
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

11 September 2018

We will begin with the usual meditation.

[meditation]

Now try to reinforce this motivation of wishing to achieve full enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. Think that you are listening to this profound teaching for that reason and promise to follow it up with practice.

It is not good enough just to think that whatever you practise or whatever teaching you receive is the Mahayana Dharma. More important is that you qualify yourself as a Mahayanist or a Mahayana follower. In order to call yourself as a Mahayana follower, you must sincerely appreciate and follow the Mahayana Dharma from the depth of your heart and practise it in thought and deed.

In order to recognise and appreciate all the excellent qualities possessed by a fully enlightened being such as a buddha, you also have to recognise and appreciate the qualities possessed by bodhisattvas, as only bodhisattvas can become buddhas. In other words, if you do not see any excellent qualities within bodhisattvas, then you are not appreciating any qualities possessed by a buddha. What makes the bodhisattvas very precious and unsurpassingly unique is their altruistic intention to benefit all sentient beings, and their spirit and determination to carry the burden of fulfilling the welfare of other beings.

A bodhisattva is defined as someone who has cultivated bodhicitta, which is an altruistic aspiration to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Not only do they possess this excellent altruistic mental attitude but, motivated by this they engage in virtuous deeds such as the six perfections to actually benefit other beings. This is how a bodhisattva eventually reaches the fully enlightened state of a buddhahood and achieves the truth and form bodies of a buddha.

Those of you who consider yourself as old students might find hearing this same thing over and over again is a bit of a strain on your ears. But the fact is that you can't instantaneously achieve the state of buddhahood, which is a completely perfectly state of enlightenment, free of all faults and endowed with all the excellent qualities. Rather it is a very long gradual process in which you work on trying to overcome all faults one by one, and trying to achieve all qualities one by one. Then, in the end, you reach the perfect state of enlightenment.

If we relate this state of the buddhahood to ourselves, then at the moment we have the potential to reach to that perfect state of enlightenment. But just knowing we have this potential is not enough to reach it. What we need to understand is that in order to fulfil that buddha potential we have to make an effort to get rid of all faults, one fault

at a time, and then work on cultivating and developing the excellent qualities, one excellent quality at a time. Although we are ordinary beings at the moment, we can achieve full enlightenment by gradually and progressively eliminating all the faults and achieving all the excellent qualities.

We need to ensure that our Dharma practice and mind are integrated together, not with the mind here, and the practice there. For example, if you are practising compassion, then it should be cultivated within your mind and you should be feeling a sense empathy for those who are suffering, instead of not feeling any sense of empathy or care with the suffering of other beings. With the practice of compassion our reaction to those who are afflicted with suffering is to say, 'Can I help you?' or go and help them. That's practice!! If we don't practice, there is perpetual suffering and unhappiness in our lives. If we don't put Dharma into practice, then no matter how long and how much we study Dharma, our mental continuum will never be subdued, and we won't reduce the suffering in our life; just like you can't boil something in warm water we cannot change the negative habits that result in suffering.

If you understand the benefits of cultivating loving kindness and wish to practise it, then your mental attitude towards others, particularly those who are very unhappy, should be one of wholeheartedly wishing them to be happy and expressing your desire to help them by asking, 'What can I do for you?'. In this way you are telling them you care about and love them. You can't say, 'He's unhappy, but I can't help'. The bottom line is everyone needs and appreciates loving kindness, and compassion. We all are same in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering.

Good learning and good practice should go hand in hand. Good learning but no practice is not enough! 'I know, I know, I know' is not enough. Practise loving kindness and caring, then the mind will change, which is good.

You have heard this before but its important always to remind yourselves that the indication of progress in the Dharma is not so much how much we know about Dharma, but the transformation within our mind. That is how we measure our progress. As the great Lama Tsongkhapa said, you measure how you are going with meditation or spiritual practice by knowing whether or not there is an increase or decrease in your compassion for other beings, in your mental afflictions and un your faith in 'your spiritual gurus and the Dharma.

We really have to be aware of this as we follow our spiritual practice, and look at the differences and changes with respect to our mental attitude and behaviours before and after we met the Dharma. Here, we should particularly focus on whether, after our meeting with Dharma, we have reduced the amount of negative states of mind such as anger, jealousy, and hatred and so forth. As part of our Dharma practice we should make a regular assessment on this basis and try to make a conscious effort to direct our practice to counteract negative states of mind. For instance, whenever we experience any unhappiness in life we should, as spiritual practitioners be looking for the cause

within ourselves rather than trying to look for some external cause. Always try to point your mind inwards because, as we all know, the source of all our suffering is really the mental afflictions.

If we look outside for the cause of suffering and difficulties and unhappiness, we won't be able to find it. But we can find it if we look inside. Having found that, we need to recognise and understand the cause of suffering very clearly and see that as our true enemy. Then we can try to work to counteract and defeat that enemy. In that way you will be able to reduce the suffering in your life.

I once quoted the passage by Atisha saying that we should be always proclaiming our own faults, and not the faults of others. Yet we do quite the opposite; we are always trying to hide and cover our own faults and weaknesses, while finding every opportunity to point out the faults of other beings. Atisha also said we should be proclaiming the qualities of others and be humble about our own qualities and try to keep them to yourself. Yet in practice, the way we think is contrary to this great advice.

Basically, what we want to achieve through spiritual practice is to subdue our own mental continuum. And in order to do this we have to recognise what makes our mind very wild and very uncontrolled – it is the mental afflictions that we continuously generate in our mind that are the real faults. By recognising that and trying to overcome and to remove these faults then we can see the result of our mind naturally becoming softer and gentler, more wholesome, peaceful and so forth.

HOW ONE TRAINS IN SPECIAL INSIGHT

The result of meditating on special insight

The actual meaning (cont.)

To return to the commentary:

In short, everything within *this world existence comes from the conceptualisation* of grasping at true existence, therefore it is rooted in it, and in *the nature of conceptual construction*. Those who fully *eliminate* and uproot *conceptualised* grasping together with its latencies will attain *the higher state of nirvana*, the supreme non-abiding nirvana enabling them to accomplish the welfare of their own self and that of others.

Establishing by scripture

The second is Establishing It By Scripture.

The Bhagawan Buddha said:

The great ignorance of conceptualisation
Causes us to fall into the ocean of samsara.
Abiding in the state of non-conceptual
concentration
Is as clear as a space free from conception.¹

The *Dharani of Entering Non-conceptuality* (Sanskrit: *Avikalpapraveshamadharani*, Tib: *rNam par mi rTog pa la 'Jug pa'i gZungs*) also says:

Verse 57

*When bodhisattvas non-conceptually contemplate
The excellent teaching, they will transcend
Conceptuality, so hard to overcome,
And eventually reach the non-conceptual state.*

The scriptures cited here are from both the sutra and tantra.

Then the commentary continues:

As to the question of the scriptural source to attest that worldly existence (samsara) comes from conceptual thought, and through meditating on selflessness we can eliminate conceptualised grasping together with its latencies, the above quote by the Bhagawan ...

Here the commentary raises a question relating to the scriptural sources giving evidence to show that this conceptualisation is the source of the worldly existence of samsara.

The term *conceptualisation* refers to grasping at a true self, or the conception of a self. In terms of our own experience this refers to the innate sense of 'I' which naturally arises within us. That conception of the self is really the source of worldly existence. We talk about ordinary and superior beings. What makes beings superior? I would point to the attribute of having overruled this conception of a self or self-grasping as making a person a superior being.

Not only that, but once someone has freed themselves from the rule of this sense of 'I' or this self-grasping, then they no longer create propelling karma or actions. So, the question is: what is the scriptural source to show that this is the case? What scriptural source shows that this conceptualisation is the source of samsara? What is the scriptural source for the assertion that *the realisation of selflessness* has the capacity to overcome this conceptualisation, together with its seeds?

There also a statement by Asanga saying that one who realises the truth no longer creates propelling actions, where *seeing the truth* refers to directly seeing ultimate truth, at which point you'll no longer create any throwing or propelling karma.

The implication here is that in order for a karma to be a throwing karma then it has to be the result of a strong form of the conception of an 'I' or self-grasping. The person who has directly realised selflessness has freed themselves from this self-grasping and hence no longer a slave to it. We call such a person a superior or transcendent being, because they are no longer under the thumb of self-grasping.

The commentary continues with:

...the above quote by the Bhagawan from the Sambhuta Tantra clarifies it.

As said in it, the syllogistic statement is Given (the subject): the object of knowledge, the conception of grasping at things is the great ignorance which serves as the root cause of samsara, because it is the doer (perpetrator), who causes us to fall into the depthless ocean of samsara.

This clearly points to *the conception of grasping at things*, which is self-grasping, *as the root cause of samsara*. In terms of the twelve links, this is the first link of

¹ Essentially this is verse 56.

ignorance. In terms of the four noble truths, there's the truth of suffering, followed by the truth of the cause of the suffering, and the truth of the cessation of suffering, followed by the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering. When we drill into the truth of suffering then we find that suffering arises from karma, which in turn has arisen from delusions, or mental afflictions. If we further dip into the mental delusions we find that eventually they are all rooted in this self-grasping, which is grasping at this inherently existing self.

The words 'grasping at a self' refer to this deep-down innate sense of 'I' or some sort of self identity, and it's important to recognise that this is the root cause of all our suffering. The stronger that sense of 'I' is, the stronger the delusions, and the greater the karmas we create which throw us into this cyclic existence.

When we think of the conception of a self, it's important we don't think of it as some sort of idea, or doctrine relating to a view of self. When we hear about this conception of self it is critical that we relate it to this deeply engrained sense of self within ourselves, and then try to understand how we exist with that sense of 'I', which is that it seems that we have a very inherent and independent existence. As just mentioned, the stronger we grasp at that inherent or intrinsic self as the ultimate reality of ourselves, the stronger the thoughts of seeing those who are distant from us with a stronger sense of aversion, and the stronger the attachment to those who are close to us. And we know how actions arise from strong attachment and aversion. Therefore, when we talk about this conception of a self-grasping it's important to relate it to this deeply engrained sense of 'I' within us.

Then the commentary continues:

The 'doer' (ignorance) is attributed with the prefix 'great', which is appropriate. As said in the *Treasury of Deathlessness* (Tib: *Chimed mdZod*):

The great, the supreme and the immeasurable,
Signifies the traits of the learned, the diligent and
the passionate.
Superb, marvellous doer is called great. ????

The meaning of this is quite self explanatory. All these words have the same meaning even though we use them in different contexts. We can call those who are learned in this understanding, *great supreme, and immeasurable*, and so forth.

Having established the meaning of the first two lines (verse 55) by the scriptures - 'the nature of this world existence which has come from conceptualisation' and so forth - we now establish the meaning of the next two lines (verse 55) by the scriptures, 'thus the elimination of conceptuality is the higher state of nirvana'. As an antidote to the conception grasping at true existence, you probe into the meaning of selflessness and at the end of your final analysis, when you have gained the definite ascertainment of it (the meaning of selflessness), *abide in the non-conceptual concentration, free from conception*. You need to remain there to become familiar with it (non-conceptual concentration) and when you achieve complete familiarity, you will vividly perceive suchness or the ultimate nature of mind with the non-conceptual awareness, *as clear as an autumn space free from clouds*, as all the dualistic

conceptions together with their latencies are dispelled.

This is mentioned in the *Union of (Sun and Moon?) Tantra*. As the saying of the sages goes, 'The perfect is not perfect', and the same reasoning is used here.

As a further scriptural source, it is also mentioned in the *Dharani of Entering Non-conceptuality* that if you abide single-pointedly in meditative equipoise on profound emptiness, you can remove the veil of conceptual elaboration.

It says, 'Having gained the wisdom arisen from listening and contemplating the profound Mahayana noble Dharma, bodhisattvas contemplate and meditate on the non-conceptuality which opposes the mental attention to the sign (of true existence). As a result, they will transcend the difficult to transcend, the net of the conceptuality sign, and eventually achieve the awareness of non-conceptuality'.

The second is the Summary.

Verse 58

*Having ascertained through scripture
And through reasoning that phenomena
Are not produce nor inherently existent,
Meditate without conceptuality.*

By relying on the corpus of definitive scriptures and stainless reasoning, ascertain and thoroughly understand the lack of true or inherent production of all phenomena encompassing the person and the aggregates, and then you meditate single-pointedly on the meaning of suchness without any sign of conceptuality.

It is said,

Following the listening, take the practice to the
heart
And with ease, free from the stain of birth.

The second is the presentation of the results.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

Here we'll just read through the commentary again.

Verse 59

*Having thus meditated on suchness,
Eventually, after reaching 'heat' and so forth,
The 'very joyful' and then others are attained
And, before long, the enlightened state of
Buddhahood.*

Having thus trained in the common practices beginning with taking refuge, and all the practices relating to the person of small and middling stages, you generate the two of the wishing and engaging minds of enlightenment. Following that, you meditated on suchness with calm abiding and special insight supplemented by the vast method. There is a purpose to this meditation in that it enabled you to traverse the small, the middling and great path of accumulation, eventually attaining the four stages (of the path of preparation) resembling the certain discernment such as 'heat' and so forth. Relying on the super-mundane or transcendental wisdom, you would then attain the very joyful one and others which encompasses from the second bhumi (bodhisattva levels) to the tenth vajra-like meditative concentration. In this way, in fact, you will attain all the short-term results. Consequently, before long, you will quickly attain the ultimate result of the great enlightened state of buddhahood characterised by three bodies, five sublime wisdoms.

You will then spontaneously perform enlightened activities to ripen and liberate an infinite number of fortunate beings. The stream of these enlightened activities will flow until the end of cyclic existence. It is said, (Maitreya's *Ornament for Clear Realisation*) 'Likewise, it is accepted that the continuation of action will never cease until the end of samsara'.

Over the next two Tuesday nights you can hold a discussion on the content of this section The Presentation of the Results. This heading contains in a very short form a lot of very important and interconnected topics. It is important to know not only the various topics individually but also how these are structured and interconnected.

What follows after this and will continue up to the end of the text is a presentation of the Tantrayana. Most likely we will give just a summary. What you'll find in the commentary will give you a good framework, and those of you who are more interested can study in your own way.

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

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Edited Version*

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Homework

Sept 11th, 2018 teachings

1. What is the indication of progress in our Dharma practice?

The true indicator of progress in our Dharma practice is the transformation within our mind. That is how we measure our progress. As the great Lama Tsongkhapa said, you measure how you are going with meditation or spiritual practice by knowing whether or not there is an increase or decrease in your compassion for other beings, in your mental afflictions and in your faith in your spiritual gurus and the Dharma.

We really have to be aware of this as we follow our spiritual practice, and look at the differences and changes with respect to our mental attitude and behaviours before and after we meet the Dharma. Here, we should particularly focus on whether, after our meeting with Dharma, we have reduced the amount of negative states of mind such as anger, jealousy, and hatred and so forth. As part of our Dharma practice we should make a regular assessment on this basis and try to make a conscious effort to direct our practice to counteract negative states of mind. For instance, whenever we experience any unhappiness in life we should, as spiritual practitioners be looking for the cause within ourselves rather than trying to look for some external cause. Always try to point your mind inwards because, as we all know, the source of all our suffering is really the mental afflictions.

If we look outside for the cause of suffering and difficulties and unhappiness, we won't be able to find it. But we can find it if we look inside. Having found that, we need to recognise and understand the cause of suffering very clearly and see that as our true enemy. Then we can try to work to counteract and defeat that enemy. In that way you will be able to reduce the suffering in your life.

2. Quote scriptural sources giving evidence to show that conceptualisation is the source of the worldly existence of samsara.

The Bhagawan Buddha said:

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Causes us to fall into the ocean of samsara.
Abiding in the state of non-conceptual concentration
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The scriptures cited here are from both the sutra and tantra.

Then the commentary continues:

As to the question of the scriptural source to attest that worldly existence (samsara) comes from conceptual thought, and through meditating on selflessness we can eliminate conceptualised grasping together with its latencies, the above quote by the Bhagawan ...

3. Quote scriptural sources giving evidence to show that self-grasping is the root cause of samsara and how realisation of selflessness can be beneficial.

The commentary continues with:

...the above quote by the Bhagawan from the Sambhuta Tantra clarifies it.

As said in it, the syllogistic statement is Given (the subject): the object of knowledge, the conception of grasping at things is the great ignorance which serves as the root cause of samsara, because it is the doer (perpetrator), who causes us to fall into the depthless ocean of samsara.

This clearly points to *the conception of grasping at things*, which is self-grasping, as *the root cause of samsara*. In terms of the twelve links, this is the first link of ignorance. In terms of the four noble truths, there's the truth of suffering, followed by the truth of the cause of the suffering, and the truth of the cessation of suffering, followed by the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering. When we drill into the truth of suffering then we find that suffering arises from karma, which in turn has arisen from delusions, or mental afflictions. If we further dip into the mental delusions we find that eventually they are all rooted in this self-grasping, which is grasping at this inherently existing self.

The words 'grasping at a self' refer to this deep-down innate sense of 'I' or some sort of self identity, and it's important to recognise that this is the root cause of all our suffering. The stronger that sense of 'I' is, the stronger the delusions, and the greater the karmas we create which throw us into this cyclic existence.

When we think of the conception of a self, it's important we don't think of it as some sort of idea, or doctrine relating to a view of self. When we hear about this conception of self it is critical that we relate it to this deeply engrained sense of self within ourselves, and then try to understand how we exist with that sense of 'I', which is that it seems that we have a very inherent and independent existence. As just mentioned, the stronger we grasp at that inherent or intrinsic self as the ultimate reality of ourselves, the stronger the thoughts of seeing those who are distant from us with a stronger sense of aversion, and the stronger the attachment to those who are close to us. And we know how actions arise from strong attachment and aversion. Therefore, when we talk about this conception of a self-grasping it's important to relate it to this deeply engrained sense of 'I' within us

The realisation of selflessness has the capacity to overcome this conceptualisation, together with its seeds.

There a statement by Asanga saying that one who realises the truth no longer creates propelling actions, where *seeing the truth* refers to directly seeing ultimate truth, at which point you'll no longer create any throwing or propelling karma.

The implication here is that in order for a karma to be a throwing karma then it has to be the result of a strong form of the conception of an 'I' or self-grasping. The person who has directly realised selflessness has freed themselves from this self-grasping and hence no longer a slave to it. We call such a person a superior or transcendent being, because they are no longer under the thumb of self-grasping.

4. How can the higher state of Nirvana be achieved?

The elimination of conceptuality leads to the achievement of the higher state of Nirvana. As an antidote to the conception grasping at true existence, you probe into the meaning of selflessness and at the end of your final analysis, when you have gained the definite ascertainment of it (the meaning of selflessness), *abide in the non-conceptual concentration, free from conception*. You need to remain there to become familiar with it (non-conceptual concentration) and when you achieve complete familiarity, you will vividly perceive suchness or the ultimate nature of mind with the non-conceptual awareness, *as clear as an autumn space* free from clouds, as all the dualistic conceptions together with their latencies are dispelled.

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Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

2 October 2018

We'll continue with the teaching on the *Lamp for the Path* commentary. Basically, we will read the commentary text then clarify some points relating to important questions raised in the commentary.

In terms of the commentary outline, we are at the second main heading, which is:

2. BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE METHOD OF ENGAGING IN MANTRA

This presentation relates to the Mantrayana, which is also called the resultant vehicle. In contrast, the Sutrayana or the vehicle of perfection of wisdom is called the causal vehicle. There are three sub-headings:

2.1. Necessity of receiving the initiations for engaging in the vajra vehicle

This obviously shows that, before disciples can engage in tantric practice, they need to fulfil all the prerequisites, including receiving initiation/empowerment, which is a ceremonial permission to practise given by a qualified teacher.

2.2. Who can or cannot actually receive the two higher initiations

This raises the question of who is or is not appropriate to receive the two actual higher initiations.

2.3. The question of whether or not it is appropriate to teach and study tantra without receiving the two higher initiations

2.1. NECESSITY OF RECEIVING THE INITIATIONS FOR ENGAGING IN THE VAJRA VEHICLE

Tantric practice is known by different terms, such as Vajrayana or vajra vehicle; Tantrayana; secret mantra or Mantrayana; the method vehicle; or resultant vehicle. Each term literally refers to certain unique characteristics of tantric practice.

We can't go in detail here, but generally, in the case of Vajrayana, for example, *yana* means vehicle, which can refer to the spiritual path that carries one to (enlightenment); and *vajra*, in a definitive sense, refers to the Vajrasattva yoga (concentration on transcendental wisdom, which is the inseparable union of method and the wisdom and is indestructible. The term tantra means continuity or thread, and can refer to the unbroken lineage of tantric teachings.

The term secret mantra implies that these teachings should be practised discreetly, and not be revealed to those who are not suitable. As to the term mantra, *man-* means the mind and *-tra* means protection, so mantra means protection of the mind. The mind here specifically refers to the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and emptiness. Hence, in an ultimate sense, mantra is a

means of protecting one's mind from ordinary perception and conception.

Tantra is called the method vehicle because it employs a superior method for achieving enlightenment. It is also called the resultant vehicle because, in tantra, you take the four purities of the resultant state of enlightenment into the path. The four complete purities relate to the pure vision within which tantric practitioners engage in their practice:

1. Place – in the tantric path, you visualise the place you are in as an actual pure land.
2. Body – you visualise yourself as the deity.
3. Enjoyment or resources – what you utilise represents the uncontaminated nectar or the perfect resources of an enlightened being.
4. Deeds – simulating the deeds of an enlightened being.

This first heading or section has three sub-sections:

2.1.1. The recipient

2.1.2. Conferring of ripening initiation upon that person

2.1.3. Significance of conferring initiation

2.1.1 The recipient

The first heading refers to verses 60 and 61, which read:

Verse 60

*If you wish to create with ease
The collections for enlightenment
Through activities of pacification,
Increase and so forth, gained by the power of
mantra.*

Verse 61

*And also through the force of the eight
And other great attainments like 'the good pot'-
If you want to practice secret mantra,
As explained in the action and performance
tantras.*

The commentary reads:

When Jowo visited Tsang, including Khu and Ngog, six disciples posed five questions of which the last three were related to mantra.

The three questions are:

If you have not received the vajra preceptor initiation, are you fit to teach tantra or not? Are celibates allowed to receive the two higher initiations or not? If you have not received the initiation, are you fit to practise secret mantra or not?

The commentary continues:

The answer to the first question is provided in Verse 67 [of this root text], '... listen to or explain the tantras' and so forth.

The answer to the second question is provided in Verse 64 [of this root text], 'Because the Great Tantra of the primordial Buddha' and so forth. The answer to the third question is provided in Verse 61 [of this root text], 'As explained in the action and performance tantras' and so forth.

Just as those who follow the vehicle of perfect wisdom achieve all their goals for themselves and for others by engaging in the six perfections and the four means (of gathering disciples), ...

So here we note that another term used to refer to Sutrayana is the perfection vehicle, through which Mahayana practitioners achieve their goals for

themselves and for others by engaging in the six perfections. The six perfections are the main deeds of this vehicle, whereas the main thought or motivation that drives these deeds is the bodhicitta mind.

We should also note that when we speak of 'vehicle', we speak of two separate vehicles: the perfection vehicle or Sutrayana, and the Mantrayana. However, when we speak of the Buddhist philosophical views, we only speak of the four schools of tenets and don't speak of their differences in terms of Sutrayana and Tantrayana. This implies that, as far as the profound view of emptiness as the final view to be attained goes, there is no difference between Sutrayana and Mantrayana – it is the same view as presented by the great Indian masters, such as Chandrakirti.

However, these masters do differentiate between Sutrayana and Mantrayana with respect to the subjective mind that realises the profound view of emptiness. They explain that the subjective mind as presented in Mantrayana is far more profound and refined than that presented in the Sutrayana.

The commentary continues:

... likewise there are also suitable beings who are liberated by the Vajrayana path...

After noting how the followers of the perfection vehicle reach their goals by cultivating bodhicitta and so on, the commentary explains the qualifications of the person who engages in the Vajrayana path:

... likewise there are also suitable beings who are liberated by the Vajrayana path. They aspire to accomplish the welfare of other beings, and are fit to follow the path, which blissfully and swiftly leads them to fully complete the collections for the great self-enlightenment. They aspire to achieve, merely through the force of mantra recitation, the four activities of pacification, increasing, controlling and wrathful deeds;...

Here, mantra recitation refers to the mantras that we recite or chant when we engage in a retreat, for example, where we try to accumulate a certain number of mantras. However, in reality, 'mantra' refers to the transcendental wisdom of bliss and emptiness within the continuum of a deity. In Tibetan, a retreat based on this is called *bsnyen pa*, which literally means the practice of approaching or being close to a deity.

There is also a type of retreat called *las rung*, which means a practice to perform activities, because through such a retreat, you are trying to accomplish the four activities of pacification, increasing, controlling, and wrath. Usually you hold the *mala* over your index finger and then, with each recitation of the mantra, you pull a bead with your thumb towards your direction. However, it is said that the finger upon which you place your *mala* depends upon the activity you want to accomplish. You place the *mala* on the index finger for the activity of *pacification*; place it on the middle finger for the activity of *increasing*; on the ring finger for the activity of *controlling*; and on the little finger for *wrathful activity*.

The commentary continues by referring to a *good pot*, which is a *wish fulfilling vase*, through which you are able to achieve everything you wish for. Then it refers to the *eight great spiritual feats* – these can be common or

uncommon spiritual feats. The eight common spiritual feats are: *pills, eye-lotion, seeing beneath the ground, the sword, flying, invisibility, longevity and youth*.

Accomplishing the four activities and the eight great spiritual feats makes the path that you follow very easy, blissful and swift in accumulating the collections for enlightenment, and achieving the state of complete enlightenment.

The commentary continues:

... and they intend to engage in the pure deeds of secret mantra as taught in the four classes of tantra such as action, performance and so forth.

This last sentence refers to the practices that enable tantric practitioners to fulfil the goal or purpose of other sentient beings. Whereas what was described before – achieving the four activities and eight spiritual feats – is primarily for tantric practitioners to fulfil their own self-goal or purpose.

2.1.2 Conferring of ripening initiation upon that person

The commentary continues:

As to the second (Conferring of Ripening Initiation upon that Person),

Verse 62 says:

*Then to receive the preceptor initiation,
You must please an excellent spiritual teacher
Through service, valuable gifts and the like
As well as through obedience.*

Verse 63ab says:

*Through the full bestowing of the preceptor
initiation,
By a spiritual preceptor who is pleased,*

Having purified their continuum through the common path, then the followers of the Vajrayana path intend to enter into the secret mantra by engaging in any of the four classes of tantra,...

Having purified their continuum through the common path, refers to how, before one enters the tantric path, one must fully purify oneself by following the common path, the Sutrayana or perfection vehicle.

The main practice within the vehicle of perfection falls under the three principal paths. The first is **renunciation**, which is essentially the genuine wish to seek liberation. Without cultivating true renunciation, whatever practice one does will not become a cause to achieve liberation from cyclic existence let alone buddhahood. The second is the **bodhicitta** mind, which is an aspiration or wish to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all beings, without which your practice cannot be called a Mahayana practice, let alone Tantrayana. The third principal path is the view of **selflessness or emptiness**, which is the final view of reality that eliminate the ignorance of self-grasping.

The view of emptiness is essential for tantric practice, which in fact commences with and evolves within it. This is because, in tantra, we are essentially supposed to view everything as the manifestation or play of emptiness. Without a true understanding of emptiness, then the frequent mention of 'emptiness' or 'manifestation of emptiness' that we find in the tantric ritual manual means nothing, and so there is nothing for us to meditate

on. In fact, when you read the *Heart Sutra*, where it says, 'form is emptiness, emptiness is form', this connotes the same meaning – that form is the manifestation or extension of its emptiness.

Here, where the commentary mentions *having purified their continuum through the common path*, it means that, as essential as the three principal paths are in the sutra path, so too are they essential in practising Mantrayana.

Next, we come across the qualifications of the gurus of the Vajrayana path. In the *Guru Puja*, you will find a few verses that explain those qualities, beginning at the verse:

Wise and patient, your three doors are well controlled.
Without pretension or deceit, you understand Mantra and Tantra.
Skilled in arts and teaching, you have twice ten qualities.
Oh Lord of Vajra Masters, hear my prayers!

The commentary continues:

... they need to devote themselves to and please a qualified noble lama.

This refers to the qualified noble lamas of the Vajrayana or Mantrayana. You should study these qualities. There are specific qualities of the vajra gurus, and specific qualities of the lamas in the context of Sutrayana.

So, *why do they need to please the lamas?* As it mentions here, you have to please the qualified noble lamas because:

The purpose of pleasing the lama is to receive the vajra preceptor initiation.

You should refer to the *Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion* by Ashvagoshā, where there's a very good explanation of qualities of the gurus.

As the commentary continues:

The purpose of pleasing the lama is to receive the vajra preceptor initiation. This applies to the three higher initiations too.

In terms of the four classes of tantra, the first two, action and performance tantra, don't have a vajra preceptor or vajra master's initiation, because in those tantras, you don't need to take tantric vows but take only bodhisattva vows. However, yoga tantra and highest yoga tantra have a vajra preceptor's initiation and require you to take both the bodhisattva and tantric vows.

We will read the commentary, which is self-explanatory:

As to the manner in which they please the lama, Maitreya's *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutra* says:

Rely on the teacher by way of
Respect, material things and practice.

Accordingly, you verbally and bodily express your respect and reverence to the lama, offer material objects such as precious jewels, clothing, food, drink as well as personal services to the lama, and voluntarily practise what has been taught by the lama, all precisely in accordance with the lama's wishes, offering everything of your three doors to please them.

Note that the highest form of offering to the guru, or of guru devotion, is to put the guru's words into practice.

Then the commentary says:

There is a reason to please the lama. Having pleased the lama, the disciple requests the lama to give an initiation.

So, as it is said here, in order to receive the initiation, first, the disciple must request the lama for the initiation.

The commentary continues:

The lama then confers upon the disciple the complete vajra preceptor initiation together with the final supporting subsequent empowerment. In this way the disciple is made a suitable vessel for the secret mantra.

Just to clarify here, the subsequent empowerment, often known as *rjes sNang* in Tibetan, is usually bestowed at the end of an initiation ceremony. Subsequent empowerment is conferred to bestow the blessings of the guru's holy body, speech and mind to the disciple following the conferring of initiations. However, this does not mean to say that the process of conferring initiation is not equivalent to conferring subsequent empowerment. Also, in some cases, the lama confers the subsequent empowerment but not the actual initiation.

2.1.3 Significance of conferring initiation

The commentary continues:

As to the third, Significance of Conferring Initiation.

Verse 63cd says:

*You are purified of all wrong doing
And become fit to gain powerful attainments.*

As stated above, there are reasons for conferring all four initiations which are: to fully purify three doors of negativities and obscurations together with their latencies/imprints, and to qualify the disciple to accomplish the small, medium and great spiritual attainments/feats.

The purpose of *conferring all four initiations* is to *fully purify three doors of negativities* and so forth. Receiving an initiation empowers us to engage in tantric practice, such as listening to, contemplating, or meditating on tantra; and explaining tantra to others. Initiation empowers us to undertake such tantric activities.

In the ultimate sense, initiation empowers us to achieve the complete state of enlightenment and thereby perform the deeds of enlightened beings. Also, as it says here, it *qualif(ies) the disciple to accomplish the small, medium and great spiritual attainments/feats*. After we receive the initiation, we follow it up by safeguarding the tantric vows, precepts, and so forth.

Through this, we will be able to achieve spiritual attainments, such as the three levels of spiritual feats. If we achieve the great feat, we can reach enlightenment within this very life. If we achieve the medium spiritual feat, we can reach enlightenment in the intermediate state [following the cessation of this life]. Achieving the small feat means we can, at most, reach enlightenment within sixteen lives.

Another benefit of receiving initiation is to implant a seed – the special cause to actualise the three bodies of a buddha.

2.2. WHO CAN OR CANNOT ACTUALLY RECEIVE THE TWO HIGHER INITIATIONS

The commentary then continues:

Regarding the second, which is Who Can or Cannot Actually Receive the Two Higher Initiations.

The two higher initiations are the secret initiation, and the wisdom knowledge initiation. We will read the root text, verses 64, 65 and 66:

Verse 64

*Because the Great Tantra of the Primordial Buddha
Forbids it emphatically,
Those observing pure conduct should not
Take the secret and wisdom initiations.*

Verse 65

*If those observing the austere practice of pure conduct
Were to hold these initiations,
Their vow of austerity would be impaired
Through doing that which is proscribed.*

Verse 66

*This creates transgressions which are a defeat
For those observing discipline.
Since they are certain to fall to a bad rebirth,
They will never gain accomplishments.*

Now if you ask, is it mandatory for all those who wish to accomplish spiritual feats to take the actual initiation?...

Here, the word *actual* refers to embracing an actual or real consort; through this, the disciple receives the secret initiation. In other words, the process of actual secret initiation involves the disciple inducing bliss through embracing an actual or real consort. Whereas when we talk about the actual wisdom knowledge initiation, this is where the guru embraces an actual consort, and through the bliss from that union, the wisdom initiation is conferred.

The commentary then says:

It is not mandatory as stipulated here. Given the object of knowledge as the subject, the preceptors, who belong to any of the five ordained groups ...

The *five ordained groups* include fully ordained monks and nuns; novice monks and nuns; and *siksamana* or trainee ordained nuns with six precepts.

... or householders with the pure conduct vow of celibacy ...

This would be a layperson who has taken the precept of celibacy.

... cannot take the actual secret and wisdom knowledge initiations in order to confer the same to the disciples, because this is forbidden emphatically by the Bhagawan in the great root Kalachakra tantra of the Primordial Buddha.

The commentary continues:

Now, if you ask, what sort of fault is observed to forbid those in pure conduct from taking the two initiations?

Obviously, those with celibate vows are forbidden or not allowed to take the two actual initiations.

If householders who abide in the austere practice of pure conduct and any of the five ordained groups actually hold or take the two initiations, then they are engaging in the forbidden code of the Teacher.

This warns that they are going against, or breaking the moral code prescribed by the Buddha.

This means that they transgress the pure vow of austerity and the ordination vows and end up receiving *pham pa* (transgression of root vow) to the vow of austerity and the downfall of root vows similar to *pham pa*.

There are different terms used for transgression of the root vow. For the fully ordained monk who transgress this root vow, it is called *pham pa*. Whereas for novice monks and nuns, it's called *pham 'dra*. For lay practitioners with the vow of celibacy, it is called *sBom po*.

Since those who transgress (root vows) commit downfalls, they will surely fall down into the three lower rebirths, and will never accomplish spiritual feats. Relating to this, Jowo himself said, 'Those who follow the liberating path of pure conduct must not confer nor must the disciples take (from them) ...

This clearly advises those who have taken a pure vow of celibacy to not take the actual secret initiation themselves, nor should they confer the actual wisdom knowledge initiation to disciples. Similarly, disciples should not take the actual wisdom knowledge initiation from a guru with a pure vow.

The commentary continues:

The *Self-commentary* also says, 'There are some who do not understand the meaning of the great tantric teachings of the secret mantra, or who are not under the guidance of a noble lama. Because of their reliance upon evil friends, they do not understand the way of the secret mantra. They instead rely on the provisional scriptures, and through boasting "we are tantric practitioners", recklessly indulge in all kinds of activities and proclaim, "We will be swiftly accomplish the spiritual feat of mahamudra". These people will go to hell and so forth'.

2.3. DISPELLING DOUBT ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT IT IS APPROPRIATE TO TEACH AND STUDY TANTRA WITHOUT RECEIVING THE TWO HIGHER INITIATIONS

The third is Dispelling Doubt with Regard to the Question of Whether or Not It Is Appropriate to Teach and Study Tantra Without Receiving the Two Higher Initiations.

We'll continue that next week. In fact, we should be able to finish the *Lamp for the Path* text next week, as there's not much left now.

From the following week, we will begin the teaching on Lama Tsongkhapa's *Great Stages of the Path*, focusing on the section under the heading 'How to train in the (bodhisattva's) deeds in general'. This section falls under the main heading 'The stages of how to train in that', which has two sub-headings: one is 'How to train in the deeds in general', which covers all six perfections, but the last two perfections are only dealt with briefly; the second sub-heading is 'How to train in the last two perfections in particular', which we won't be covering.

If you have a hard or digitised copy of the *Great Stages of the Path* it would good to bring it to the teaching sessions and also read it.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering*

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Homework

Answers

Teaching: 2 October 2018

1. Tantric practice is known by different terms. Name these different terms and explain their meaning

2.1. NECESSITY OF RECEIVING THE INITIATIONS FOR ENGAGING IN THE VAJRA VEHICLE

Tantric practice is known by different terms, such as Vajrayana or vajra vehicle; Tantrayana; secret mantra or Mantrayana; the method vehicle; or resultant vehicle. Each term literally refers to certain unique characteristics of tantric practice.

We can't go in detail here, but generally, in the case of Vajrayana, for example, *yana* means vehicle, which can refer to the spiritual path that carries one to (enlightenment); and *vajra*, in a definitive sense, refers to the Vajrasattva yoga (concentration on transcendental wisdom, which is the inseparable union of method and the wisdom and is indestructible). The term tantra means continuity or thread, and can refer to the unbroken lineage of tantric teachings.

The term secret mantra implies that these teachings should be practised discreetly, and not be revealed to those who are not suitable. As to the term mantra, *man-* means the mind and *-tra* means protection, so mantra means protection of the mind. The mind here specifically refers to the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and emptiness. Hence, in an ultimate sense, mantra is a means of protecting one's mind from ordinary perception and conception.

2. Tantra is called the method vehicle because it employs a superior method for achieving enlightenment. It is also called the resultant vehicle because, in tantra, you take the four purities of the resultant state of enlightenment into the path. Explain the four purities.

Tantra is called the method vehicle because it employs a superior method for achieving enlightenment. It is also called the resultant vehicle because, in tantra, you take the four purities of the resultant state of enlightenment into the path. The four complete purities relate to the pure vision within which tantric practitioners engage in their practice:

1. Place – in the tantric path, you visualise the place you are in as an actual pure land.
2. Body – you visualise yourself as the deity.
3. Enjoyment or resources – what you utilise represents the uncontaminated nectar or the perfect resources of an enlightened being.
4. Deeds – simulating the deeds of an enlightened being.

3. Why is the view of emptiness essential for tantra?

The view of emptiness is essential for tantric practice, which in fact commences with and evolves within it. This is because, in tantra, we are essentially supposed to view everything as the manifestation or play of emptiness. Without a true understanding of emptiness, then the frequent mention of 'emptiness' or 'manifestation of emptiness' that we find in the tantric ritual manual means nothing, and so there is nothing for us to meditate on. In fact, when you read the *Heart Sutra*, where it says, 'form is emptiness, emptiness is form', this connotes the same meaning – that form is the manifestation or extension of its emptiness.

4.a) What are the qualities of the gurus of the Vajryana path?

Next, we come across the qualifications of the gurus of the Vajrayana path. In the *Guru Puja*, you will find a few verses that explain those qualities, beginning at the verse:

Wise and patient, your three doors are well controlled. Without pretension or deceit, you understand Mantra and Tantra.

Skilled in arts and teaching, you have twice ten qualities. Oh Lord of Vajra Masters, hear my prayers!

b) Why do we need to devote ourselves to and please the noble lama?

The commentary continues:

... they need to devote themselves to and please a qualified noble lama.

This refers to the qualified noble lamas of the Vajrayana or Mantrayana. You should study these qualities. There are specific qualities of the vajra gurus, and specific qualities of the lamas in the context of Sutrayana.

So, *why do they need to please the lamas?* As it mentions here, you have to please the qualified noble lamas because:

The purpose of pleasing the lama is to receive the vajra preceptor initiation.

You should refer to the *Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion* by Ashvagoshā, where there's a very good explanation of qualities of the gurus.

As the commentary continues:

The purpose of pleasing the lama is to receive the vajra preceptor initiation. This applies to the three higher initiations too.

In terms of the four classes of tantra, the first two, action and performance tantra, don't have a vajra preceptor or vajra master's initiation, because in those tantras, you don't need to take tantric vows but take only bodhisattva vows. However, yoga tantra and highest yoga tantra have a vajra preceptor's initiation and require you to take both the bodhisattva and tantric vows.

c) What is the manner with which to please the lama?

We will read the commentary, which is self-explanatory:

As to the manner in which they please the lama, Maitreya's *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutra* says:

Rely on the teacher by way of

Respect, material things and practice. Accordingly, you verbally and bodily express your respect and reverence to the lama, offer material objects such as precious jewels, clothing, food, drink as well as personal services to the lama, and voluntarily practise what has been taught by the lama, all precisely in accordance with the lama's wishes, offering everything of your three doors to please them.

Note that the highest form of offering to the guru, or of guru devotion, is to put the guru's words into practice. Then the commentary says:

There is a reason to please the lama. Having pleased the lama, the disciple requests the lama to give an initiation.

So, as it is said here, in order to receive the initiation, first, the disciple must request the lama for the initiation.

The commentary continues:

The lama then confers upon the disciple the complete vajra preceptor initiation together with the final supporting subsequent empowerment. In this way the disciple is made a suitable vessel for the secret mantra.

5. Receiving an initiation empowers us to do what?

The purpose of *conferring all four initiations* is to *fully purify three doors of negativities* and so forth. Receiving an initiation empowers us to engage in tantric practice, such as listening to, contemplating, or meditating on tantra; and explaining tantra to others. Initiation empowers us to undertake such tantric activities.

In the ultimate sense, initiation empowers us to achieve the complete state of enlightenment and thereby perform the deeds of enlightened beings. Also, as it says here, it *qualif(ies) the disciple to accomplish the small, medium and great spiritual attainments/feats*. After we receive the initiation, we follow it up by safeguarding the tantric vows, precepts, and so forth.

Through this, we will be able to achieve spiritual attainments, such as the three levels of spiritual feats. If we achieve the great feat, we can reach enlightenment within this very life. If we achieve the medium spiritual feat, we can reach enlightenment in the intermediate state [following the cessation of this life]. Achieving the small feat means we can, at most, reach enlightenment within sixteen lives. Another benefit of receiving initiation is to implant a seed – the special cause to actualise the three bodies of a buddha.

Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

༄༅། བྱང་ཆུབ་ལམ་གྱི་སྒྲོན་མ་བཟུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

9 October 2018

We will begin with the usual meditation.

[Tonglen meditation]

It is always very important to check our motivation before beginning an action, particularly before beginning a spiritual practice. Not only that, but even in everyday life, the type of activity we do and the effectiveness or outcome depends on the state of mind that motivates us to do that action. Therefore, it is beneficial to give a bit of thought to what sort of mind or motivation we have at the beginning any activity. In particular, when we engage in spiritual practice it is not enough to think that what we are doing appears to be a spiritual practice – whether it is actually going to be a spiritual or Dharma practice depends on the motivation which led us to that action. We should therefore ensure that we have the right motivation to begin this teaching.

If, when we check our motivation, we notice some mistake or fault with that motivation, then before we carry on with that activity, we should utilise our own intelligence to correct that faulty mind and get rid of it.

Continuing with the commentary on Atisha's *Lamp for the Path*, we are up to the third heading.

3. CAUSE FOR THE COMPOSITION

In relation to this, Verse 68 of the root text reads:

Verse 68

*I, the Elder Dipamkarashri, having seen it
Explained in sutra and in other teachings,
At the request of Jangchup Wö,
Have made this concise explanation.*

The presentation of the lines in the commentary has been changed to accord with the order in the translation of the root text. The commentary says:

The first line of the root text *I, the Elder Dipamkarashri, having seen it*

This indicates the author, ...

... the fourth line indicates the activity undertaken.

The fourth line refers to having completed *this concise explanation*.

The second indicates the internal condition of excellent wisdom knowledge.

This is, as the root text says, *explained in sutra and in other teachings*.

The third line indicates another condition of great compassion as a cause for composing the text.

This refers to the line *At the request of Jangchup Wö*

So this verse shows the causes for the author to compose this text.

In this verse we can notice the two important elements necessary for the composition of any Mahayana text, which are wisdom and method.

First of all, as this verse says, the author of a Mahayana text needs to be endowed with the qualities of excellent wisdom, the intelligent knowledge of the entire teachings and scriptures (including the sutras and the various commentaries to those), and a correct and complete understanding of the content of all the scriptures. These are the necessary qualities of any author of a Mahayana text.

The second element is that the author should also use an excellent skilful method in the composition. Here 'method' primarily refers to great compassion, as Mahayana texts are composed in order to benefit other beings.

It is also implied here that those who are studying this text should also try to develop both method and wisdom.

Then the commentary continues, referring to the author Atisha:

He was called the Great Elder Dipamkara Shrijnana because he was the head and the crown ornament of all the eighteen schools (of early Buddhism), and who, after taking the full ordination vows, had maintained for over thirty years the pure and unbroken lineage of ordination vows.

Further:

He wrote an exposition for the sake of guiding the fortunate people of the land of snow ...

This refers to the people of Tibet.

... on how to follow the Mahayana path of liberation from the beginning level to supreme enlightenment.

We have already heard these words so many times: the teachings of the stages of the path indicate the spiritual practices that are suitable for all levels of practitioners from the very low scope through the medium and then to the great scope. Not only that, but the structure of the entire path is explained in such a systematic way that it makes it easy for followers to follow it step by step without any mistakes. So this part of the commentary is basically referring to the three stages of the path.

The next part of the commentary is quite self-explanatory.

There is also a cause for composing his work. The cause is that he had gained knowledge and seen what is explained in sutra and in other, which includes tantras, and the commentary scriptures and pith instructions.¹ Beside this, Bhikkhu Jangjub Wö from the royal family, who shouldered the responsibility for Buddhism in Tibet, fervently requested him to write an exposition which could serve as the pioneer doctrine of the Mahayana for the sake of the flourishing of general Buddhism.

In requesting the teaching from Atisha there is reference to the *flourishing of general Buddhism* in Tibet. These words, as we have mentioned in the past, were very pleasing to Atisha.

It then continues:

As to the manner of the composition Atisha's *Entering into the Two Truths* states:

Life is short and many the kinds of knowledge;
Let him who knows not even his own life's span,
Choose only from his purest desires,
As the goose strains from water.

These words advise us to consider what is really essential for our spiritual practice. First of all, *the kinds of knowledge*

¹ Here we can see how the commentary actually relates to that line in the root text.

refers to an object of knowledge, something to learn and to know, and of course there are endless things to know. However our life span is just not long enough to gain all that knowledge. And, as it says here, when we think about it, we have no idea how long we will live.

Therefore, it says we have to be like a *goose* or a *duck*. The idea here is if you give it milk mixed into water the goose will strain the milk from the water as it drinks, although I'm not too sure whether a goose actually has that ability! But the turtle does have that ability so we can consider a turtle as an example here.

The implied advice to us is that it is more important to put what we learn into practise, to the point that we can really taste it, just like drinking milk is more satisfying than water. The commentary is saying to us that we should not spend a lot of time just trying to learn and understand the meaning of the text. Rather we should be focusing more on the application of whatever knowledge we have acquired. That is what we need to practise.

Then the commentary continues:

Having eliminated all the lengthy elaboration of what to accept and reject, ...

This indicates the special qualities of Atisha's texts. The author of the commentary is saying: *I'm not focusing on the elaborations of various ideas, various things which we should accept and other things we should reject and so many things like various theories.* Rather:

... the work just focuses in a concise manner on the complete favourable conditions for the practice of those seeking the state of omniscience.

Here, *those seeking the state of omniscience* could be referring to all of those who follow Dharma practice. The author is indicating that his intention is to give a teaching that is concise, and which can be directly applicable to those who are seeking the state of omniscience.

Concluding remarks

We will just read through the remaining part of the commentary which is:

The fourth is Concluding Remarks which has two:

1. Who wrote it
2. Who translated it

Who wrote it

The first is that this completes the work kindly composed by the great scholar and preceptor, the crown jewel of the five hundred sages, Dipamkara Shrijnana, for the sake of countless fortunate beings.

Who translated it

The second, is that this work that was translated from Indian into the Tibetan language, edited and approved by the eminent Indian Abbot Dipamkara Shrijnana and the Tibetan translator, the eyes of the world, fully ordained monk Geway Lodro and it was then taught and studied. The *Self-commentary* to this was translated by Geshe Gungtang pa with permission (from the author). As it is said, 'No other disciples of Jowo have it but Nagtso alone', the translator Nagtso preserved it as hidden Dharma. However, this enlightening work was propagated widely by Geshe Tonpa² and other masters. Geshe Tonpa passed it to the three Kadampa brothers (Geshe Potowa, Chengawa and Phuchungwa) and to

a large gathering of his disciples and so forth. Geshe Potowa held the teachings of the translator and the pandita to such a high regard that each time he would teach them eight times to the gathering. (?) Later on, Sharawa disseminated this teaching, and that's how it serves as the lamp of the Buddhadharma and the eyes for migrating beings to this day.

It is very fortunate and auspicious that we have been able to complete this teaching of Atisha's *Lamp for the Path* from beginning to end. Receiving this teaching is also very special for a number of reasons. First of all, the transmission that you have received is an unbroken transmission of the teachings. I, along with many of you, received this teaching on the *Lamp of the Path* from His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Sydney during one of his visits. His Holiness received the transmission from one of his teachers Gen Rinzin Tenpa, who was the brother to the great bodhisattva commonly known as Khunu Rinpoche or Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen. His Holiness also received the transmission and commentary to this teaching from the late Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche. I have always had a great personal interest in this text and received a teaching on it from the late Gen Rinpoche (Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey). The preciousness of this teaching is always in my mind, and I've always wanted to extensively study it in conjunction with Lama Tsong Khapa's *Lam Rim*. But my time is passing, and I don't think that I will be able to do that now. As you can see, this teaching has the blessing of being a lineage of unbroken transmission, and therefore we are very fortunate to be able to study it.

As we have completed a commentary for this whole text it would be good to make a booklet as soon as we can, as I see it as being very beneficial for others. I acknowledge the great job of the preparation of the teaching transcriptions and translation by the Tara publication team over many years. For the publication of the teachings on the *Lamp for the Path*, we need a few volunteers. Ross volunteered. Would Jeremy and Kathy like to be involved? If the publication needs more help they will check with you. Consult with Adair, who's in charge of this and then go from there.

I admire Ross for his years of experience and knowledge in the Buddhadharma and contribution to the centre. I am very happy that he is involving himself in the publication of this book.

As we discussed last week, I am going to teach from a section from Lama Tsongkhapa's *Great Stages of the Path*, beginning with Chapter 8 Training in the Mahayana: Precepts and Perfections. So if you have time before next week it would be good to go over some part of it.

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 Adair Bunnett

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Edited Version

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² Referring to Drom Tonpa.

2018

Homework

Answers

Teaching: 9 October 2018

1. Explain the lines in verse 68

Verse 68

*I, the Elder Dipamkarashri, having seen it
Explained in sutra and in other teachings,
At the request of Jangchup Wö,
Have made this concise explanation.*

The presentation of the lines in the commentary has been changed to accord with the order in the translation of the root text. The commentary says:

The first line of the root text *I, the Elder Dipamkarashri, having seen it*

This indicates the author,...

... the fourth line indicates the activity undertaken.

The fourth line refers to having completed *this concise explanation*.

The second indicates the internal condition of excellent wisdom knowledge.

This is, as the root text says, *explained in sutra and in other teachings*.

The third line indicates another condition of great compassion as a cause for composing the text.

This refers to the line *At the request of Jangchup Wö*

So this verse shows the causes for the author to compose this text.

2018

Homework

Answers

Teaching: 9 October 2018

1. It is strongly recommended that you study the bodhisattva's precepts and vows prior to taking them. Why?

1. Essentially when it says 'in the discipline of individual liberation', it refers to the vinaya or vows of individual liberation, and the tantric vows – it is not appropriate to study these vows before taking them. On the other hand, it is strongly recommended that you study the bodhisattva's precepts and vows prior to taking them.

In Tibetan the terms 'enthusiastic' literally means joyful effort, 'if you have an enthusiasm for taking them', connotes heartfelt joy in the bodhisattva's vows and precepts. After studying and learning those vows and precepts, and if you feel joyful, positive and inspired, then it says you should go ahead to take them. Indirectly this means that if you don't feel that way, it is not recommended to take the vows.

2. Explain what the precepts are based upon.

There are limitless clear categorizations, but if you arrange the bodhisattva precepts by type, you can include them all within the six perfections

The six perfections are thus the great condensation of all the key points of the bodhisattva path. The four ways to gather disciples [generosity, pleasant speech, working at the aims, and consistency of behaviour] are also included within these six perfections as follows.

2. List:

a) the six perfections:

The perfections are generosity, morality, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom.

b) the four ways of gathering disciples:

The four ways of gathering disciples generosity, pleasant speech, working at the aims, and consistency of behaviour

c) the two collections:

The two collections are the collections of merit and wisdom.

d) the three trainings:

. The three trainings are morality concentration and wisdom

3. Summarise: A) The fixed number of perfections based on high status.

Thus the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras (Mahayana-sutralamkara)* says:

High status possessed of excellent resources and body,
Excellent companions and undertakings,

Not going under the power of the afflictions,
And never being mistaken in activities

This passage summarises how the four excellences are the result of the six perfections. Recall that the perfection of giving is the cause of excellent resources, the perfection of morality is the cause for a good body, the perfection of patience is the cause for excellent companions and joyous effort is the cause for the success of all undertakings. Meditative concentration prevents the excellences from being soiled by the power of the afflictions, while never being mistaken in activities is the result of the perfection of wisdom.

4. **Summarise:** B) The fixed number of perfections based on fulfilling the two aims

To fulfil the aims of others you must first help them with material goods. Since no benefit will come from generosity accompanied by harmfulness toward living beings, you need ethical discipline, ...

To bring this to its full development you also need patience that disregards the harm done to you, for, if you are impatient with harm and retaliate a time or two, you will not attain pure ethical discipline.

When you do not retaliate because of your patience, you prevent others from accumulating a great amount of sin and bring them to virtue by inspiring them with your patience

From this, we understand how the first three perfections of giving, morality and patience enable us to primarily benefit other beings.

You attain your own aim, the bliss of liberation, through the power of wisdom.

Your own aim, which is state of liberation or nirvana, depends on the perfection of wisdom. Then it goes on:

Since you will not attain this with a distracted mind, ...

meaning you cannot achieve wisdom or insight if your mind is too distracted.

...you must set your mind in meditative equipoise by means of meditative stabilization,...

This shows that we have to rely on the perfection of concentration or meditative stabilisation to overcome all the distracted states of mind. And then:

obtaining a mental serviceability wherein you intentionally set your attention on any object of meditation ...

... refers to benefits of the perfection of concentration.

Here a connection is made between the importance of generating joyous perseverance and achieving the state of concentration and wisdom. Without joyous effort, we can fall prey to laziness, and then we cannot achieve concentration and wisdom. So in this way, it summarises how the three perfections of joyous effort, concentration and wisdom are necessary to achieve one's own goals.