong views. These ten are referred to as the harm and the basis for bringing harm to others.

As specified here, *it is imperative to prevent* any of these ten which cause harm to others. Thus, avoiding these ten forms a suitable basis on which to take the bodhisattva vows. This emphasis implies that one does not need to have taken the self-liberation vows in order to receive the bodhisattva vows. However, at the very minimum these bodhisattva vows have to be based on refraining from engaging in the seven harms and the three bases of causing harm to others.

This is logical because in the bodhisattva vows one is making the commitment to bring only benefit to other beings. So without making a strong commitment to completely refrain from harming other beings, one cannot possibly engage in the means to benefit other sentient beings.

3. When death occurs one will lose any self-liberation vows that one has taken. If one loses them then how can they be a basis for the bodhisattva vows?

### **Answer**

*In response to this, the Great Yogi says, "a walking stick helps an old man to stand up but afterwards the stick doesn't fall because the old man holds it.*

This is a very vivid analogy. An old person has to depend on a stick to stand up, but once they are actually standing up they are preventing the stick from falling down, because they are holding it up.

The commentary further explains:

*Likewise, initially the individual liberation vow serves as a basis for one to receive it (bodhisattva vow), and then afterward, one is able to refrain from harmfulness or not staggered until reaching to the state of enlightenment due to bodhisattva vow."*

In relation to the analogy presented earlier, the self-liberation vows basically encompass refraining from harming others and from engaging in the bases of that harm. That is then further held by the bodhisattva vows. Receiving the bodhisattva vows, and then practising them also encompasses refraining from harming others and the bases as well. So while refraining from harming others and its bases serves as initial basis for receiving bodhisattva vows, once the bodhisattva vows are taken, that in turn will hold and protect the self-liberation vows encompassed by those bodhisattva vows.

4. Give an example of how the Buddha presented the sequence of vows in accordance with the capacity of those who take those vows.

### **Answer**

One example of the demarcation between the two types of vows is the third of the seven misdeeds, which is refraining from sexual misconduct. When a layperson takes the vow of refraining from sexual misconduct it only refers to specific forms of misconduct. When one takes the ordination vows then the sexual misconduct entails abstaining from all sexual contact, which is the vow of celibacy.

We can see here how the Buddha presented the sequence of vows in accordance with the capacity of those who take those vows. If the Buddha had required that lay people to abstain from all sexual contact, then that would have made it very difficult for lay people to take those vows. What is manageable for lay people is to refrain from sexual misconduct, not the sexual act itself.

When someone feels they have the capacity to take the ordination vows then they make commitment to abstain from sexual contact altogether. In this way, we can see how the Buddha very meticulously and very skilfully guided disciples, so that the earlier vows serve as basis for the later vows. It is said that the self-liberation vows are the basis for receiving not only bodhisattva vows, but they also establish a suitable basis for tantric vows.

5. *Now if you ask, when the person with an individual liberation vow takes upon a bodhisattva vow, does his/her (former vow) change its status (into latter one) or he/she will have both the vows?*

### **Answer**

Basically, the answer is that the earlier vows do not change later vows. Rather, the individual would hold both vows. Further:

In the Nesurpa's Tenrim (The Stages of the Doctrine) it is said that Jowo holds the view of vows being added progressively that he/she will have both the vows.

The main point is that an individual can hold two separate sets of vows.

Then as the commentary further explains:

Because they both are no other than a moral sense of restraint, and that abiding in any of seven individual liberation vows characterises a moral sense of restraint, they are one. They can also be treated as a separate on the ground that individual liberation vows are regarded as a substance, which enables the individual to prevent and stop harming others. However, bodhisattva vows are not regarded as a substance but it enable the individual to only benefit others

The bodhisattva vows are not vows as understood in the some of the lower schools, which assert vows to be a type of form. The main thing to remember is that that one has two separate sets of vows. As the commentary also mentions, this answers the fourth of the seven questions mentioned earlier, which asks whether the vows change or transform into another vow, or maintain their own identity?

The final assertion here is that one has both sets of vows. With this understanding, we need to understand that a lay man or woman who wishes to become ordained will first take the lay vows. Then based on those lay vows, they will take the novice vows. When they take the novice vows, they still have the lay vows that they took earlier. So the earlier lay vows will still be intact and then on top of that they will have novice vows. Later when the novice takes the full ordination vows then they would have the basis of the lay vows and the novice's vows, on which they lay the full ordination vows. That is how they will have all three sets of vows in their mind.

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# Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

14 November 2017

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As usual let us spend some time for our regular meditation practice. [*Tong-len meditation*]

We can now generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings.

For those who weren't sure about the meaning of the word 'bodhicitta', it was explained in the last session that the literal translation is 'mind of enlightenment'.

It's important that we integrate the Dharma teachings into our practice. The main thing is to ensure we become more and more familiar with adopting a virtuous mind after listening to the teachings. Otherwise, putting our understanding of the Dharma on one side and our practice on the other, as if they were incompatible, would be the wrong approach and would not benefit us. This is how we receive the blessings of the Buddha. This point was discussed in last Wednesday's teaching when someone asked how one receives the blessings of the Buddha.

In terms of how the objects of refuge serve as a protection for us, we need to recall what the *actual* refuge is. As discussed previously, of the three objects of refuge – the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha – the actual refuge is the Dharma jewel. On a personal level, the Dharma jewel is whatever practice of morality one observes, such as engaging in the ten virtuous deeds and avoiding the ten non-virtuous ones. At a personal level, this would be one's actual refuge.

Of course, as presented in the teachings, the ultimate Dharma jewel is presented as true cessation [of suffering and its causes] and the true paths [to cessation]. But if one hasn't obtained true cessation and generated true paths within one's mental continuum yet, then it would be hard to understand them as being one's actual refuge. Therefore, we need to understand that it is our present practice, such as the morality of avoiding the ten non-virtues, that is our actual refuge.

Of the three objects of refuge, the teachings present the Dharma jewel in particular as the one that will protect us from being reborn in the lower realms. However, if the ultimate Dharma jewel were only true cessation and the true path, we might then develop the doubt that, since we have not yet obtained the true path and true cessation, how could the ultimate Dharma jewel protect us? So here we need to understand that it is one's practice of morality that actually protects us.

That initial doubt is reasonable, because the teachings explain that one's actual refuge or protection is the Dharma jewel, and the ultimate Dharma jewel is the true paths and true cessation. If we don't understand this in its proper context, we might think, 'How can the Dharma jewel protect me if I have not yet actualised it within my

own mental continuum?' But we can understand it as explained earlier – on our level, the actual refuge within our mental continuum is the practice of morality, such as abandoning the ten non-virtues, which will protect us from going to the lower realms. In this way, we can understand that we have the Dharma jewel within our own mental continuum, right now.

It is important to incorporate this understanding into our practice. Otherwise, if we relate to the objects of refuge, the Three Jewels, as something simply to be worshipped and have faith in – something separate from ourselves, out there high above us – we may wonder how these separate, distinct objects can actually protect us. We need to understand that the Dharma is our actual refuge, and that it is something that we need to cultivate and develop within our own mental continuum. We can then develop a clear understanding of how the objects of refuge actually protect us.

Of course, as objects of inspiration, the Buddha and Sangha jewels are also incredibly important for our development. By taking refuge in the Buddha, we generate inspiration and blessings can be received. As a source of inspiration, the Sangha jewel is particularly important, as we can directly relate to them.

As I suggested previously, we should look at the explanation of the three jewels in the lam-rim, which presents very succinct instructions about how to relate to the objects of refuge and how this practice will benefit us. As explained in the lam-rim, at the beginners' level, we need to start by adopting every single virtue and abandoning every single non-virtue or negativity that we can. This then leads us to achieving, and then being protected by, the ultimate refuge. This is how we need to understand it. This is an essential instruction to keep in mind, otherwise we may think that we have to try to reach a higher level and that until we reach that level we are not really getting anywhere. We need to understand that we begin our practice at our present level by adopting whatever virtues we can, and abandoning as many negativities as we can.

I have presented this previously many times. This is just a reminder that we need to understand this instruction about adopting virtue, or qualities, and avoiding non-virtue, or faults. Adopting every single quality, no matter how small, and avoiding even the smallest fault is the way to practise the Dharma. In that way, one's mind and practice become integrated with the Dharma. A mind that is not integrated with the Dharma is basically a mind that has non-virtuous thoughts, and that can influence one to engage in non-virtuous activities. If this occurs, the result is an unhappy mind, a mind that feels weighed down.

So the real cause of one's disturbance comes from within oneself and not from outside. By contrast, if one's mind is integrated with the Dharma, one's frame of mind will be virtuous, and the mind will naturally be much happier, much more at peace and at ease.

We can definitely see the benefit of integrating Dharma practice with one's mind. We see many who have not met with the Dharma. Once they have made that connection, then when they subsequently experience illness or disease, their minds remain quite calm and

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peaceful, despite the fact that they are physically suffering. This is a true mark or positive effect of Dharma practice on the mind. Those practitioners themselves recognise their calm mind as a benefit of their Dharma practice, and others too will see this positive effect.

If you contemplate these points you will see there is a lot to be gained from understanding them. Those who truly integrate Dharma with their practice will have a happy mind, making it easier for those who nurse or help them. Apparently, it is much easier to help and assist patients who do not exhibit much anger. By contrast, it is much harder to help those who exhibit anger and it is particularly hard to continue offering them assistance.

The main point is that practising the Dharma will help one during both good health and illness; furthermore, it offers benefits to others as well as oneself at all times.

### Suitable life-form for taking vows (cont.)

In our last session, as presented in the text, we covered the 'suitable life-form' or basis for receiving bodhisattva vows.

The most suitable basis is any individual who has taken any of the seven categories of self-liberation vows. Within those seven categories, the later ones are more supreme than the earlier ones. Thus, the full ordination vows are the most supreme of all. It was also explained that observing morality – such as avoiding the ten non-virtues – is the fundamental basis for receiving the bodhisattva vows.

There are four root vows and we need to understand what it means to break them. For example, the *root vow* 'not killing' specifically refers to refraining from taking the life of a human being; if one were to kill a human being then this would break the root vow of 'not killing'. It is not the same as the *non-virtue* of killing, which relates to all forms of life. Likewise, breaking the root vow of 'lying' would not involve just any kind of lie, but specifically a lie proclaiming that one has obtained superhuman qualities, when in fact one hasn't obtained any. This is not the same as the lying referred to in the ten non-virtues, which is any kind of lie. It is good to understand this distinction.

The main point is that an individual who practises morality is a suitable basis for receiving the bodhisattva vows; so the observance of morality is the actual basis. Among those who observe morality, the supreme basis for bodhisattva vows would be one who has taken self-liberation vows. This makes the basis very firm and stable, which is considered as a suitable basis.

We can now understand why His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, in granting bodhisattva vows, usually precedes this by offering the laypersons' vows for those who may not have taken them before. Within the audience there would be those who are already ordained, so of course, they already have the self-liberation vows. But there would also be laypeople who might not have taken laypersons' vows. For these people, His Holiness gives those vows so that they can become a suitable basis for receiving the bodhisattva vows.

### The qualities of the object bestowing the vows

Now we come to the second subdivision here, which says:

The second is Object from whom one is receiving it (Bodhisattva vow).

The verse then quoted is:

23. *Understand that a good spiritual teacher  
Is one skilled in the vow ceremony,  
Who lives by the vow and has  
The confidence and compassion to bestow it.*

The commentary explains that:

In order to make the presentation more sensible this is addressed prior to verse 22 - "The chapter on discipline in the *Bodhisattva Stages* ..."

So the commentary explains that verse 23 is addressed before verse 22 as it enhances the presentation. In explaining the meaning of verse 23, the commentary raises this rhetorical question:

Now, what type of an object or the Lama from whom one should be receiving bodhisattva vow?

Then it gives this answer:

An excellent lama as presented here should be understood and is defined as an excellent lama who is skilled in bestowing bodhisattva vow and endowed with four excellent qualities. The four excellent qualities are:

- Excellent knowledge with respect to the ritual ceremony procedure concerning perfect receiving of vows, safe guarding those from being deteriorated and renewing those which have been deteriorated
- Adherence to excellent moral discipline of bodhisattva
- Excellent endurance or confidence in bestowing bodhisattva vows
- Excellent thought of compassion

The **first quality** is *excellent knowledge with respect to the ritual*. Then the verse itself says: *who lives by the vows*. Therefore, the **second quality** referred to in the commentary is *adherence to excellent moral discipline of bodhisattva*. In order to bestow the bodhisattva vows on others, one has to observe them oneself perfectly. The **third quality** presented here is *excellent endurance or confidence in bestowing the bodhisattva vows*. In order to confer the bodhisattva vows, one needs to also have the endurance of observing the vows oneself, thus having the confidence to bestow them on others. The **fourth quality** is *excellent thought of compassion*. Indeed, when conferring the bodhisattva vows, it would have to be with incredible compassion for other sentient beings and particularly for those taking the vows. With great compassion, one then confers the vows on others. That quality of compassion definitely has to be present.

The commentary further explains:

Of the four, the first two are regarded as the main one by Shangrom and Lagsorwa; this is very true as 'A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life' by Shantideva also says, "A spiritual guide is one, who is well versed in Mahayana matter, and always displays supreme austerity of bodhisattva."

This verse from the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* is quoted to back up the point that, of the four qualities, *the first two are regarded as the main points*. We need to understand from Atisha's meticulous presentation that those who

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wish to receive the bodhisattva vows should receive them from a very compassionate and kind lama who has these four qualities. It is important for us to understand that if we wish to take the bodhisattva vows, we should ensure we are receiving them from a qualified teacher, as advised here.

Even if we have the qualities to receive the bodhisattva vows, that in itself is not sufficient, because we need to also ensure that we are receiving the bodhisattva vows from someone who is suitable to bestow them. That is a significant point. Even if one is a suitable base to receive the vows, if the object conferring the vows is not suitable, the ritual will not be intact. Of course, there is no need to mention the situation where both the recipient and the one bestowing the vows lack the necessary qualities.

As specified here, the first quality, *excellent knowledge with respect to the ritual ceremony procedure concerning a perfect receiving of vows*, is not enough; the lama must also have been *safe guarding those vows from deteriorating and renewing those which have deteriorated*. These are important points.

### The ritual of taking the vows

The third is the ritual of taking the vows. As the commentary states:

The third is the Ritual of taking the vow, which has two sub-headings - Ritual with Lama and Ritual without lama.

So, as mentioned earlier, for those wishing to take the bodhisattva vows, when the ritual is performed by a lama, the lama needs to be a suitable lama, having all the qualities intact. However, if one is unable to find a suitable lama who has all the qualities, then it is possible to take the bodhisattva vows oneself.

### The ritual of taking the vows with a lama

The next verse quoted here is:

22. *According to the ritual described in  
The chapter on discipline in the Bodhisattva  
Stages,  
Take the vow from a good  
And well qualified spiritual teacher.*

The commentary further explains:

Regarding this, the Self-Commentary says that it follows the tradition of Acharya Asanga and Master Shantirakshita. Further down then it says that the Ritual with lama is presented by relying upon the morality chapter (in the Bodhisattva Bhumi by Asanga) whereas Ritual without lama is presented by relying upon the Compendium of Trainings (Shikhsamuccaya - by Shantideva.) Jowo possesses the instruction of the three Great Chariots and of the three, he relied upon Asanga and Shantideva's tradition on the subject of engaging vow.

Hence, aside from some differences, there is no practical difference in the ritual system of the two Great Chariots. To say that they have different views in relation with the Object of receiving, ritual procedure and root downfalls on the pretext of being the followers of Madhyamika and Cittamātra is very thoughtless.

*The Bodhisattva Bhumi by Asanga* is actually presented from the Cittamātra point of view, while the instructions presented in the *Compendium of Training* are from the

Madhyamika viewpoint. While there is a premise for each of these approaches, to say that these ritual systems are completely distinct and different is mistaken. So although there is a premise for making a distinction, this would not validate one saying that there is a distinction between the *object of receiving, ritual procedure and root downfalls*: that would be a mistake.

The commentary further explains:

In here, the word 'Take the vow' indicates the basis of discussion, and then the word 'vow' indicates what to engage in, then the word 'well qualified spiritual teacher' indicates from whom to receive or take the vow which refers to an excellent lama endowed with perfect excellent qualities; and to indicate the source of the ritual to take the (vow) it says here that it is the ritual described in the chapter on morality in 'Bodhisattva Bhumi' by Arya Asanga.

Presenting all these sources in such a detailed manner indicates that this presentation of the vows themselves and how they are to be received comes from an authentic source. This presentation is not derived from just anywhere, but from authentic sources.

Up to this point, the text has been presenting how to take the ritual from a lama.

In this (ritual) there are three sections - Preliminary, Actual and Conclusion. The preliminary comprises of seven namely - supplication, rejoicing, accumulating merits, requesting, generating special thought, enquiring about common obstacles and briefly explaining the precepts.

These are the **seven preliminaries**. The commentary further explains:

The Actual section is taking upon a pledge three times of the precepts of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the past, present and future dwelling in the ten directions.

So the **actual** taking of the vows is when one recites the pledge of taking the vows. This is followed by the five concluding aspects:

The end section of ritual comprises of five namely - drawing attention, benefits of receiving the attention of sublime wisdom, not recklessly proclaiming the vow, briefly explaining the precept and thanksgiving offering.

The commentary concludes on this point by saying:

The details about these can be found in the Jowo's Explanation of ritual vows and of the chapter on morality.

To understand more about this topic, we need to refer to these teachings. There is a commentary on the chapter on morality composed by Lama Tsong Khapa which has very detailed explanations. As mentioned previously, the ritual of the bestowing of the vows is presented in the extensive lam-rim clearly and in detail. You can read about the actual bestowing of the vows, as the *Great Treatise on the Graduated Path to Enlightenment* has been translated into English. The section on how the vows are bestowed, as the lam-rim itself mentions, is extracted from the *Bodhisattva Bhumi* or the *Stages of the Bodhisattva*. This will be the topic of discussion for you on Tuesday the 19<sup>th</sup> of December as I will not be here to teach.

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The specific explanations about the *benefits of receiving the attention of sublime wisdom*, and also generating joy have been covered in detail. For those who attended the Kalachakra initiation, His Holiness also explained all of this in some detail.

It is good to read more details and become more familiar with the presentation of the taking of the vows as explained here and in the lam-rim. While the vows themselves are the same, there are differences in the ritual of bestowing the vows – the ritual of taking the vows as presented in the *Bodhisattva Bhumi* is slightly different to that in the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, which we covered in detail when we studied the text. There is yet another slightly different presentation in the other text mentioned here: *The Compendium of Trainings*. It is good to know these different presentations.

### The ritual of taking the vows without a lama

The verse relating to this is the next verse which reads:

24. *However, in case you try but cannot  
Find such a spiritual teacher,  
I shall explain another  
Correct procedure for taking the vow.*

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

General promise to explain it is expressed here. Despite one's great effort in finding a qualified lama as described here to take vow, if one completely fails to find such a lama due to one's location and circumstances, what should one do?

If one is keen to take the bodhisattva vows, one needs to attempt to find a suitable lama to bestow the vows – a lama who, as mentioned earlier, has all of the qualities intact. If one has tried to seek a lama who has these qualities and has not been able to find one due to circumstances or location then, in order to present the next point, a rhetorical question is asked, *what should one do?* The commentary answers:

There is also a ritual ceremony which is specially designed to take the vow oneself, without requiring a lama, this is correctly explained here.

So there is a ritual ceremony of taking the vows which is *specially designed* for taking the vows oneself in the event that one does not find a qualified lama to receive them from.

These are important points for us to understand and incorporate into our practice. We can learn this from the example of the great Atisha himself. When he first went to Indonesia to meet with Lama Suvarnavipa (Lama Serlingpa), Atisha did not immediately take the vows from Lama Serlingpa. He first received teachings as a way to check out the lama. Of course, there was no need from Atisha's side to really check him out, because he would have known the qualities right away. However, he practised like this as a way for future disciples to understand how to receive vows and so forth from a lama. One should not take a lama in the same way a hungry dog finds a piece of meat and gobbles it up. Rather, one needs to investigate and check, and once one sees the qualities of the lama, that is when one commits oneself to being a disciple of that lama.

From the examples of the past masters, we can see that this was indeed how they practised. Some masters have

explained that, even if the lama has certain qualities, one of the main reasons one should further check the lama is that, on a personal level, one would find whether one could generate strong faith in this particular lama. That is why one should investigate or check the lama.

Also, there are occasions where the lama would check out the disciple before actually giving a teaching. This is shown in the life story of Milarepa. Marpa did not readily give teachings to Milarepa, and gave him many tasks as a way to check whether he was really keen and would be able to put the Dharma into practice or not. So there are occasions where the disciple takes time to check the lama, and there are occasions where the lama checks out the disciple before giving a teaching. These practices were followed by the earlier masters. However, in this time and age, we find that these practices tend to be ignored, or are too difficult to follow perhaps.

Then the commentary explains that the ritual for taking the bodhisattva vows without a lama comes from an authentic source, and it is not just something made up recently.

Now, if one asks what is the scriptural source for the ritual without a lama?

This is to reassure us that it is possible to take the vows; even when there is no qualified lama to be found, there is the possibility to take that vow oneself.

We can conclude here for this evening. We will recite *The King of Prayers* and we can dedicate specifically for Venerable Tsepal's late mum, who passed away last Thursday. Venerable Tsepal herself is an old student of Tara Institute who is very dedicated. Prior to becoming a nun, she was of a kind and gentle nature, and after becoming a nun she has continuously engaged in the practice of Dharma and became gentler. So she is a good-natured student of Tara Institute. Thus we can keep her mum in mind when we dedicate this practice. Her mum seemed very joyful and happy in her later years and was perhaps 92 when she passed away. Venerable Tsepal herself looked after her mum very well. So that is also a great source of virtue and inspiration.

It seems that all her sisters and Tom, her brother, were all able to come to see their mum before her passing. I think many of them were there together when their mum actually passed away. So it appears that her mum passed away in good circumstances surrounded by her loving family.

As I have mentioned previously, to dedicate we do the visualisations and generate the thought that, just as the dedication is made here, may it actually be so. [*Recitation of The King of Prayers*]

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 Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version*

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**4. The actual taking of the vows is when one recites the pledge of taking the vows. This is followed by the five concluding aspects. What are they?**

**5. What is the main reason that one should investigate or check the lama?**

2017

## *Homework*

(14/11/2017) *Assigned: 2/11/2017*

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**1. What is the main thing we need to integrate from Dharma teachings into our practice?**

**Answer:**

It's important that we integrate the Dharma teachings into our practice. The main thing is to ensure we become more and more familiar with adopting a virtuous mind after listening to the teachings. Otherwise, putting our understanding of the Dharma on one side and our practice on the other, as if they were incompatible, would be the wrong approach and would not benefit us. This is how we receive the blessings of the Buddha. This point was discussed in last Wednesday's teaching (8/11/29017) when someone asked how one receives the blessings of the Buddha.

**2. What is the actual Dharma jewel, at both a personal and ultimate level?**

**Answer**

In terms of how the objects of refuge serve as a protection for us, we need to recall what the actual refuge is. As discussed previously, of the three objects of refuge - the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha - the actual refuge is the Dharma jewel. On a personal level, the Dharma jewel is whatever practice of morality one observes, such as engaging in the ten virtuous deeds and avoiding the ten non-virtuous ones. At a personal level, this would be one's actual refuge.

Of course, as presented in the teachings, the ultimate Dharma jewel is presented as true cessation [of suffering and its causes] and the true paths [to cessation]. But if one hasn't obtained true cessation and generated true paths within one's mental continuum yet, then it would be hard to understand them as being one's actual refuge. Therefore, we need to understand that it is our present practice, such as the morality of avoiding the ten non-virtues, that is our actual refuge.

Of the three objects of refuge, the teachings present the Dharma jewel, in particular, as the one that will protect us from being reborn in the lower realms. However, if the ultimate Dharma jewel were only true cessation and the true path, we might then develop the doubt that, since we have not yet obtained the true path and true cessation, how could the ultimate Dharma jewel protect one? So here we need to understand that it is one's practice of morality that actually protects oneself.

That initial doubt is reasonable, because the teachings explain that one's actual refuge or protection is the Dharma jewel, and the ultimate Dharma jewel is the true paths and true cessation. If we don't understand this in its proper context, we might think, 'How can the Dharma jewel protect me if I have not yet actualised it within my own mental continuum?' But we can understand it as explained earlier - on our level, the actual refuge within our mental continuum is the practice of morality, such as abandoning the ten non-virtues, will

protect us from going to the lower realms. In this way, we can understand that we have the Dharma jewel within our own mental continuum, right now.

**3. “Now, what type of an object or the Lama from whom one should be receiving bodhisattva vow?”**

**Answer**

An excellent lama as presented here should be understood and is defined as an excellent lama who is skilled in bestowing bodhisattva vow and endowed with four excellent qualities. The four excellent qualities are:

- Excellent knowledge with respect to the ritual ceremony procedure concerning perfect receiving of vows, safe guarding those from being deteriorated and renewing those which have been deteriorated
- Adherence to excellent moral discipline of bodhisattva
- Excellent endurance or confidence in bestowing bodhisattva vows
- Excellent thought of compassion

**4. The actual taking of the vows is when one recites the pledge of taking the vows. This is followed by the five concluding aspects. What are they?**

**Answer**

The end section of ritual comprises of five namely – drawing attention, benefits of receiving the attention of sublime wisdom, not recklessly proclaiming the vow, briefly explaining the precept and thanksgiving offering.

**5. What is the main reason that one should investigate or check the lama?**

**Answer**

Some masters have explained that, even if the lama has certain qualities, one of the main reasons one should further check the lama is that, on a personal level, one would find whether one could generate strong faith in this particular lama. That is why one should investigate or check the lama.

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# Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

21 November 2017

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

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings incorporating into it, to the best of one's understanding of bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment.

As I've mentioned previously, it is really important to engage in the practice of meditation as it is one of the best ways to bring about physical and mental wellbeing. It is important to understand and acknowledge that both internal and external conditions affect one's mental wellbeing. You need to recognise what these are and then try to further develop those conditions and increase them.

It is the same with our physical wellbeing; there are external conditions and internal conditions, and it is also good to understand and acknowledge what they are as a way to further develop those conditions. With this understanding, the main thing is to acquire the good conditions for one's wellbeing that one has not yet acquired, and increase those that one has already obtained. And one needs to avoid the adverse conditions one has not acquired yet, and abandon those one already has acquired.

When the causes and conditions for happiness are intact then the consequence is that one will experience happiness. Likewise, if the conditions for happiness are lacking, then one will not experience a genuine sense of happiness. There are also causes and conditions for suffering, and when these causes and conditions are intact then the consequence is the experience of suffering, even if one doesn't wish for it. When the conditions for suffering are removed then one will not experience suffering. So it is good to know that there are causes and conditions for both happiness and suffering.

As acquiring these conditions depends entirely upon oneself, one cannot blame others for one's lack of happiness or experience of suffering. If one lacks happiness, then one needs to acquire the appropriate conditions to experience a sense of wellbeing and happiness. Likewise, if one is experiencing any level of suffering, then the conditions that will remove those causes of suffering need to be applied. This basic fact indicates that we should take more responsibility for our own wellbeing. In fact, on a more profound level, it can be encouraging to know that we do have that ability to acquire those conditions.

While these teachings are presenting the ways that the practices of bodhisattvas benefit other sentient beings, we need to understand that on a personal level we need to begin by securing our own wellbeing and happiness. Then on the basis of our own wellbeing and happiness,

we will be able to extend benefit and wellbeing to others as well.

In summary, happiness doesn't come about by waiting around and wishing to be happy; the conditions for one's happiness have to be acquired. Waiting for suffering to just cease naturally is also pointless, as the right conditions also have to be acquired. We all naturally wish for everything to go well, but leaving it as a wish only causes more misery. If wishing for happiness alone could indeed bring about happiness then we should all be very happy by now, as most of us have already spent twenty to thirty years wishing to be happy and striving for that happiness.

Apparently, there are some who have waited for the right person to appear in their life, and are still waiting for that to happen after many years. They might even end up waiting for the 'right person' until the end of their life!

What does meeting the right person mean anyway?

*Student 1:* Someone who makes you happy.

*Student 2:* Someone who fulfils your desires.

That, of course, is a completely wrong approach. If you are not able to fulfil your own desires, then how could you possibly expect someone else to do that for you? If there was anyone who could have fulfilled all your wishes and desires to make you entirely happy, then Buddha Shakyamuni would have already done that long ago.

We have also come into contact with some very great and precious teachers who have all the perfect qualities intact, but if we don't make the effort from our own side, then it doesn't help much.

These days there are many who have a rinpoche as their partner. If anyone could fulfil your wishes, then perhaps a rinpoche could! However, there was an American lady who was married to a rinpoche, and she once made the comment, 'Although he's a rinpoche he's got more desire than me!' If that was true, then how could someone who has more desire than you fulfil your wishes? I don't think she was exaggerating, as it was her own experience.

Nagarjuna gave a very succinct description of the meaning of wealth, he said 'the meaning of wealth is to be content!' That is to say, that one's desires will be fulfilled when one develops contentment. This is really true.

Coming back to the main point, all of you have a good basis of understanding the law of karma i.e. the natural consequences of cause and effect. The main criteria for being able to acquire what one wishes for and to avoid negative circumstances is to abide by the law of karma.

## The manner of taking vows

### The ritual of taking vows without a lama (cont.)

Having covered the first verse under this heading, the commentary now poses a rhetorical question:

Now, if one asks what is the scriptural source for the ritual without lama?

Having previously explained that there is a ritual for taking the vows without a lama, the next verse presents an authentic scriptural source.

25. *I shall write here very clearly,  
As explained in the Ornament  
Of Manjushri's Buddha Land Sutra,  
How, long ago, when Manjushri  
Was Ambaraja, he aroused  
The intention to become enlightened.*

Then the commentary explains the meaning of this verse.

The specific promise to explain it is expressed here. As explained in the Ornament Of Manjushri's Buddha Land Sutra, once upon a time of the immeasurable aeon, Manjushri was born as the Chakravarti king called Ambaraja or Sky King, and at that time in front of the Tathagatha called the King of the Melodious roaring dragon, He generated the unsurpassable mind of enlightenment. This is lucidly written here. As to the explicit presentation of the bodhicitta and the manner of holding the vow in that sutra, it [the root text] says:

This explanation should be quite clear. As the commentary indicates, the next six verses in the root text are actually quoted from the *Ornament of Manjushri's Buddha Land Sutra*.

The verses for taking the vows are:

26. *"In the presence of the protectors,  
I arouse the intention to gain full  
enlightenment.  
I invite all beings as my guests  
And shall free them from cyclic existence.*
27. *"From this moment onwards  
Until I attain enlightenment,  
I shall not harbour harmful thoughts,  
Anger, avarice or envy.*
28. *"I shall cultivate pure conduct,  
Give up wrong-doing and desire  
And with joy in the vow of discipline  
Train myself to follow the Buddhas.*
29. *"I shall not be eager to reach  
Enlightenment in the quickest way  
But shall stay behind to the very end  
For the sake of a single being.*
30. *"I shall purify limitless  
Inconceivable lands  
And remain in the ten directions  
For all those who call my name.*
31. *"I shall purify all my bodily  
And my verbal forms of activity.  
My mental activities, too, I shall purify  
And do nothing that is non-virtuous."*

These verses from the sutra are to be recited when one takes the bodhisattva vows without a lama.

Then the commentary explains:

Having offered the seven limbed practices to the Three Jewels, take the vow by utilising the awakening mind generation statement by the Manjushri Ambaraja,

Here 'take the vow' refers to reciting the verses that have just been quoted. As a way to back this up the commentary continues:

It says, in 'Compendium of Trainings' (Shikhsasamuccaya by Shantideva),

As you will recall the ritual of taking the bodhisattva vows with a lama is in accordance with the presentation in the *Bodhisattva Bhumi*, or *Bodhisattva Grounds*. Here, the ritual of taking the bodhisattva vows without the lama is in accordance with Shantideva's *Compendium of Trainings* or *Shikhsasamuccaya*. Although both texts include presentations of taking vows from a lama and taking vows without a lama, the commentary specifies that the ritual for taking vows without a lama is from the *Compendium of Trainings*.

"Following the supplication prayer to the Spiritual Master, one either repeats after the preceptor or recites it by oneself - O Preceptor, please listen to me, I named so and so.

When the *Compendium of Trainings* says, *Following the supplication prayer to the Spiritual Master, one either repeats after the preceptor or recites it by oneself*, it is referring to the fact that according to the *Compendium of Trainings*, in the ritual of taking vows from a lama one repeats the vows after the preceptor or lama, and if there is no lama present then one recites the vows by oneself. However, an important point to note is that one needs to visualise the Buddha in front of oneself and imagines repeating the verses after the Buddha and receiving the vows from the Buddha.

If there is a preceptor one begins the ritual saying

O Preceptor, please listen to me.

The connotation of the Tibetan word translated here as *please listen to me* is 'Please listen to me as I have a request to make'. So there is this additional connotation of 'I have something to request'. This is of course in accordance with what we do in daily life. When we want to request something from someone we first get their attention, and having done that we say: 'Oh, can you please listen to me, I have a request to make', and then you ask whatever favour you want from them.

It's basically the same here. Out of great veneration and respect for the lama, one first prostrates to him, makes mandala offerings, and then with one's palms joined at one's heart, one says, whilst kneeling, 'oh please pay attention to me.

This is in line with requests made to the Buddha such as in the *Vajra Cutter Sutra*, where it begins with Subhuti kneeling on his right knee and making the request to the Buddha to please teach. It is in accordance with that tradition that one kneels on one's right knee when taking the vows.

Having made that request to listen, one says

I named so and so

The indication here is that one actually states one's name after the request to listen. Then the ritual continues:

Then, one says, "just as mentioned in the *arya Manjushri's Buddha Land Sutra* how in the past the Arya Manjushri actively generated the mind of enlightenment, so too I generate the mind."

The most potent part of this is the actual vow: *just as Arya Manjushri generated the mind of enlightenment, I too will also generate this mind of enlightenment.*

As the commentary then explains:

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If one prefers the short version then simply recite this three times and take the bodhisattva vow.

After repeating the short vow three times, one then generates the conviction that one has received the bodhisattva vows.

For someone who is taking the vows for the first time, at the end of the third repetition one generates the strong conviction that 'I have now received the bodhisattva vows intact'. For those who have previously received the vows that have since degenerated, after the third repetition one generates the mind, 'the degenerated bodhisattva vows have now been restored'. For those whose previously obtained bodhisattva vows have remained intact without any degeneration, one generates the thought, 'the purity of my vows is now further increased'.

Having developed the conviction that one has either received the bodhisattva vows that had not been obtained before, restored previously obtained but since degenerated vows, or increased the undegenerated vows obtained previously, one then generates a mind of great joy for having engaged in this incredibly good deed of taking the vows. After that one can recite verses such as those from the *Six Session Yoga*, 'From today I've become a child of the Buddhas' and so forth. Otherwise one can recite a few verses which are in the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

I'm mentioning these extra points as a reminder for those who are practising regularly. Any understanding that you have can be incorporated into what is being explained here. Your understanding will be enhanced when you remember that there are similar points in other texts to a point in the text you are now studying.

Having received the bodhisattva vows, henceforth one has to observe the eighteen root vows and the forty-six auxiliary vows.

After the explanation of the short version of reciting the few lines mentioned earlier, the commentary explains the extensive version of taking the vows:

However, the extensive version of the ritual is to repeat these (Verse 26 - 31) three times, from the line 'In the presence of the protector,' up to 'And do nothing that is non-virtuous.'

So, one takes the vows in the extensive manner by reciting all of these verses three times.

Next, the commentary further explains:

The *Compendium of Trainings* takes into account of both the Ritual with and without Lama, so this was explained earlier. But in here it follows the system of the Ritual without Lama.

The word *here* means that the *Lamp for the Path* extracts its presentation from the *Compendium of Trainings*, and presents it as a ritual to take the vows without a lama.

As mentioned in the commentary:

To elaborate it there is two - generating the mind and correctly taking the vow.

### Generating the mind

Generating the mind means generating the mind into the unsurpassable perfect state of complete

enlightenment in the presence of the Protector-Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

One takes the bodhisattva vows in the presence of a visualised assembly of *protector-buddhas and bodhisattvas*. Thus, one visualises all buddhas and bodhisattvas as being present when one takes the vows.

By taking the vows in the presence of all buddhas and bodhisattvas one has made a great promise in front of a great assembly. Thus, when one holds the vows properly and maintains them well, the benefits are unimaginably great. But if one doesn't practice according to the advice, then one will incur great negativity, for one is being unfaithful to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The connotation of *unsurpassable* is that there is no other state beyond the state of enlightenment.

The purpose of generating it is to host all sentient beings equal to the limits of space or in another words to benefit them all.

As a host, what does one offer all sentient beings who are one's guests? As the commentary explains:

What one will offer to them is to ferry those who are stranded in samsara, release those who are bound, revive those who are breathless, and lead those who have not yet gone completely to the state beyond sorrow. Sharawa regards this as the preliminary to the engaging mind and the actual aspiring mind.

### Correctly taking the vow

Regarding the section on taking the Bodhisattva vows or the pledges to engage in (Bodhisattva deeds), there are three sub-headings.

What is presented here is called the pledge of morality. As I've explained previously the pledge of morality is not actually the bodhisattva vow; it is merely making a promise to observe morality.

### The pledge of morality

Here the pledge of morality is to observe the three types of morality:

- the morality of restraining from negative deeds
- the morality of gathering virtue
- the morality of benefitting sentient beings.

I've explained these three types of moralities many times in the past. We can say that basically all bodhisattva deeds are subsumed into these three types of morality. The practices of the six perfections are also subsumed into these three practices of morality.

The extensive lam-rim explains how all the bodhisattva deeds are subsumed into the three of abiding, maturing one's own mental continuum, and maturing the minds of other sentient beings. **Abiding** refers to the first morality of restraining from negative deeds. **Maturing one's own mind** refers to the morality of gathering virtues, and **maturing the minds of others** refers to the morality of benefiting other sentient beings. These points are very meticulously presented.

Yet, another way of understanding is that the bodhisattvas' deeds are basically subsumed into two main categories:

- engaging in activities to fulfil one's own purpose; and

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- engaging in activities to fulfil the purpose of other sentient beings.

Both the morality of refraining from negative deeds, and the morality of gathering virtue, are subsumed into engaging in activities to fulfil one's own purpose, while the morality of benefitting other sentient beings is subsumed into engaging in activities for the purpose of benefitting other sentient beings.

We can relate this to the following verse in *The Foundation of All Good Qualities*

By clearly recognising that developing bodhicitta  
Without practising the three types of morality  
I will not achieve enlightenment  
Please bless me to practise the bodhisattva vows with  
great energy.

When reciting this in the past you might have wondered what 'practising the three types of morality' actually refers to. Now you have the answer, as that is what is being explained here.

The actual definition of morality is the mind of restraint. With that definition you might wonder how the definitions of the morality of gathering virtues, and the morality of benefitting others fit into the definition of a mind of restraint?

The lam-rim specifically explains that when one engages in gathering virtues on the basis of restraining from misdeeds, then that is the morality of gathering virtues. Likewise, engaging in the means to benefit other sentient beings on the basis of restraint from misdeeds is referred to as the morality of benefitting other sentient beings. As both are based on the morality of restraint from misdeeds they are presented as a morality. This is how you need to understand this point.

Next the commentary explains:

The first is the pledge of the morality of refraining (from negativities) which means to pledge that from the day of taking the vow until achieving the unsurpassable state of enlightenment one will give up the following four arising due to the cause of any of the nine types of antagonistic [or harmful] attitudes.

I have explained the nine *types of antagonistic attitudes* many times in the past. As explained in the teachings, with any one of these nine attitudes one will generate a mind of harmfulness, as a result of which anger arises. As also explained in the teachings, beings in the higher form and formless realms have no anger, because they don't have the basis of these nine attitudes.

In relation to **oneself**, one generates the mind that so and so is such an enemy; they have harmed me in the past, they are harming me now, and they will harm me in the future and that is a cause for anger to arise.

In relation to **one's friends or relatives**, thinking that so and so has harmed my relatives in the past, is harming them now, and will harm them in the future, is again a cause for anger to arise.

In relation to **one's enemy**, thinking so and so has benefitted my enemy in the past, is benefitting my enemy now, and will benefit my enemy in the future, generates anger and is the cause of wishing to harm other beings.

Then the commentary lists *the four arising due to any one of these nine antagonistic attitudes*. The first two are:

Harmful thoughts such as the thought of killing (someone) out of hatred.

Feeling irritated and belligerent towards others.

As I've explained many times again, anger is one of the six root delusions, whereas belligerence is a secondary delusion.

Lati Rinpoche once asked Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey to explain the difference between anger and belligerence and Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey explained that belligerence only arises in relation to animate objects, not inanimate objects, while one can feel anger towards both animate and inanimate objects. Lati Rinpoche agreed with that, saying that making this distinction is a good point.

The main point here is that anger is a root delusion. The secondary delusion of belligerence is a wish to really harm the other, which arises out of an anger that has escalated and has become really strong. We can see that there is a difference in how these states of mind are generated. When anger first arises, it is just a state of mind that generates a harmful intention that doesn't reach the point of actually wanting to do something about actively engage in harming them. It's more a mind of unease about the other. Then when that starts to escalate further it can become resentment, which is a state of mind where one actually wants to do something about it, thinking 'Wait until I get the opportunity'. Then with belligerence one thinks 'I'll definitely strike them with my stick'. It has come to the point of really wanting to take action to harm them.

The third is:

Being miserly and not wanting to give away one's possessions to others.

The two things we can give are material things or the Dharma. If one has the means and does not give to someone in need, such as a beggar, then if the four conditions are intact, one would incur an infraction of the bodhisattva vows.

Fourth is:

Feeling jealous and finding other's success unbearable.

This is another very important point to be mindful of.

The commentary continues:

This implies the length of time too.

This refers to the duration of the vows, which is from the time that one has taken the vows until one achieves enlightenment. The length of time also applies to the next point:

It is also important to refrain from acts of sexual conduct by engaging in pure conduct, and to give up wrongdoing together with its causes of desire for sensual objects.

The first part is quite explicit and easy to understand. *Wrongdoing* or negative karma is actually a non-virtue itself, and *with its causes* refers to the desire for sensual objects which are the desire objects of the five senses - nice sights, nice fragrances, nice sounds, nice taste, and nice tactile objects. Developing desire for these sensual

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objects is a cause of wrongdoing or negative karma. Then the commentary summarises:

By giving up these and taking joy in observing pure morality, one should train oneself well in following the noble deeds of the Buddha.

### **The pledge of the morality of benefitting sentient beings**

The second is the pledge of morality of benefitting sentient beings, which means to generate a determined spirit to remain for a limitless time or for as long as samsara remains to benefit even one single sentient being; there should not be any sense of impatience or expectation to swiftly achieving enlightenment whatsoever.

As presented here, the emphasis is not on thinking, 'I should achieve enlightenment quickly for my own benefit'. Rather one should generate the mind of wanting to remain in samsara to benefit sentient beings, for as long as there are sentient beings in samsara.

This explanation is in accordance with other explanations. There's a point in the *Six Session Guru* relating to this after the presentation of the eighteen root vows. As other texts explain, rather than falling into a tainted mind of wanting to achieve enlightenment quickly for one's own purpose, the altruistic mind of wishing to benefit sentient beings lasts for as long as there is just one sentient being in samsara. The altruistic intention is, 'I will remain in samsara as a way to benefit them, and lead them out of that state'.

Basically, the morality of benefitting sentient beings is, of course, in accordance with generating the mind of bodhicitta. There are also practical ways of benefitting other sentient beings. In fact, as I've also presented previously, there are actually eleven different ways of helping. When you're travelling, for example, and you see someone with a load that is difficult for them to carry, help them to carry their load, and so forth. There are many practical ways of benefitting other sentient beings. I've also presented this in the past so you can look that up.

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 Mark Emerson  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version*

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4. When taking the vows without a lama one recites the vows by oneself. However, what else should one do while taking the vows?

5. All bodhisattva deeds are subsumed into three types of morality. What are they?

6. There are nine antagonistic attitudes. List the four that arise from them.

## **Homework**

(21/11/2017) *Assigned: 28/11/2017*

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1. How does abiding by the law of karma relate to experiencing happiness ourselves, and how does experiencing happiness ourselves relate to the practices of bodhisattvas and benefit other sentient beings

### **Answer**

When the causes and conditions for happiness are intact then the consequence is that one will experience happiness. Likewise, if the conditions for happiness are lacking then one will not experience a genuine sense of happiness. There are also causes and conditions for suffering, and when these causes and conditions are intact then the consequence is the experience of suffering, even if one doesn't wish for it. When the conditions for suffering are removed then one will not experience suffering. So it is good to know that there are causes and conditions for both happiness and suffering.

As acquiring these conditions depends entirely upon oneself, one cannot blame others for one's lack of happiness or experience of suffering. If one lacks happiness then one needs to acquire the appropriate conditions to experience a sense of wellbeing and happiness. Likewise, if one is experiencing any level of suffering, then the conditions that will remove those causes of suffering need to be applied. This basic fact indicates that we should take more responsibility for our own wellbeing. In fact, on a more profound level, it can be encouraging to know that we do have that ability to acquire those conditions.

While these teachings are presenting the ways that the practices of bodhisattvas benefit other sentient beings, we need to understand that on a personal level we need to begin by securing our own wellbeing and happiness. Then on the basis of our own wellbeing and happiness, we will be able to extend benefit and wellbeing to others as well.

2. Nagarjuna gave a very succinct description of the meaning of wealth. What is this description?

### **Answer**

Nagarjuna said 'the meaning of wealth is to be content'! That is to say, that one's desires will be fulfilled when one develops contentment. This is really true.

3. A. Name the authentic scriptural source for taking the bodhisattva vows without a lama?  
B. Which verses of the root text by Atisha do they correspond with?

### **Answer**

A. The next verse presents an authentic scriptural source.

25. *I shall write here very clearly,  
As explained in the Ornament  
Of Manjushri's Buddha Land Sutra,  
How, long ago, when Manjushri  
Was Ambaraja, he aroused  
The intention to become enlightened.*

Then the commentary explains the meaning of this verse.

The specific promise to explain it is expressed here. As explained in the Ornament Of Manjushri's Buddha Land Sutra', once upon a time of the immeasurable aeon, Manjushri was born as the Chakravarti king called Ambaraja or Sky King, and at that time in front of the Tathagatha called the King of the Melodious roaring dragon, He generated the unsurpassable mind of enlightenment. This is lucidly written here. As to the explicit presentation of the bodhicitta and the manner of holding the vow in that sutra, it [the root text] says:

B. The verses for taking the vows in Atisha's root text are verses 26-31.

4. When taking the vows without a lama one recites the vows by oneself. However, what else should one do while taking the vows?

**Answer**

If there is no lama present then one recites the vows by oneself. However, an important point to note is that one needs to visualise the Buddha in front of oneself and imagines repeating the verses after the Buddha and receiving the vows from the Buddha.

5. All bodhisattva deeds are subsumed into three types of morality. What are they?

**Answer**

### **The pledge of morality**

Here the pledge of morality is to observe the three types of morality:

- the morality of restraining from negative deeds
- the morality of gathering virtue
- the morality of benefitting sentient beings.

The extensive lam-rim explains how all the bodhisattva deeds are subsumed into the three of abiding, maturing one's own mental continuum, and maturing the minds of other sentient beings.

**Abiding** refers to the first morality of restraining from negative deeds. **Maturing one's own mind** refers to the morality of gathering virtues, and **maturing the minds of others** refers to the morality of benefiting other sentient beings. These points are very meticulously presented.

6. There are nine antagonistic attitudes. List four that arise from them.

**Answer**

1. Harmful thoughts such as the thought of killing (someone) out of hatred.
2. Feeling irritated and belligerent towards others.
3. Being miserly and not wanting to give away one's possessions to others.
4. Feeling jealous and finding other's success unbearable.

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# Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

28 November 2017

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

I will have to bring you out of meditative equipoise now, as the only one who can teach or listen to the Dharma in meditative equipoise is the Buddha! This is a unique feature of the Buddha. No-one else could listen to a teaching while at the same time meditating or engaging in single-pointed concentration.

## **Correctly taking the vow (cont.)**

As explained previously, when one makes a pledge when generating aspirational bodhicitta, one is not actually receiving the bodhisattva vows. Similarly, the pledge to practise the morality of benefiting sentient beings is simply a pledge, and is not referred to as 'taking a vow'. As also explained earlier, the extensive ritual of taking the engaging bodhisattva vows is by reciting Verses 26 to 31.

## **The pledge of the morality of benefitting sentient beings**

The commentary further explains:

The second is the pledge of morality of benefiting sentient beings, which means to generate a determined spirit to remain for a limitless time or for as long as samsara remains to benefit even one single sentient being; ...

From this explanation we need to understand that there is a system for generating bodhicitta with the aspiration of achieving enlightenment quickly in this very lifetime, which is presented specifically in the tantric system. In the sutra system, generating bodhicitta generally involves engaging in the bodhisattva deeds over many lifetimes and accumulating merit and purification over many eons. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has commented that making a pledge to benefit sentient beings, even if it takes many lifetimes, seems to show a much stronger determination.

Generating the aspiration to achieve enlightenment very quickly, possibly in this very lifetime, is said to be a unique feature of the tantric system. For example, in the Tara sadhana, having generated strong determination to achieve enlightenment very quickly, one engages in the practice of Tara in that spirit. Saying 'I will engage in the practice of Tara' (meaning to visualise Tara and recite the mantras etc.) is the unique feature.

The wording itself says, 'I will enter into the meditation and recitation of the Tara practice. 'Meditation' here refers to the self-generation (or prime generation) of Tara and 'recitation' refers to the recitation of the mantra.

Here the commentary notes that:

... there should not be any sense of impatience or expectation to swiftly achieve enlightenment whatsoever.

Developing very strong determination, 'for the sake of liberating all sentient beings from samsara, I will remain in samsara' represents a very strong determination to free sentient beings and work for their welfare. There are different ways of benefiting sentient beings, such as the eleven different ways that I touched on last week. One engages in these different methods of benefitting sentient beings and working for their welfare while still in samsara. This is a very strong altruistic state of mind, which requires the development of a level of determination in order to benefit sentient beings.

Similarly, as a verse in the *Guru Puja* says:

Even if I must remain for an ocean of eons in the fiery  
hells of Avici  
For the sake of even one sentient being,  
I seek your blessings to complete the perfection of  
joyous effort,  
To strive with compassion for supreme  
enlightenment and not be discouraged.

I bring in these points from other teachings so that you can incorporate them into your understanding. When you get an understanding from one source it's easier to relate it to other instances where a similar topic is mentioned.

What one needs to understand here is that someone with a strong self-interest cannot develop the kind of altruistic mind that seeks to benefit other sentient beings to such a great extent. Only someone who has overcome the self-cherishing mind and self-interest is capable of developing such a determination to work for other sentient beings. Understand here that working towards developing this determination is a means to combat the self-cherishing mind.

Here one also needs to understand that until and unless one overcomes a self-cherishing mind, the doorway to the Mahayana will not open for oneself - it will be blocked. Blockage to the door of the Mahayana path does not refer to physical blocks like a passageway blocked by obstructions. Rather it means that for as long as one harbors a self-cherishing and self-interested mind, the doorway to the Mahayana will forever be blocked. However, as soon as one overcomes the self-cherishing and self-interest mind, one's personal doorway to the Mahayana will open.

As explained in our last session, there are three types of morality. According to the lam-rim, the first morality of refraining from misdeeds is an explicit morality according to the definition, which is to refrain from misdeeds. As the lam rim explains, when one's practice of gathering virtues and benefiting sentient beings is based or conjoined with morality, then it is referred to as 'the morality of gathering virtues and benefiting other sentient beings'. However, some other texts explain that there is a particular morality of gathering virtues and a particular morality of benefiting sentient beings.

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## The pledge of the morality of gathering virtue

The commentary highlights the heading:

The third is the pledge of morality of gathering virtue

When bodhisattvas engage in the means to acquire virtues which have not been accumulated in the past, establish the virtues that have already been created, and further increase those virtues, the understanding of the morality in this context would be that acquiring or gathering virtues is the basis of having morality.

The commentary explains that the morality of gathering virtue:

... relates to the question of what Bodhisattvas will do if they choose to remain (until the end of samsara).

And further:

During that time Bodhisattvas thoroughly purify flaws such as prickles and cliffs and so forth of countless Buddha's fields possessing inconceivable qualities.

This may seem a bit ambiguous, but it is actually referring to the 'pure lands'. So *thoroughly purify flaws such as prickles and cliffs*, is a contrast to the impure lands, which refers to the impurity of being contaminated and in the nature of suffering. An environment which is in the nature of suffering has objects which cause suffering, such as thorns and pebbles and uneven grounds. In fact, every contaminated object in the impure lands is an object that causes suffering in one way or another. By contrast, in the pure lands everything is said to be only pleasurable – even the ground is explained as being very soft and spongy, i.e. when you take a step it sinks a bit and reforms its shape when you lift your foot up. I guess it is like those mattresses which conform to your shape as you lie down.

To *thoroughly purify* means to purify the impure lands and the impure objects through one's practice to establish oneself and others into the pure lands which have no causes for suffering. That is how we need to understand it.

So, 'thoroughly purify' means to purify the truth of suffering i.e. transform the contaminated objects which are in the nature of suffering into uncontaminated pure objects, which are only a cause for happiness.

As the commentary further explains:

Bodhisattvas wish sentient beings to be benefited simply by hearing or remembering their names, or simply by seeing, hearing, recognising or touching them. As Bodhisattvas' names spread and remain throughout the ten directions, they also purify the world of sentient beings.

This is the extent of the bodhisattvas' aspirations to benefit beings, where even *by hearing* about them, and *seeing them*, can alleviate the sufferings of sentient beings.

On a personal level, these instructions serve as a means for us to pay heed to generating such aspirations. Whenever one engages in a practice of accumulating merit and purifying negativities, one needs to make strong aspirations such as, 'May the merits that I accumulate in this way serve as a cause to benefit sentient beings through various different means'. This means that besides giving teachings and leading others

on the path where one is actually helping to liberate them, when they merely see and hear about one it becomes a cause to alleviate their suffering.

This is how we should understand that just reciting the incomparably kind buddhas' names becomes a cause to purify a lot of negative karmas. This is possible, not because of some sort of miracle, but because the buddhas themselves (whose names we recite), had themselves accumulated extensive merits and purified all negativities in the past when training on the path, and dedicated their merits entirely for the benefit of sentient beings. Now that they are enlightened beings, when sentient beings merely hear and recite their names it becomes a cause for happiness.

Particular enlightened beings are said to be extremely powerful for removing obstacles and generating compassion, such as Tara and Chenrezig or Avalokiteshvara. When we make strong and sincere prayers to them we experience a positive effect. This is because when they were training on the paths they had developed an intensely strong altruistic mind of love and compassion and made very powerful aspirational prayers. Thus, when sentient beings pray to them they swiftly receive spontaneous benefit. When we incorporate this understanding into our practice now, it shows us the immense benefit of developing an altruistic mind and making strong aspirations.

The commentary further explains:

Hence, the former one purifies the environment and the latter one purifies sentient beings. The beginners should particularly focus on practising the morality of refraining from negativities.

The emphasis here is that *beginners* need to *focus* on the practice of *morality*. As explained previously, *the morality of refraining from negativities* refers particularly to the seven negativities of the body and speech within the ten non-virtues. On the level of the physical body, refraining from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct and on the level of speech, refraining from lying, divisive speech, harsh words and idle gossip. When one makes a strong commitment to refrain from these seven misdeeds, it serves as a profound basis to protect one from a host of other downfalls of the bodhisattva vows and tantric vows. Hence, observing these seven also becomes the basis of observing the tantric vows. It is in this way that we need to understand that a lot of misdeeds can be avoided by observing these seven very well.

The commentary mentions:

To summarise again, it is vitally important to purify all negative actions of body, speech and mind, and to resolve that until achieving enlightenment, at any cost not commit any negative actions through the three doors.

As an after-note the commentary says:

Some scholars consider this as the summary of the above mentioned.

This is quite clear.

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## **The presentation on training in the precepts after taking vow<sup>1</sup>**

This third subdivision has three subheadings:

- Training in the precept of morality
- Training in the precept of the mind
- Training in the precept of wisdom.

The presentation here is of the three higher trainings and, in this context, this is to be understood as the *morality* that specifically relies on observing the bodhisattva vows one has taken. *Training in the precept of the mind* specifically refers to developing the calm abiding, while *training in the precept of wisdom* refers particularly to developing special insight.

### **Training in the precept of morality**

This has two subheadings:

- Actual
- Its characteristics

#### **Actual**

Now the commentary further presents:

The first one relates to the previous statement that one should purify body, speech and mind. Now the question is what is the cause of purifying (them)?

We can see here how meticulously the teaching is presented. Earlier it said that in summary, *it is important to purify all negative actions of body, speech and mind*, and having mentioned this it now says:

Now the question is what is the cause of purifying (them)?

Having said one needs to purify them, it goes further and asks, 'What are the causes of purifying them?'. Here we can see how the very presentation teaches us to use a systematic and logical approach to help us increase our own logic and intellect for reasoning.

The commentary now presents the verse in the text which presents the trainings.

32. *When those observing the vow  
Of the active intention have trained well  
In the three forms of discipline, their respect  
For these three forms of discipline grows,  
Which causes purity of body, speech and mind.*

From the understanding that we gain from these lines, we can see how meticulously it has been explained.

As I have mentioned previously, when reading texts such as this one, it is important not to just skim over it. Rather spend time reading each line and try to derive the meaning and contemplate it. That in itself is really a meditation! It becomes a good meditation because when we focus on these words, and contemplate on their meaning, it keeps our mind in virtue.

The commentary now explains the meaning of this verse:

It is said that this verse shows how through training, one's morality practice and respect for it will grow; ...

This is a precise sort of instruction saying that as one engages in the training of *morality*, one's natural respect

for the morality *will* naturally *grow*. Also, as part of the actual training, observing the morality will also increase naturally. This is a very significant point.

The commentary explains this again profoundly:

... while the next verse then shows how the growth of morality will result in quickly completing the accumulation which is the cause of the Complete enlightenment.

The emphasis here is that when one's morality increases the *result* will be to *quickly* complete *the accumulation which is the cause of complete enlightenment*.

The commentary goes on to explain that:

Furthermore, the word "trained" is the basis of the presentation here. If you ask what it is that one trains in? The answer is the three precepts of morality.

It then says:

Who is training? It is the bodhisattvas who are abiding in the vow which reflects the nature of the engaging mind.

Next, comes another question:

For what purpose do the bodhisattvas undergo training?

Again, we can see how meticulously and logically the meaning of the text is presented. The text presents this answer to that hypothetical question:

The bodhisattvas undergo the training in order to purify their own body, speech and mind of moral downfalls as well as to greatly benefit sentient beings.

Incorporate this as a personal instruction. If one asks the question, 'What purpose does it serve to train in morality?', the answer is to create the causes to achieve enlightenment by purifying one's own body, speech and mind, as a way to benefit sentient beings. This is how we can relate it to our own personal practice. Ultimately the purpose is to create the causes for achieving enlightenment as a way to benefit sentient beings.

The commentary now explains the training:

In relation with how to train, as the text says "trained well" the implication of which is to train well or in accordance with (the precepts) of morality.

The next hypothetical question asks what one is achieving:

Having thus trained in it, what will one achieve?

As an answer, the commentary explains:

If one trained well in those three moralities with effort, and then due to the force of acquaintance one would later on cherish and develop respect with a deep sense of regard for them.

The commentary further explains:

The word "well" here refers to 'trained well' and conveys three meanings - to become pure, irreversible and fully complete.

First the meaning of *pure* is explained:

One will become pure like a physically elegant person through the training of the morality of refraining (from negativities)

Next it explains the meaning of *irreversible*:

One will become irreversible or unperishable from the state of complete enlightenment through the training of the morality of benefiting sentient beings

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<sup>1</sup> This heading was introduced on 31 October 2017. It is third part of the heading Engaging in bodhisattva precepts. The other two sub-headings were Taking Engaging Vows, and the section we have just finished, The Manner of Taking Engaging Vows

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like a chronic disease which has been completely purged

Finally, the meaning of *fully complete*:

One will become fully complete (with virtues) through the training of the morality of gathering virtues like a well-filled vase.

The commentary continues:

The etymology of the term Bodhisattva (byang-chub sempa in Tibetan), a great Bodhisattva can be also interpreted from the perspective of above three.

The commentary explains quite specifically how the term 'bodhisattva', the 'great bodhisattva' relates to the three trainings of morality, particularly by using the Tibetan term for bodhisattva *jang-chub sempa*.

The word *jang* has the connotation of purifying, as explained here:

Through morality of refraining (from negativities) or a sense of moral restraints one can purify (byang in Tibetan) all faults or negativities.

The next word 'chub' has the connotation to acquire.

Through morality of gathering virtues one can accomplish or realise (chub in Tibetan) all the excellent qualities

That is the meaning of *jang chub*. The next words *sempa chenpo* literally mean 'great mind'.

Through morality of benefiting sentient beings one can become a great/noble being or Courageous/heroic one (*sempa chenpo* in Tibetan)

In taking these words literally, a great mind refers to taking on the *courageous* mind of benefiting all *sentient beings*. That is the meaning of *great* here. One can now see how the practice of the three moralities relates to what constitutes a bodhisattva, with the meaning of a bodhisattva ultimately meaning enlightenment, because *jang-chub* is also the term for enlightenment. While someone aspiring to achieve enlightenment is a bodhisattva, the actual state of enlightenment is the ultimate state. Understanding this we can recognise how by training in the three moralities one achieves the ultimate state of enlightenment.

### The characteristics

The second is the characteristics (of training in the precept of morality), regarding which the text says ...

The following verse from the root text is quoted here:

**33. Therefore, through effort in the vow made by Bodhisattvas for pure, full enlightenment, The collections for complete enlightenment Will be thoroughly accomplished.**

The commentary explains the meaning:

Through training in the three moralities, one's body, speech and mind will be purified, and hence one can achieve the result, Enlightenment which is characterised by having thoroughly purified all that is to be abandoned and fully equipped with the remedial force.

This passage again uses *jang-chub*, the Tibetan words for enlightenment - becoming completely purified of all negativities and fully accomplishing all the qualities. Hence, having all the qualities that can be achieved through the results of the three trainings.

The commentary further explains:

Aimed at that (Enlightenment) for the sake of other beings, and through applying mindfulness and alertness with sincere great respect and effort, Bodhisattvas are able to fully gather two accumulations of merit and wisdom, the causes to achieve the unsurpassed complete enlightenment.

This second part explains that when aiming at *enlightenment for the sake of other sentient beings*, aided by *applying mindfulness and alertness with a sincere great respect and effort*, this is expressing the means by which *bodhisattvas gather the two accumulations of merit and wisdom which are the causes to achieve the two bodies of the Buddha; the form body and wisdom truth body*. These establish *the causes to achieve complete enlightenment*.

### Training in the precepts of the mind

The second is training in the precept of the mind which has two: Training in Calm Abiding in order to gain clairvoyance and How to train in Calm Abiding.

Training in the precepts of the mind is subdivided into two:

- Training in calm abiding in order to gain clairvoyance (or 'higher perceptions')
- How to train in calm abiding.

If you can just read the text a bit and familiarise yourself with it prior to the next presentation, then when we go through it the meanings will dawn upon you more clearly and it will be quite easy to follow. So, do some reading and preparation for our next sessions. For example, when it mentions 'certain categories' you should know what those categories are and be able to list them out.

As the text presents the topic on calm abiding, I will be asking you what the nine stages of calm abiding are, what are the five faults and six powers etc. and you will have to be able to list them correctly!

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 Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Jill Lancashire  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version*

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## Homework

(28/11/2017) Assigned: 05/12/2017

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1. What is the main point to be taken from the "The pledge of the morality of benefitting sentient beings"?

**Answer:**

The commentary further explains:

The second is the pledge of morality of benefitting sentient beings, which means to generate a determined spirit to remain for a limitless time or for as long as samsara remains to benefit even one single sentient being; ...

From this explanation we need to understand that there is a system for generating bodhicitta with the aspiration of achieving enlightenment quickly in this very lifetime, which is presented specifically in the tantric system. In the sutra system, generating bodhicitta generally involves engaging in the bodhisattva deeds over many lifetimes and accumulating merit and purification over many eons. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has commented that making a pledge to benefit sentient beings, even if it takes many lifetimes seems to show a much stronger determination.

And

... there should not be any sense of impatience or expectation to swiftly achieve enlightenment whatsoever.

2. What is the main obstacle to generating this mind of Bodhichitta?

**Answer**

What one needs to understand here is that someone with a strong self-interest cannot develop the kind of altruistic mind that seeks to benefit other sentient beings to such a great extent. Only someone who has overcome the self-cherishing mind and self-interest is capable of developing such a determination to work for other sentient beings. Understand here that working towards developing this determination is a means to combat the self-cherishing mind.

Here one also needs to understand that until and unless one overcomes a self-cherishing mind, the doorway to the Mahayana will not open for oneself – it will be blocked. Blockage to the door of the Mahayana path does not refer to physical blocks like a passageway blocked by obstructions. Rather it means that for as long as one harbors a self-cherishing and self-interested mind, the doorway to the Mahayana will forever be blocked. However, as soon as one overcomes the self-cherishing and self-interest mind, one's personal doorway to the Mahayana will open.

**3. Explain the meaning of “The pledge of the morality of gathering virtue”?**

**Answer**

When bodhisattvas engage in the means to acquire virtues which have not been accumulated in the past, establish the virtues that have already been created, and further increase those virtues, the understanding of the morality in this context would be that acquiring or gathering virtues is the basis of having morality.

The commentary explains that the morality of gathering virtue:

... relates to the question of what Bodhisattvas will do if they choose to remain (until the end of samsara).

**4. How can merely hearing and/or reciting the names of the buddhas become a cause for happiness?**

**Answer**

Just reciting the incomparably kind buddhas' names becomes a cause to purify a lot of negative karmas. This is possible, not because of some sort of miracle, but because the buddhas themselves (whose names we recite), had themselves accumulated extensive merits and purified all negativities in the past when training on the path, and dedicated their merits entirely for the benefit of sentient beings. Now that they are enlightened beings, when sentient beings merely hear and recite their names it becomes a cause for happiness.

Particular enlightened beings are said to be extremely powerful for removing obstacles and generating compassion, such as Tara and Chenrezig or Avalokiteshvara. When we make strong and sincere prayers to them we experience a positive effect. This is because when they were training on the paths they had developed an intensely strong altruistic mind of love and compassion and made very powerful aspirational prayers. Thus, when sentient beings pray to them they swiftly receive spontaneous benefit. When we incorporate this understanding into our practice now, it shows us the immense benefit of developing an altruistic mind and making strong aspirations.

**5. What do the three higher trainings relate to in the context of taking the Bodhisattva vows?**

**Answer**

The presentation here of the three higher trainings, in this context, is to be understood as the morality that specifically relies on observing the bodhisattva vows one has taken. Training in the

precept of the mind specifically refers to developing the calm abiding, while training in the precept of wisdom refers particularly to developing special insight.

**6. What happens when one's morality increases?**

Answer

When one's morality increases the *result* will be to *quickly complete the accumulation which is the cause of complete enlightenment*. Incorporate this as a personal instruction. If one asks the question, 'What purpose does it serve to train in morality?', the answer is to create the causes to achieve enlightenment by purifying one's own body, speech and mind, as a way to benefit sentient beings. This is how we can relate it to our own personal practice. Ultimately the purpose is to create the causes for achieving enlightenment as a way to benefit sentient beings.