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# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་མེས་པོ་འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷོ་ལྷན་པ་ལ་འཇམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

18 March 2014

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As usual we will now spend some time engaging in the meditation practise.

[meditation]

It is important to generate the appropriate motivation to receive the teachings. The main point is to ensure that the motivation is not tainted with self-interest. Then it is important to familiarise our minds with the wish to benefit others, as this naturally reduces self-interest. We need to intentionally develop this approach because otherwise almost every activity in which we engage has 'What is in it for me?' at the forefront of our minds. The practical benefit of generating the wish to benefit others is that the more we familiarise our minds with this wish, the less likely we will intentionally harm others. At the very least it will prevent us from harming others and actually help us to benefit whenever possible. By cultivating this approach we can start to measure the extent to which we have developed the genuine wish to benefit others.

Lama Tsong Khapa highlights that if we genuinely engage in benefiting others then our own needs will be fulfilled subsequently; this is an essential point. At his recent teachings in India His Holiness the Dalai Lama twice emphasised this point; we need to derive the real meaning from this. And that is, if we genuinely benefit others, our own needs will naturally be fulfilled subsequently, which in turn implies that we do not need to intentionally think or worry about our own needs. This approach prevents one from feeling discouraged from benefitting others. To summarise, the main point is that if one knows that one's own needs will be met and that we are not missing out by benefiting others, then one will not feel overwhelmed or discouraged about helping others. These are the essential points to bear in mind.

## 2.2.1. Conscientiously abandoning faults (cont.)

### 2.2.1.3. THE FREEDOMS AND ENDOWMENTS WILL BE DIFFICULT TO FIND

In relation to oneself, the point here is that if we give up bodhicitta (as mentioned previously), then this causes difficulty in finding the freedoms and endowments again.

As the outline here presents, the *freedoms and endowments will be difficult to find*, so we need to take this as a personal instruction to be conscientious in utilising the freedoms and endowments that we have now obtained. This heading is subdivided into two:

2.2.1.3.1. If bodhicitta degenerates, the freedoms and endowments with the condition of four wheels are difficult to find

2.2.1.3.2. Although attaining one, as it disintegrates quickly make an effort

2.2.1.3.1. If bodhicitta degenerates, the freedoms and endowments with the condition of four wheels are difficult to find

Due to a lack of conscientiousness, if one's bodhicitta degenerates, then the freedoms and endowments and the conditions of the four wheels, which are necessary to traverse the Mahayana path, will be difficult to find.

I will list and then explain the four wheels:

1. Living in a conducive place
2. Relying on a sublime being
3. Making aspirational prayers
4. Accumulating merit

1. The first is to abide in a place which is conducive for the Mahayana path to be actualised. This is also presented simply in some texts as living in a place where one can accumulate virtue.

2. The second is to associate and rely on a sublime being, such as a virtuous friend, who leads one on a path to abandon negativity (overcoming faults) and adopt virtue (acquiring good qualities). Thus, the first indicates the kind of place that one should abide in, and the second is in relation to the kind of being that one should rely upon.

3. The third is to be endowed with the results of aspirational prayers that one has previously made.

4. And the fourth is to be endowed with the results of previously accumulated merit.

The conditions of the four wheels were also presented in *Precious Garland*. As direct advice to the king, Nagarjuna highlighted that the freedoms and endowments with the condition of the four wheels are difficult to obtain in the future. He exhorts the king, 'since you have obtained the eight freedoms and ten endowments with the conditions of the four wheels now, you must definitely use them to ensure that they don't go to waste, by practising the Dharma'.

To take this as personal instruction, we need to relate all the points in the four conditions to our own lives; that is, to actually see the significance of making aspirational prayers and see the significance of accumulating merit etc. Whatever attempt we make to accumulate merit is extremely important because the merit that we accumulate now will be experienced later as ripened results with favourable conditions. Likewise, making very strong aspirational prayers now when we have the opportunity is also important and has great significance. As mentioned in other sutras and teachings, the enlightened beings are constantly benefiting sentient beings now as a result of their past aspirational prayers. These are the points we need to keep in mind by understanding their significance.

The main point here is that it is not sufficient just to have the eight freedoms and ten endowments and the conditions of the four wheels. What we need to do is ensure that they are utilised by practising the Dharma to bring about the ultimate goals we seek. That is the main point. It is presented here that the freedoms, endowments and conditions of the four wheels are extremely difficult to find, so we definitely need to utilise them wisely. You will recall that at the end of the *Guru Puja* there is a dedication, 'May I not be separated from the four

Mahayana wheels'. This is exactly what is being explained here.

The commentary introduces the meaning of this verse with a hypothetical query:

One may think: I will make an effort when I attain the freedoms and endowments later on.

One may become complacent by thinking *I will make an effort when I attain the freedoms and endowments later on*. So, as a way to overcome this sort of apathetic resolution in one's mind, the verse presents:

15. *The coming of a tathagata  
Faith and the attainment of a human body—  
These, making it possible to meditate on virtue,  
Since they are rare, when will they be attained?*

The commentary then reads:

To have attained the five personal endowments and the five circumstantial endowments that make it possible to meditate on virtue, is as rare as the Udumbara flower.

These are, among others:

- A tathagata has descended.
- One has faith in the three baskets of the Buddha's teachings.
- One has also attained a human body.
- One has been reborn in a central country.
- One has complete faculties.
- One has not transgressed the border of karma.

The commentary explains that *a tathagata* (or a buddha) *has descended* relates to one of the endowments. The ten endowments are categorised into five personal or internal endowments, and five that are circumstantial or external endowments. That a Buddha has descended to this earth is an external endowment. It relates to the fact that we are born in a light eon or an illuminated eon, which is at a time when the Buddha has descended to this earth; thus this condition is intact for oneself. There is also the period called a dark eon, which is a time when the Buddha has not descended.

The next line in the verse, *One has faith in the three baskets of the Buddha's teachings* is a personal endowment. The Lam Rim teachings present this in abbreviated form as having faith in the source, which is *having faith in the three baskets of the Buddha's teachings*. It is very rare indeed to have genuine faith in the three baskets of the Buddha's teachings.

The next lines are: *One has also attained a human body and not only has a human body been obtained, but one has been born in a central country*. These are both personal endowments.

The final two lines are: *One has complete faculties* and *One has not transgressed the border of karma* (or extreme actions).

The five personal endowments have been explicitly presented here: one has faith in the Buddha's teachings; one has obtained a human body; one has been reborn in a central country; one has complete faculties and one has not transgressed the border of karma, for example having wrong views about karma is concluding that karma doesn't exist, or that the objects of refuge don't exist and so forth.

Among the five circumstantial endowments 'a tathagata has descended' is presented here. The remaining four

after the Buddha has descended are: the Buddha has taught; the teachings still remain in the world; there are those who are practising the teachings; there are those who are kind and support practitioners.

For us, all these endowments are intact. There is no question we've been born a human; born in a light age when the Buddha has come to this world and taught, and where the Buddha's teachings remain; born in a central country where the Buddha's teachings are taught; and being born with full faculties. Even though we may not have met the actual Buddha Shakyamuni, the teachings are presented to us by great teachers of his direct lineage. As these teachers represent Buddha Shakyamuni, we have received the unbroken lineage of the teachings from the unmistakable masters who are practicing at this time.

The commentary continues:

If this is so rare, then to have attained a precious human rebirth where one trains in the two minds is even rarer.

The *precious human rebirth* refers to one with the endowments, and *where one trains in the two minds* refers to the two minds of bodhicitta. The key point here is that if it is difficult to obtain the endowments, then to actually attain a state where one develops the two minds of bodhicitta is even rarer.

2.2.1.3.2. *Although attaining one, as it disintegrates quickly make an effort*

The next verse is preceded by another hypothetical doubt:

One may think: This body I have currently attained has no obstructing conditions against it and is endowed with conducive conditions. Hence I shall practise later.

This doubt represents the need to contemplate on death and impermanence as a way to show how such doubts and queries occur and obstruct one from utilising one's perfect opportunities.

The verse reads:

16. *A day like this without sickness,  
Although there is food and no harm,  
Life is deceptive on a momentary basis,  
The body is a one-time loan.*

The commentary begins with:

One should not act as if one has leisure.

We need to really consider this point, as we often procrastinate about our practise of Dharma by falling under the illusion that we have time to practise later. When we look at how this thought affects us in what we do now, it leads to mostly non-virtuous activities which incur negativities. One must judge one's own activities. If one finds one is leaving one's practise until later, then what is being done now is activities that will incur negativity. This is the fault of thinking that we have leisure and that we have plenty of time to practise later.

An understanding of death and impermanence definitely relates to this point in that the reason why *one should not act as if one has leisure* is because one's life with the freedoms and endowments could end at any moment and then one's opportunity to practise Dharma would have been completely wasted.

The commentary further explains:

A human body without the obstructing condition of sickness is like a day in the context of saying: 'A day like this'.

The key here is the word 'a day' (or 'a sun' in Tibetan) which means a day without sickness.

The commentary goes on:

But a day like this, without sickness, without the obstructing conditions of harm...

This line refers to factors that oppose one's health or wellbeing, oneself in general, or one's life conditions

...and with the conducive conditions of food and so forth, is deceptive....

This line explains that it is deceptive to maintain the view that one has everything going well for oneself (food etc.) because, as the commentary goes on to explain:

Life does not abide even for one moment and disintegrates quickly. This body is only a one-time loan and one has no power over it.

The point presented here is that our life is being used up on a momentary basis, and it can end at any given moment. Thus one should not fall under the deception that one has time to practise the Dharma later on.

The commentary uses the analogy *that the body is like a one-time loan*. This is a very significant analogy to illustrate the point that our body is indeed like a loan, because we have to give it back—we don't have real power over it; i.e. all the good conditions that we have with this body can end at any moment. Recall using something borrowed: we always know we do not have complete control over the object because it belongs to someone else, and eventually will have to be given back. Also, we cannot use it for as long as we want, or do anything we like with it. Because it is on loan we have to take good care of it and give it back at the appropriate time. Similarly, our bodies are like this. An analogy presented in the thirty-seven practices of a bodhisattva compares our bodies to a guest house with the guest being our consciousness. So just as a guest stays in a guest house for a short time and then moves on, our consciousness comes into this body, remains for a short time and then moves on.

The teaching emphasises that our body is like something which is on loan. If we ask ourselves whether our body belongs to oneself, then technically it does, however we also recognise that we don't have real power or ownership over it because we have to discard it. At the time of death, the consciousness moves on and we have to leave our body behind. The Lam Rim teachings state that since our consciousness will definitely depart from our body, only the Dharma will help us at that time. This is the point to recognise: that it is only the Dharma that will help one at the time of death when our consciousness departs the body. As only the Dharma can help us, we need to try and implement it in our everyday lives to the best of our ability. I have tried to emphasise these points to you, and of course I do this out of great concern and kindness for your well-being. Recognise that you have an opportunity to accrue virtue even in everyday activities such as eating and drinking, by making offerings, by reminding oneself that one is eating for the sake of

benefitting all sentient beings, that one is drinking for the benefit of all sentient beings etc. In this way, whatever activity one does, when one walks, sits, does tasks at work, in short, whatever activity one engages in can be utilised, and incorporated into one's practise so that it becomes a means to accumulate virtue. The practise of Dharma in short is to engage in creating virtue.

The commentary concludes:

Therefore, do not act as if there is time, and make an effort.

#### 2.2.1.4. IF REBORN IN THE LOWER REALMS ONE HAS NO OPPORTUNITY TO GENERATE VIRTUE

Try to embrace what is being presented here and take it to heart. As I remind you again and again, don't lose the opportunity to practise or accumulate merit and virtue in whatever way you can now, when you have the opportunity, because if you were to lose that opportunity, it would be an incredibly great loss. It is hard for us to imagine being reborn in the lower realms (such as an animal) where one would not have the same opportunities again. In comparison to losing wealth, losing the opportunity to practise Dharma is a far greater loss. Recently you might have heard of instances where some very wealthy people, due to certain circumstances, lost their wealth and consequently became depressed, sick and died soon afterwards. All the sickness, the worry and the sadness was caused merely by losing material wealth. Compared to losing the opportunity to practise Dharma, losing material wealth is not really significant at all. Losing material wealth will not cause one to go to the lower realms, but losing the opportunity to practise Dharma is definitely a cause to go to the lower realms and be reborn as something like an animal. Therefore, pay attention to the following points.

Under this heading there are three subdivisions:

2.2.1.4.1. There is no opportunity for virtue in the lower realms

2.2.1.4.2. If one does not strive while in the happy realms one will be confused in the lower realms concerning what is to be practised and abandoned

2.2.1.4.3. It is extremely difficult to be liberated from the lower realms

##### 2.2.1.4.1. *There is no opportunity for virtue in the lower realms*

The verse is again preceded with a hypothetical query:

It is unsuitable to relax, thinking: I will attain a succession of precious human rebirths, so I will practise later on.

The verse reads:

17. *With behaviour like this  
I will not even attain a human body.  
If I do not attain a human body  
There will be only negativity and no virtue.*

The commentary reads:

Someone like myself, through actions that create negativity and no virtue, will not even attain a human body in the next life.

If I take rebirth in the lower realms, without attaining a human body I will only generate non-virtue and not the slightest amount of virtue, and it will be difficult to be reborn again in the happy realms.

As the commentary indicates we need to take the advice here as personal instruction. When looking into one's own behaviour, *someone like myself*, one is one's own best judge; one knows oneself best. Therefore looking honestly into oneself, if one's actions incur negativity and hardly any virtue *through actions that create negativity and no virtue* then the result is that one *will not even attain a human body in the next life*. This aims to counteract the notion we may have that: 'Oh, if I don't get around to doing well in this life I shouldn't worry too much because in my next life I can continue to practise.' But what does obtaining a human rebirth in the next life depend on - virtue or negativity? If the causes depend on virtue, then the question one needs to ask oneself is, 'Have I accumulated virtue?' Is one actually engaging in virtue now, or is one engaging more in negativity? This is something we have to look into. If, when you look into your actions you find that you are creating virtue and no negativity, then a good rebirth in your next life is guaranteed. But if, after looking into your actions you find you are creating more negativity and hardly any virtue, then, as the commentary states, you will not *even attain a human body in the next life*.

The commentary continues: *If I take rebirth in the lower realms, I will only generate non-virtue and not the slightest amount of virtue, and it will be difficult to be reborn again in the happy realms*. So, if one has found that one's actions are mostly negative, then the result is rebirth in the lower realms. If one were to be born in the lower realms, the opportunity to accrue virtue is almost none. Thus, since it is hardly possible to accrue virtue in the lower realms, it will be extremely difficult to be reborn again in the happy realms such as a human again.

The emphasis here is the importance of ensuring that one engages in virtue and shuns negativity. The cause for a fortunate rebirth in the happy realms is virtue, and the cause for rebirth in the lower, unfortunate realms is non-virtue. To be free from a rebirth in the lower realms, we must shun negativity and adopt virtue. At the time of death we don't disappear and become nothing; there is a continuity. Even those who believe in a creator or God agree that we don't completely disappear or disintegrate at the time of death and that there is continuity. They believe that if one has acted according to God's wishes then one will progress into a good state, and if not, one will go into an unfortunate state. The explanation here is the same: if we have created negativity we will have an unfortunate rebirth, and if we have accumulated virtues we will have a fortunate rebirth. The point is, as we will not disappear and become nothing after our death, we need to take responsibility for ensuring that we have a good rebirth. His Holiness explains that what the Christian faith calls the soul is similar to what we call the 'self'. So even in the Christian faith they say that after death the soul continues.

Again, why is it difficult to be reborn again in the happy realms? Firstly, we can relate to the existence of unfortunate rebirths. So, if we were to be reborn in any of these unfortunate states, such as the hell realms, the hungry ghost realms or the animal realms, we would be completely immersed in suffering. If this occurs there would be hardly any opportunity for virtue to occur in

the mind. Take the example of the animal realm, where we can see that with many, their very existence depends on preying on other animals and consuming their flesh. They must actively go out and kill other living beings for their very survival. If they didn't do that they would not survive. Imagine how much negativity they incur just having to survive by killing other beings. Hence there is hardly any opportunity for animals to accumulate virtues when in the lower realms, which is why it is difficult to go from a lower realm to a higher realm. Note that it is easy to go from a higher rebirth to a lower rebirth—that is very easy! However, ascending from a lower rebirth to a higher rebirth is very difficult.

To summarise the meaning of the text in more practical terms, it is suggesting it is better not to go to a place where you would have much suffering and misery and in which it would be very difficult to accumulate virtue. Rather, wouldn't it be better for you to remain in a happier state where you can accumulate virtue? If you're enjoying some leisure now in this realm, wouldn't it be better to be reborn into such a realm again in the future, rather than having to take rebirth in a state of much suffering? If you agree that you don't want to be reborn in a realm where there is more suffering, and you want to be reborn continuously in happy rebirths, then what you need to do is intentionally avoid creating negativity and proactively accumulate virtue. This is how we need to practise to create the causes for that outcome.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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Edited Version*

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# *Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

25 March 2014

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation.

*[meditation]*

Now we can generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings, to alleviate all their suffering and bring them to ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put it into practice well.

## **2.2.1. Conscientiously abandoning faults**

### **2.2.1.4. IF REBORN IN THE LOWER REALMS ONE HAS NO OPPORTUNITY TO GENERATE VIRTUE (CONT.)**

*2.2.1.4.2. If one does not strive while in the happy realms one will be confused in the lower realms concerning what is to be practised and abandoned*

We need to consider how fortunate we are to have obtained this perfect human rebirth with its freedoms and endowments. If we were to be reborn in the lower realms we would hardly have any opportunity to engage in virtue, because of the lack of wisdom, and thus no opportunity to create the causes to obtain higher rebirths. So we need to remind ourselves again and again that it is like a miracle and pure chance that we have obtained such good conditions now. When we think about it in great detail we can see how incredibly fortunate we are to have these amazing conditions now, and in that way develop a great sense of joy. It would be extremely foolish to waste the good conditions that we enjoy now!

When we think of our own circumstances we can see how remarkable it is that we have all of these perfect conditions now. In my case it may seem more natural, in that that I was brought up as a Buddhist because of my birth into a Buddhist family. Traditionally, the very first thing Tibetan parents do is bring their child to a revered and respected lama or geshe. This happened in my case and I was given the name Lobsang Dorje. So we could say that the conditions were already there for me to be a Buddhist. Of course there was no choice—it was my destiny to be brought up in that way. As amazing as that is, your situation is even more amazing. Considering your background and so forth, it is really quite amazing for you to have met all of these conditions now.

The main point in considering all of this is that it should encourage us to engage in the practice of Dharma. Having considered how we enjoy these great conditions now, and how they will not come our way again easily, we need to take the initiative to utilise every minute of the day to practise the Dharma.

Newer students seem to find it hard to deal with the explanations of the sufferings. As many of you are already quite familiar with them it might be easier for

you, but it seems to be really difficult for new students to listen to the extensive explanations of sufferings. At his recent teachings in Sera, His Holiness the Dalai Lama commented on the late Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey's great skills in presenting the teachings. Those of you who were there would have heard him say that. Indeed, when Geshe Ngawang Dhargye presented teachings on bodhicitta, the students' minds would naturally become subdued. Apparently there was one occasion when a new student attended a class where Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey was teaching on bodhicitta and the kindness of others. He went into great detail and explained it in a way that made this person really inspired and drawn to the teachings. However, when Geshe-la started to explain the sufferings, it became difficult for this student to take it in, so he started to slowly come out of the teachings. He just didn't want to listen to accounts of suffering.

In 1985 when Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey came to Australia he gave teachings at Atisha Centre. This time there was a lady from Germany who later commented that when she went to the teachings she was really inspired and it was very helpful for her mind. She did, however, confess that when it came to the topic of suffering, it was hard to accept all of it. About three years later she came to see me and confided, 'Those sufferings that Geshe-la was explaining in detail were hard for me to accept then, but later I actually experienced those very sufferings. It was exactly as Geshe-la described them'.

Initially it was hard for her to accept some of descriptions of the sufferings—even the sufferings of the human realm were hard for her to accept. However, later she found from her own experience that they were definitely true. This is an instance of where it might be difficult to fully grasp some aspects of the teachings initially, but because they are the words of truth, they gradually become much clearer due to one's understanding and experiences.

The verse relating to this heading reads:

*18. If, although having the fortune to practice virtue,  
I do not create virtue,  
Then what am I going to do  
When completely confused by the lower realm's sufferings.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

If, although having the fortune to practise virtue, I do not make an effort now to practise virtue, then how am I going to practise when I am in the lower realms?

At that time I am miserable because of continuously experiencing the feeling of suffering of the lower realms, and I am confused concerning what has to be practised and what has to be abandoned. As a result, I cannot practise anything.

Hence I need to make an effort now at this time when I have obtained freedom and endowments.

First of all, the commentary acknowledges that one has the *fortune to practise virtue*. Here we can use ourselves as an example of a fortunate one who is endowed with two types of fortune; the fortune of not being deprived of material necessities, and not being deprived of the conditions for practising the Dharma. I consider one is fortunate if one is endowed with both good external and internal conditions.

The Tibetan term *kal-den*, translated into English as fortunate, has the literal connotation of someone who possesses their share. So if we use that literal meaning from the Tibetan word, then *fortune* can relate to having our share of the perfect conditions to practise the Dharma, as well as having our share of material conditions.

As the commentary explains, *although one does have this fortune to practise virtue*, i.e. the good conditions that enable us to practise virtue, that is not sufficient in itself if *I do not make an effort now to practise virtue*. It is not sufficient to have these good conditions if we don't strive to put them into practice.

Here we need to understand that the emphasis is on the necessity for engaging in the practice of Dharma if we are to be saved from the sufferings. What is being implied here is that the Dharma Jewel is the real protector which needs to be cultivated within oneself. As the *Offering Prayer* reads:

To supreme teacher, the precious Buddha;  
To the supreme protector, the precious Dharma;  
To the supreme guides, the precious Sangha;  
To these Three Jewels, the objects of refuge, I make  
this offering.

The Dharma developed within oneself is indeed the real protector, which implies that one is one's own saviour and liberator.

What we really need to consider is how we are our own protector and guide. The person who guides us to fortunate rebirths in the higher realms is none other than ourselves. So we are the ones who need to take the initiative to guide ourselves to a higher rebirth and protect ourselves from lower rebirths. How foolish would it be to practise the reverse, and guide ourselves to the lower realms? Why on earth would you want to work towards an unfortunate rebirth? That wouldn't be wise at all. No-one else but ourselves can guide us to a higher rebirth, so it is up to us to take the initiative. Likewise, no one can lead us, or drag us down to the lower realm but ourselves. We are the ones who must take the initiative to prevent being reborn in the lower realms. Likewise, one cannot ultimately guide others to the higher realms or lead them to the lower realms. The point here is that we have to take personal responsibility for securing good conditions for ourselves in the future.

Thus, in very simple terms, if the finger is to be pointed, it has to be pointed at ourselves; we need to constantly remind ourselves, 'Don't lead yourself down to the lower realms, but lead yourself up to a higher rebirth'. This is the sort of internal dialogue we need to engage in to ensure that we are creating the causes for higher rebirth.

Even though it is not in the Tibetan root text, the commentary poses a rhetorical question: *how am I going to practise when I am in the lower realms?* The point here is that one will not be able to practise in the lower realms, because *at that time I am miserable because of continuously experiencing the feeling of suffering of the lower realms*. There is a Tibetan word here, which has a connotation of intense suffering. The point is that being completely immersed in intense suffering deprives one of the initiative to practise Dharma.

Furthermore, *I am confused concerning what has to be practised and what has to be abandoned. As a result, I cannot practise anything*. The point here is that because one lacks the intelligence or wisdom to be able to know what is virtue, which is to be adopted, and negativity, which is to be abandoned, one cannot engage in practice. How can you abandon what you don't know? These are actually quite pertinent and pointed points. They are a personal instruction that we really need to apply in our everyday thinking. Hence, Gyaltsab Je concludes, *we need to make an effort now when we have obtained the freedoms and endowments*.

It is also then good to complement these points with our understanding of the Lam Rim teachings, which explain the need to practise Dharma, and the need to practise Dharma right now.

#### 2.2.1.4.3. *It is extremely difficult to be liberated from the lower realms*

One might think, 'If I were to go to lower realms, then I would eventually be able to free myself from that'. However, once in the lower realms it is very difficult to leave them.

Again, we need to relate this point to our understanding of the difficulty of finding the freedoms and endowments that we have gained from the Lam Rim teaching. The Lam Rim explains that finding the freedoms and endowments is difficult because accumulating their causes and so forth is extremely difficult.

The relevant verse reads:

19. *One did not generate virtue  
And one accumulated negativity easily.  
Even for ten million eons  
One will not hear even the words 'happy  
realm'.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

It is extremely difficult to later obtain the freedoms and endowments because in this life one has not generated any virtue, and accumulated negativity easily, and so one will not even hear the words 'happy realm' for ten million eons.

The essential point here is that it *is extremely difficult to later obtain the freedoms and endowments*. While the explanation in the commentary is quite easy to understand, the main point is that we really need to incorporate it into our minds so that it is a constant source of encouragement. As explained here, the reason why it is extremely difficult to obtain the freedoms and endowments in the future is *because in this life one has not generated any virtue and has accumulated negativities*. If one has not generated any virtue and accumulated negativities, then it is difficult to obtain the freedoms and endowments in the future. Again, we can relate this to the explanations in the Lam Rim, which say that the cause of obtaining the freedoms and endowments is virtue.

If we have not accumulated the causes then naturally we will not be able to experience the result, specifically the result of the freedoms and endowments. If one is reborn in the lower realms then *one will not even hear the words 'happy realms' for ten million eons*. This means that if one were to be reborn in the lower realms then, let alone being able to create the causes for the freedoms and

endowments, one will not even know what the freedoms and endowments are, just like a creature in the depths of the ocean could not be aware of other types of existence. Without even knowing about them, the chances of creating the causes for a happy existence would be very remote, to the point of being virtually impossible. Again, the main point here is to take this as an encouragement to actually practise the Dharma.

To explain this in practical terms, if we wish to obtain a perfect human rebirth with its freedoms and endowments in the next lifetime, then we need to shun negativity and accumulate virtue. We can wish as much as we want, to obtain good conditions and be born as human beings, but if we continuously create negativity and put little or no effort into accumulating virtue, then we are not creating the causes to enjoy these good conditions again in the future. All too often we fall into a state of procrastination thinking, 'Well, even if I don't do too well this time round I will probably obtain a human rebirth again next time and it might be better the next time round. I will do better then'. However, being able to obtain a perfect a human rebirth again in the future is dependent on the causes and conditions that we need to be creating now.

#### 2.2.1.5. WHY IT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND FREEDOMS AND ENDOWMENTS

The relevant verse reads:

20. *For that very reason the Bhagavan taught  
That merely becoming human is extremely  
difficult,  
As it is for a turtle  
To put its neck through the yoke floating on the  
great ocean.*

Gyaltsab Je begins his explanation of this verse with:

Because it is very difficult to find a happy rebirth from the lower realms, the Bhagavan taught in his perfect scriptures:

Then Gyaltsab Je quotes the *Perfect Sutra*:

*Bhikkhus, if all this ground were to become a great ocean on which a yoke with one hole is moved by the wind. And in that ocean if there was a blind turtle that only sticks its neck out of the water once a hundred years.*

*Bhikkhus, what do you think? Is it easy for the turtle to catch the yoke with its neck? 'Tathagata, it is not so'. The Tathagata replied: Bhikkhus, similarly is it difficult merely to attain a human rebirth.*

The commentary then continues

If one does not create virtue and accumulates negativity, then one does not even hear the word 'happy migration'. For that reason, the Bhagavan taught that merely to attain a human rebirth is much more difficult than for the blind turtle that comes up only every hundred years, to stick its neck into the single hole of the yoke floating on the surface of the ocean, being moved here and there by the wind.

Therefore one needs to make an effort to practise virtue when one is in the happy migration.

As the commentary explains, the freedoms and endowments are incredibly difficult to find, and even more so when one is in the lower realms. In the *Perfect Sutra* the Buddha gave a hypothetical example to illustrate the degree of difficulty this entails. We imagine

*the whole ground becoming an incredibly vast ocean, and on that the ocean is a single yoke with only one hole in it, and this yoke is constantly moved by the wind. At the bottom of the ocean is a blind turtle, which surfaces only once every hundred years. The likelihood of that blind turtle entering its neck into that single hole of the yoke is very remote indeed.*

Then the Buddha asked his disciples, 'What is the likelihood of this happening? Is it easy for a blind turtle to enter its neck into the hole?'. They replied, '*It is not so, it is very difficult*'. This, said the Buddha, is as difficult as attaining a human rebirth.

As explained in the teachings, each part of this example is an analogy.

- The blind turtle represents ignorant beings who are ignorant of the wisdom as to what to adopt and what to discard.
- Once every hundred years is an analogy to the fact that it is very rare to be reborn as a human being with all the perfect conditions.
- The turtle surfacing is analogous to being reborn in a higher rebirth.
- The yoke on the surface of the ocean represents the Buddha's teachings.

Just as the likelihood of that blind turtle placing its neck into the yoke is a near impossibility, taking a higher rebirth, with the chance of meeting with the Buddha's teaching is very, very remote. One might be reborn as a human, but in the country or place where his teachings are not available, or where there are no conditions for the Dharma to be taught or practised. So one might be born as human, but without the conditions to practise. From this analogy, we can see how extremely difficult it is to find all these freedoms and endowments intact.

Obtaining the freedoms and endowments of a higher rebirth, with all the perfect conditions, is said to be even more remote than this hypothetical example of the chance of a blind turtle sticking its neck into the hole of the yoke. That is how it explained in the teachings.

Then the commentary on this section concludes with, *Therefore one needs to make an effort to practise virtue when one is in the happy migration.*

#### 2.2.2. Conscientiously meditating on virtue

This section is subdivided into three:

2.2.2.1. It is appropriate to strive in abandoning the infinite negativity accumulated previously

2.2.2.2. Why a single suffering in the lower realm exhausts that karma, but does not exhaust the karma of the lower realm

2.2.2.3. Why it is appropriate to strive in the antidote to negativity

##### 2.2.2.1. IT IS APPROPRIATE TO STRIVE IN ABANDONING THE INFINITE NEGATIVITY ACCUMULATED PREVIOUSLY

This explanation follows on from the earlier explanation that if creating negativity is the cause for one to be born in the lower realm, then it is most appropriate that one strives to purify the infinite non-virtue accumulated previously.

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The verse relating to this outline reads:

21. *If one remains in the naraks for eons  
Due to one moment of negativity,  
Then why even mention that one won't go to  
the happy realms  
Due to the negativity accumulated in  
beginningless samsara?*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

If one has to remain in the hells without respite for eons due to only one moment of anger at a bodhisattva, then what need is there to mention that one will not go to the happy migrations due to the negativity in one's continuum that has been accumulated since beginningless time, and has not been destroyed by an antidote?

One should train in purifying negativity by way of the four powers.

When the commentary says, *If one has to remain in the hells without respite due to only one moment of anger at a bodhisattva*, it is referring to the impact of just one moment of negative karma. This is in contrast to the intense negative karma that is created over a long period in many previous lifetimes. Here, because the object of one's anger is a bodhisattva, a very superior object, the negativity created is a cause leading to the hells without respite, for a long period of time. We can also relate this to the fact that karma multiplies greatly, which is one of the four characteristics of karma. So the main point here is that even a short moment of negative karma such as anger can have heavy negative consequences.

The duration of the cause might only be *a moment of anger at a bodhisattva* but the result is that *one has to remain in hell without respite for eons*. Because of the short duration of the negative deed, one might think, 'Oh, this is a very small negative deed over a short period of time, so the consequences may not be too bad'. However, as explained here, if one were to create negative karma in relation to a supreme object such as a bodhisattva, even if it is of short duration, the consequence is that one will have to experience being born in the hell realms for many eons. Gyaltsab Rinpoche also explains this point very clearly in his other works, where he exhorts us to be mindful and particularly careful not to criticise and be judgemental of others with anger, because we cannot know who is a bodhisattva. So we need to protect ourselves from this grave misdeed lest we end up criticising and becoming angry with a bodhisattva.

The commentary then further explains that if one will remain in hell without respite for eons just from one moment of anger towards a bodhisattva, *then what need is there to mention that one will not go to the happy migrations due to the negativity in one's continuum that has been accumulated since beginningless times and has not been destroyed by an antidote?* As we have been in samsara since beginningless time, we have accumulated infinite negativities in the past. For as long as those negativities are still within our mental continuum, not destroyed by an antidote, there should be no doubt about the possibility of being reborn in the lower realms. The point here is that these negativities that have been accumulated since beginningless time can be destroyed when the antidote is applied. So *one should train in purifying negativity by way of the four powers*.

The four opponent powers were explained previously, and we need to take this advice to heart as a personal instruction. We need to remind ourselves again and again that we need to be constantly mindful of purifying the negativities that we have accumulated in the past by applying the four opponent powers. Then we need to guard ourselves from creating even more negativities. When we adopt this as our practice in our daily life then we will definitely be applying the antidote for overcoming these negativities. If we adopt the reverse of that i.e. keep virtues at bay and embrace the negativities, then the price will be rebirth in the lower realms.

However we also need to be mindful about not becoming disheartened because we have accumulated so much negativity in the past, or the fact that we find ourselves continuously engaging in negativities now, seemingly without control, which is due to our habituation with these negativities. While that prospect may seem quite daunting, we do have the ability to purify negativities. We have the knowledge and we have the means to firstly identify what is negativity, and when we find that we have engaged in some negativities, we have the means to purify them by applying the four opponent powers.

So it is not at all a hopeless situation because we do have that opportunity to purify our negativities. As I have mentioned previously, while an immediate negativity may be the trigger for a purification practice, when we actually engage in that practice it is very important that we also bring to mind any negativity that we have created in the past. In relation to this life we can definitely recall negativities that we had created in the earlier part of the day, last night, last week, last month, last year, and in the earlier part of one's life. By recalling them we can inevitably feel strong regret about accumulating those negativities.

As the teachings mention, when one develops a very strong regret then that suffices to purify a great amount of negativity. The four opponent powers entail being profoundly regretful that yet again one has been compelled to engage in these negativities; taking refuge, as a quick way of applying the antidote; and then resolving not to commit these misdeeds again. If we find that we have created negativity in the morning, we try to purify it by noon. If further on in the day one finds one has again created negativity then, towards the evening one again applies the four opponent powers of developing regret and so forth. In this way, by applying mindfulness we are able to apply the measures of purifying negativities through the four opponent powers, by taking refuge and so forth.

In fact, the practice of purification is, by default, also the optimum means for accumulating merit. So purification practice is incredibly worthwhile. When we conduct ourselves in our daily life by regretting negativities we have created in the past, then that regret will be the impetus to purify these negativities. Likewise, when we think about the virtues we have definitely created, we can rejoice. If we conduct our daily life in this way, rejoicing in good deeds and purifying our negative deeds, then we will secure a meaningful life. As we purify negative karma and engage in these practices the mind naturally becomes happier and happier, and there will naturally be



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more joy in one's mind. That is a practical positive result of the purification practice.

A Dharma practitioner is one who, based on their understanding of karma, understands that virtue results in happiness and non-virtue results in unhappiness. Based on that simple principle, if we find that we have created some non-virtue, then, because we don't want to experience the result, which is unhappiness and suffering, we can take the initiative to purify those accumulated negativities. And then, in every possible way, we try to adopt a virtuous mind, and engage in virtuous deeds, because we wish to experience the positive result of happiness. When we conduct ourselves in that way then that constitutes a real Dharma practitioner.

Put simply, when we apply the purification practice with the four opponent powers then that very practice becomes the means to block the passage or doorway to the lower realms. And then, as when we engage in virtues and accumulate merit it opens the doorway or passage to a higher rebirth.

There are only two doorways and it is up to us to choose which one we want to enter. We have no other choice but these two doorways, so we need to make the right choice.

#### **2.2.2.2. WHY A SINGLE SUFFERING IN THE LOWER REALM EXHAUSTS THAT KARMA, BUT DOES NOT EXHAUST THE KARMA OF THE LOWER REALM**

The next verse is explained in the context of overcoming another hypothetical doubt; we might again think, 'If experiencing the sufferings in the lower realms will exhaust one's karma to be in the lower realms, then I will be reborn again in higher realm'. However, by virtue of being in the lower realms one will be continuously creating more causes to remain there, which is why it is not easy to free oneself from the lower realms.

As will be explained, once born in the lower realms one will quite naturally and spontaneously create further negative karmas to remain in the lower realms, continuously propelling one from one unfortunate rebirth to the next. We can avoid that by using our current fortunate rebirth to apply the causes and conditions to be born again in the higher realms. That would be a crucial way to practice, for just experiencing the consequences of one unfortunate rebirth does not mean that the karma to be born in the lower realms will be completely exhausted.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

1 April 2014

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When we recite the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* at the beginning of any practice, it is really good to reflect on it as an opportunity to generate the optimum motivation for doing the practice. We need to remember that taking refuge is the essential criteria for ensuring that the practice is a Buddhist practice, whilst generating bodhicitta ensures that the practice is a Mahayana practice.

It seems that every religion has its own form of refuge prayer that is recited at the beginning of every ceremony.

So, based on the motivation we have generated during the recitation of the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in our meditation practice.

[meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teaching, and put it into practice well.

## 2.2.2.2. WHY A SINGLE SUFFERING IN THE LOWER REALM EXHAUSTS THAT KARMA, BUT DOES NOT EXHAUST THE KARMA OF THE LOWER REALM

Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary on this section of the text with this query:

One may think: It is not difficult to become liberated from the lower realms because after the result is exhausted I will take rebirth in the happy migration.

This query is yet another excuse to procrastinate in one's Dharma practice, where one thinks, 'If I were to be reborn in the lower realms, then when that karma is used up I will be able to take a higher rebirth, and I'll be able to achieve liberation then'. This thinking is based on the fact that the karma to be reborn in the lower realms occurs as a result of previous karma, and that karma exhausts itself. Reasoning that rebirth in the lower realms means using up negative karma, thus leaving it possible to be able to take rebirth in the higher realms sooner rather than later, and then achieve liberation, can lead to laziness and procrastination about practising the Dharma.

The verse relating to this outline reads:

22. *Only through the mere experience  
One will not be liberated, because  
During the experience  
One generates other negativities.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

A person will not be liberated from the lower realms merely through experiencing the result of only one negative action, because while one is experiencing the suffering result of previous karma one adventitiously

creates other negativity that brings forth powerful suffering.

As explained here, merely experiencing the results of previously created negative karma does not mean one will be *liberated from the lower realms*. The commentary further explains that *while one is experiencing the suffering result of previous karma, one adventitiously creates other negativity that brings forth powerful suffering*. In addition to experiencing the sufferings of the lower realms, the conditions there are a cause to repeatedly create even more negative karma, which brings about even more suffering. Here we can use the example of the animal realm, a lower realm with which we are very familiar. We can see that most animals have to constantly engage in negative actions for their very survival. They cannot recognise their actions as negativity, let alone know that they can be purified. Due to their state of ignorance they have no knowledge of the ways to create virtue, or to shun negativity. Even we humans, who do have that intelligence and knowledge, find it difficult to avoid negativity and adopt virtue. Animals have no such choice.

The personal instruction here is that being reborn in the lower realms will be a perpetual cause for creating further negative karma, and thus continuous rebirth in the lower realms over a long period of time. To avoid that situation we need to use the good conditions we have now to avoid the negative causes that will lead to rebirth in a lower realm, and adopt the positive causes or virtue that will ensure that we have a good rebirth. Then we can continuously go from one fortunate rebirth to the next, continuously engaging in creating virtue and merit until we reach the ultimate goal. Just as the result of previous negative karma is to be reborn in the lower realms, rebirth in the fortunate realms is definitely the result of positive, virtuous karma.

Since we have now achieved that fortunate rebirth, we need to ensure that we do not use up our positive karma. Just as the karma of lower realms can be exhausted, our karma in the fortunate realms can also be used up. If we don't seize the opportunity to create further virtuous karma, then there is no other possibility than a lower rebirth. Then the situation of repeatedly creating negative karma will befall us. Therefore, we need to really understand that we are responsible for our own future, and whether we have a fortunate rebirth or an unfortunate rebirth lies entirely within our own hands. So we need to take the initiative if we are to achieve our goal.

On a personal level, the advice here is that we should not relate being reborn in lower realms to external circumstances, i.e. as only happening to others. Rather, we need to personalise this advice and keep in mind the fact that it relates to oneself. So, one needs to be thinking, 'If I were reborn in the lower realms then it will be extremely difficult for me to escape from that'. That will be an impetus to really take this advice to heart for the need to practise the Dharma.

Then Gyaltsab Je concludes his commentary on the verse:

On the basis of the lower realms, virtue is weak and negativity is continuously accumulated. Therefore one should strive to stop the cause of the lower realms.

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Here Gyaltsab Je is re-emphasising Shantideva's advice. If one were to be reborn in the lower realms there will be hardly any opportunity to accumulate virtue, because the conditions for accumulating virtue are very minimal. Furthermore, because of the conditions in the lower realms we would be continuously creating negativity. We see the truth of this when we look at the animal realm. What opportunities do they have to accumulate virtue? We might help a pet to create some virtue by taking them around a holy object like a stupa, or say some mantras, but apart from that they don't have any opportunity to willingly create virtue. When we think about the prospect of having to experience those kinds of conditions ourselves, we will see why we need to *strive to stop the cause of the lower realms*. We need to take this as a personal instruction to constantly remind ourselves, 'Be careful, be careful. Now that I have these good conditions I have to use them wisely and not waste them'.

The crux of the advice is in the words *the cause of the lower realms*—we need to reflect on the causes for rebirth in the lower realms. Here we consider the ten non-virtues. Killing, such as taking the life of another being, is a cause for the lower realms; taking what belongs to another is a cause for the lower realms; and engaging in sexual misconduct is a cause for the lower realms. We need to take note here that sexual misconduct applies to lay people, who don't have the vow of celibacy.

We can see here how kind and skilful the Buddha was in his advice on accumulating virtue and abandoning non-virtue. It would be extremely difficult for lay people to completely abstain from sexual activity, so here the advice is to abstain from sexual misconduct. If one wishes to practise on a higher level one can take the self-liberation vows of an ordained monk or nun, which include the vow to completely abstain from sexual activity, i.e. the vow of celibacy. So the Buddha meticulously presented many opportunities for engaging in virtue and abstaining from negativity on various different levels, in accordance with the capacity of his followers.

Further causes for rebirth in the lower realms are lying, slander, harsh words, idle gossip, covetousness, ill will and wrong view. Engaging in these non-virtues is a cause to be reborn in the lower realms, whereas willingly abandoning the ten non-virtues and thus adopting the ten virtues is the cause for a fortunate rebirth. None of these ten virtues are beyond our capacity. We can all abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and so forth, while engaging in virtuous deeds such as protecting the life of others, practicing generosity and so forth.

Here we need to engage in a personal dialogue. 'If you have the choice, would you rather go to the lower realms or take a fortunate rebirth in the next lifetime?' The natural answer should be, 'I definitely want to have a fortunate rebirth'. 'So, if you want to have a fortunate rebirth and avoid an unfortunate one, then you need to create the causes for it. If you just lie back and do nothing, then how could you possibly create the causes for a fortunate rebirth?' Reprimanding oneself with a personal dialogue like this is a good method to encourage oneself to accumulate virtue. It is in this way that we gradually develop more faith in the Dharma and an

aspiration to engage in the practice. Adopting a life of accumulating virtue and shunning negativity will gradually become more stable for the sublime Dharma to take root in one's life.

As I mentioned previously, while we acknowledge that we should avoid negativity and adopt virtue, we may still find ourselves uncontrollably engaging in non-virtues. You might find yourself (accidentally or intentionally) taking the life of another sentient being, or taking something without permission, or engaging in sexual misconduct. These things may occur from time to time because we are habituated to them. With a proper understanding of the Dharma that should not become a cause for despondency and feeling that things are hopeless. Rather you should remind yourselves again and again of the teaching that purification is a powerful means to purify negative karma.

When you remember that you can purify negative karma, then the great privilege of understanding the Dharma means that you will be able to apply the antidote to any negativity immediately. When you find you have created some negativity, rather than feeling hopeless and depressed, and thinking, 'Oh, I have created so much negativity I am definitely going to the lower realms. There is no hope for me anymore', one should immediately remember, 'OK, I have created some negativity but negativity can be purified'. That is why the kind Buddha presented us with the means for purification. The first part of purification is feeling regret, and based on regret one applies the appropriate antidotes.

By taking the Dharma to heart in this way, when you do find yourselves unwillingly creating some negativity out of habituation, you can rest assured that you can still purify that negative karma; that will prevent rebirth in the lower realms. We need to also use that as a reminder to ensure that we are creating the causes for a fortunate rebirth.

This is how we need to apply ourselves if we want to take the Dharma practice to heart. If one thinks, 'Oh, I don't care anymore' then one has definitely fallen victim to one's own negativity; one will not purify negativities because one does not care about it. In fact, one may even start to feel joyful about creating negativity and regretful about creating virtue. When we think about it we will see how, even though we have this incredible, fortunate rebirth with the freedoms and endowments intact, somehow there are times when we regret not having been able to create some negativity, and feel hesitant about opportunities to create virtue. Feeling glad that we have had the opportunity to create non-virtue and sad that we have missed an opportunity to create non-virtue or negativity would be a really pitiful situation, to say the least, given the great conditions we have now.

In summary, the main point to consider is that we definitely have the capacity to obtain a fortunate rebirth in the next lifetime. The causes to obtain such a fortunate rebirth, as well as taking another fortunate rebirth from a higher rebirth are not difficult or obscure. What is difficult, is obtaining a higher rebirth from the lower realms. Thus, we must take matters into our own hands. There is no-one who puts us into a lower rebirth but

ourselves. Likewise, no-one else can obstruct us from taking a fortunate rebirth except ourselves. Who creates the causes for a fortunate rebirth? Again, it is none other than ourselves. The causes definitely lie within our hands as we have the capacity and we have the means. The main thing to consider is that this explanation is a way to encourage us to use these good conditions we have now to create the appropriate causes for a good rebirth.

In simple terms, Shantideva is saying, 'You have the full capacity and the appropriate conditions to create the causes for a fortunate rebirth. If you go to the lower realms it will be very difficult freeing yourself from that. Now, when you have those good conditions to create a cause for a fortunate rebirth, is the time to create those causes'. These incredible conditions that we all possess right now are such that we can create extensive merit even in just a second. As you would have heard many times, if an ordinary person generates the mind of bodhicitta, even for just a second, the amount of merit they accumulate would be difficult for all the buddhas to articulate.

### 2.2.2.3. WHY IT IS APPROPRIATE TO STRIVE IN THE ANTIDOTE TO NEGATIVITY

We can relate this section to Nagarjuna's definitions of negativity and non-virtue, which have been explained in past teachings. Nagarjuna defined negativity as that which is an onset to rebirth into the lower realms, whereas non-virtue is defined as that which is shunned by the noble ones. Here Nagarjuna is making a distinction that is very pertinent to this outline.

This outline is subdivided into four:

2.2.2.3.1. If one does not strive in virtue upon having obtained the freedoms and endowments, then one is deceiving oneself

2.2.2.3.2. One will experience suffering in this life

2.2.2.3.3. Later one will be tormented by the sufferings of the lower realms

2.2.2.3.4. Why it is appropriate to abandon negativity and practise virtue

*2.2.2.3.1. If one does not strive in virtue upon having obtained the freedoms and endowments, then one is deceiving oneself*

The point here is that no-one is depriving us of this opportunity to create virtue but ourselves.

The relevant verse reads:

23. *If, upon having found this freedom,  
I do not meditate on virtue,  
Then there is no greater deception,  
There is no greater ignorance.*

With respect to this verse Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Having found this freedom which is difficult to find, and when found has great meaning, if I do not strive in and meditate on the cause for higher status and liberation, then there is no better method of self-deception.

There is also no greater ignorance than the ignorance concerning what has to be practised and what has to be abandoned.

The commentary gives a very clear explanation of the verse. *Having found this freedom which is difficult to find*

refers to the freedoms and endowments that we enjoy now. We had to create many virtuous causes in the past to obtain these great conditions, and having found this life *there is great meaning* refers to the great capacity one has to obtain the causes for one's future goals.

This not talking about goals like finding the necessities for survival. Rather, it is referring to the great potential we have to obtain the causes for a fortunate rebirth. Based on the conditions we have now, we have the full capacity and means to avoid the ten non-virtues and to engage in the ten virtues. That then becomes the cause for a fortunate rebirth in the next life. Furthermore, on the basis of the conditions we have now, we have the full capacity and potential to generate renunciation, which becomes a cause to obtain liberation, becoming free from rebirth in cyclic existence. And finally, with these conditions we also have the full capacity to generate bodhicitta and gain the realisation of emptiness, which are the causes to obtain the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

Because we have these freedoms and endowments we can create the causes for these three goals. So, *if I do not strive in, and meditate on, the cause for higher status and liberation, which includes enlightenment, then there is no better method of self-deception.* As I have mentioned previously, if we do not utilise the good conditions we have now, and just focus on our survival and worldly concerns, then that would be a great deception. Indeed, the greatest deception is to waste this incredible opportunity and potential we have to obtain these supreme goals. Furthermore, there is no greater ignorance than to be ignorant of what is to be adopted and practised, and what is to be abandoned. So we are being encouraged to use these great conditions to ensure that we do not fall victim to self-deception, and apply these good conditions to creating the causes to obtain our goals. While it is easy to understand what is being explained here, we need to take it to heart and really try to implement it in our daily life and practice.

*2.2.2.3.2. One will experience suffering in this life*

The verse relating

24. *Should I, after having understood this,  
Still be indolent due to ignorance,  
When the time to die comes  
Great misery will arise.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads,

Should I, after having realised that I have to strive in achieving virtue and abandoning negativity, still be indolent with regard to the mind of enlightenment, the practice of the perfections and so on, then at the time of death, when I know I am going to the lower realms, great misery will arise. Therefore I should strive with great effort.

The meaning of the commentary is quite clear. The significant point is that when, if one has realised that one must adopt virtue and abandon negativity but disregards this and continues to engage in frivolous activities, or if one has not adopted the mind of bodhicitta, not practising the perfections such as generosity and so forth, then at the time of death one will generate great sorrow and misery. Realising at that time, when one reflects upon one's life, that negativity is the cause for rebirth in

the lower realms, and that one has mostly engaged in negativity and not accumulated virtue, one will be tormented and have great regret in one's mind.

It is a fact that when people are in the last stages of death appearances occur to them that are linked to what they have done in their life. Some appearances cause them real joy because they have accumulated virtues. However, for those who recognise they've mostly engaged in negativity, the appearances bring great fear and unease in their minds. This definitely occurs. Here in the west, dying people who are in pain are often sedated with morphine which seems to numb their mind and senses, so even if they have some experience of these appearances they may not be able to express it. However, when body and senses are not numbed there are clear signs of anxiety at the time of death from those with strong regret.

For yourself, the advice here is *to strive with great effort*. By bringing to mind the great misery that will occur at the time of death, and wanting to avoid it, one will create the causes for a fortunate rebirth. One needs to apply great effort to adopt virtues and refrain from negativities. The crucial point is realising that one has to strive to adopt virtue and abstain from negativity. If one does not apply the practice, one becomes complacent. There is a Tibetan term describing this which has the connotation of becoming immune or desensitised to the Dharma. This is a very dangerous situation to be in, and one to avoid, so take it to heart and apply the practice of Dharma sincerely now.

The teachings explain that great practitioners have only joy in going onwards at the time of death. A medium-level practitioner has no hesitation in facing death and the lowest-level practitioner will not have any regrets in their mind. Thus, one needs to ensure that at the very least, one can prevent strong regret arising at the time of death. It would be a good achievement to know one has done one's best to adopt virtues and purify negativities, and that there is no need for regret at the time of death. It is important to ensure that we practise the Dharma wholeheartedly now, when we have the opportunity.

We can see how Nagarjuna's definition of negativity, which is that it is the onset to rebirth in the lower realms, is very relevant here. This means that creating negativity is like being in the state that is one step away from the lower realms. For individuals who have created a lot of negativity, there will be fear, anxiety and sorrow at the time of death, due to the prospect of what will come next. In relation to that, we can see that Nagarjuna's precise definition of negativity is very pertinent. Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti were great masters. His Holiness mentioned recently that Lama Tsong Khapa clearly matched their attributes and their capacity for reasoning and discernment. In both ancient and modern times there are hardly any other masters who equal them. As their explanations and advices are extremely clear and precise, we really need to take heed of them.

The first Dalai Lama said that the real enemies to overcome are the delusions, and these lie within oneself. Take this advice to heart and recognise that the real enemy lies within; as such, the delusions are the main culprit that cause all the turmoil and harm for oneself.

Recognising this means that we need to protect ourselves from the intensity of the negativities. It might be difficult for us to completely prevent negative states of mind such as anger, jealousy or attachment from arising occasionally, but while they are difficult to prevent, we can stop them from escalating. We can stop anger becoming intense anger such as hatred; we can stop intense jealousy that harms our mind and causes harm to others, and we can stop attachment from becoming obsessed with the object.

We have the means to overcome strong emotions, so we can apply antidotes to anger etc. But if one doesn't apply them and holds onto the anger, one is then befriending anger. Again, with attachment, if, rather than applying the antidote, one actually befriends attachment, one makes oneself a slave to attachment, listening to whatever attachment (or anger) says. One might find it hard to listen to the advice of one's gurus, but when it comes to listening to our anger and our attachment we have no hesitation. We become completely submissive to our attachment, anger and ignorance and allow them to be our masters, who we willingly serve. In summary, the delusions, which are the real cause of harm and destruction, lie nowhere else but within oneself, so we need to recognise and overcome this.

Although it will be explained further in the text, I want you to prepare yourself now and to familiarise yourself with identifying the delusions, particularly the six root delusions and the 20 secondary delusions.

### ***2.2.2.3.3. Later one will be tormented by the sufferings of the lower realms***

In case one feels that one could enjoy oneself in the lower realms, what is being explained here is that one will be tormented by the sufferings of the lower realms.

The next verse in the outline reads:

25. *When my body is burned by  
The difficult to bear fires of hell for a long time,  
The fire of terrible regret will light up,  
And the mind will be despondent, this is  
certain.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains :

Through the faults of degenerating the mind of enlightenment and so forth one will take rebirth in the lower realms. When then the difficult to bear fires of hell burn my body for a long time, the fire of terrible regret will light up and my mind will be tormented. Since this is certain, make an effort to not incur any faults and downfalls.

The commentary explains here that the fault of allowing the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta to degenerate is one of the heaviest of the downfalls. Previously, this was explained extensively. What is being explained here again is that *through the faults of degenerating the mind of enlightenment, one will take rebirth in the lower realm*. If one were to be born in a hell realm, such as the hot hell realm, one's body and fire become inseparable, and it is as if one's body and the fire is of one entity. So in that kind of situation, how could one even imagine that one's mind will not be tormented; there is no question about how much unceasing torment one would experience in both body and mind. The commentary explains here that this

outcome is certain and that such consequences definitely have to be experienced.

What one needs to take to heart now is to make an effort not to incur any faults and downfalls. The main point is that once one takes those pledges of practising, one should ensure that one does not incur faults and downfalls, and that as one has the ability to apply the antidote to negativity, one should do so, as this serves as the means to overcome negativity.

#### **2.2.2.3.4. Why it is appropriate to abandon negativity and practise virtue**

Having contemplated the consequences of negativity, what logically follows is that it is appropriate to abandon negativity and practice virtue. So this is again subdivided into two:

2.2.2.3.4.1. Having wasted the freedoms and endowments, if one goes to the lower realms again, then one resembles something mindless

2.2.2.3.4.2. It is appropriate to contemplate the cause of ignorance

#### **2.2.2.3.4.1. Having wasted the freedoms and endowments, if one goes to the lower realms again, then one resembles something mindless**

I have elaborated on the fact that if one does not actually put these incredibly good conditions of the freedom and endowments to use, and seize that opportunity to use them optimally to create virtue and abandon negativities, and if one lays back and engages in frivolous worldly activities, then one has wasted those good conditions. Thus, having wasted the freedoms and endowments one goes to the lower realms. It is as if there is no common sense at all. This is what is being reflected here.

The verses under this heading read:

26. *Having found somehow  
This extremely difficult to find basis of benefit  
If I return to the lower realms later again  
Despite having knowledge,*

27ab. *Then, similarly to one confused by mantra,  
This makes me someone without mind.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

This basis of benefit, the precious human rebirth with freedoms and endowments, is extremely difficult to find and, if found, is of great purpose.

Having found it somehow by chance, should I again go to the lower realms despite having knowledge of what is useful and what is harmful, then that makes me someone without a mind achieving just the purpose of the moment for self, similarly to a person confused by mantra.

The commentary explains here that the basis of benefit is *the precious human rebirth with freedoms and endowments*, and that this *is extremely difficult to find*. Reflect back on the explanations given in the Lam Rim teachings about why it is difficult to find the freedoms and endowments, where three reasons are given: the causes are difficult to accumulate; explaining with an analogy why it is difficult; and because of the number of precious human rebirths being minimal in comparison to the numbers of living beings in other realms.

As mentioned in the commentary, having *found this precious human rebirth is of great purpose*. As explained

previously, the great purpose is to achieve one's temporary and ultimate goals, and one can achieve all this having found, as if by chance, this precious human rebirth with freedoms and endowments. So, if one were to go back again to the lower realms, *despite* having known *what is useful and what is harmful, makes me someone without a mind*. This means that it is as if one does not have a rational mind that knows what is good and beneficial and what is harmful to oneself.

*Achieving just the purpose on the moment for oneself*, refers to being completely immersed in temporary gratification and goals, rather than thinking about virtuous actions, and the necessity for long-term achievements. The analogy for being mindless is that it is similar to a person who is under the spell of a mantra of another person. They would be completely confused, and do things that are completely irrational, because they are completely dominated or influenced by the spell of the mantra. Thus, wasting one's perfect opportunities now with its freedoms and endowments would be similar to one who is mindless (lacking any common sense), like being under the spell of a mantra.

#### **2.2.2.3.4.2. It is appropriate to contemplate the cause of ignorance**

In presenting the meaning of the next two lines of verse, Gyaltsab Je opens his commentary with a query:

*Query: How did one become confused?*

Then as a response to that query the two lines of verse read:

*27cd. I do not know how I got so confused  
What is lurking inside of me?*

Then the commentary explains:

*Answer: I also do not know due to which cause I got confused and thus deceived. What cause for confusion is lurking inside me? I think there definitely is something.*

If one falls into laziness, then one should think in this way.

What is again being reflected upon here is that even though we have all the good conditions such as the eight freedoms and ten endowments, and the knowledge and understanding of what is to be adopted and what is to be shunned, one still finds that one is not taking full opportunity and wastes the opportunities with frivolous worldly activities that focus on oneself. 'What could be causing that? There must definitely be something inside of me that is causing that confusion. What could it be?' This is a means of recognising that it is the delusions within oneself that are causing the confusion.

This introduces the next verse which refers to *my enemies of anger, craving and so forth*.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྡོད་བ་ལ་འཇུག་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

8 April 2014

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Based on the motivation we have just generated we can engage in the practice of meditation. [meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to become enlightened myself, and so for that purpose I will engage in the teaching, and put it into practice well.

The *tong len* meditation practice that we have just attempted to do is, of course, the basis for developing love and compassion, which is the core practice of Buddhism. We cannot possibly assume that we are engaging in any real practice if we leave this essential element aside.

This is in line with an understanding of what it means to be a practising Buddhist. A practising Buddhist is someone who, based on the teachings on non-violence that the Buddha gave, wholeheartedly entrusts themselves to the Three Jewels (the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha), seeing the Buddha as their protector and teacher, and following his teachings. It is essential that we, who consider ourselves Buddhists, know what Buddhadharma encompasses. It would be quite pitiful if, when we are asked what Buddhadharma is, we hesitate in giving an answer. Several years ago at one of the Easter courses, I recall that when Vanessa's younger sister was present and showing interest, I told her to take the question 'What is Buddhadharma?' to her discussion session. When she posed that question, no-one seemed to be able to give a succinct and good answer to it.

It is particularly important that those who present Buddhism to newer students respond to questions with succinct answers that encompass the essential points. As I regularly share with those who present the classes for beginners, you need to prepare yourself not only for the presentation, but also be prepared to answer any questions that are asked.

When classes are advertised as an introduction to Buddhism, people will inevitably ask such questions as 'What is Buddhadharma?' It would not be sufficient to answer, 'It is the practice of abandoning the ten non-virtues such as killing and so forth' because the morality of abandoning killing is common to other traditions as well, such as Christianity and so forth. So we cannot present the practice of abandoning negativities and adopting virtue as being unique to Buddhism.

*2.2.2.3.4. Why it is appropriate to abandon negativity and practise virtue*

*2.2.2.3.4.2. It is appropriate to contemplate the cause of ignorance (cont.)*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with a query:

Query: How did one become confused?

Why is it that one is not taking the freedoms and endowments, which enable us to engage in the practice, to heart? Why are they not being utilised to engage in practice?

Something must be causing this confusion and inability to act. As the verse states:

*27cd. I do not know how I got so confused,  
What is lurking inside of me?*

Then Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

*Answer:* I also do not know due to which cause I got confused and thus deceived. What cause for confusion is lurking inside me? I think there definitely is something.

If one falls into laziness, then one should think in this way.

The hypothetical query at the beginning is presented as a way to really look into the main culprit that is causing one to not adopt the practices. As the commentary states, *I also do not know due to which cause I got confused and thus deceived. What cause for confusion is lurking inside me? I think there definitely is something.* Presenting this point in the form of a personal dialogue brings to light the fact that, although we see the value of observing morality, and engaging in the practices of listening, contemplating and meditating, and have the inclination to practice, there seems to be something that is preventing us from really embracing that practice on a continuous basis. So what is it that is preventing us from practising?

We need to take particular note that this presentation is suggesting that we undertake a personal investigation. The very words *what cause for confusion is lurking inside me* indicates that there is definitely something lurking within that is the cause of our procrastination and hesitation about practising. So, as suggested here, we need to take the measure of checking within to identify the main cause of the confusion that causes the hesitation, laziness and so forth. Then, as emphasised here, lest *one falls into laziness* and becomes complacent, *one should be thinking in this way*, again and again, about how there is something within that is causing such confusion.

Then the text presents the causes of that confusion.

## *2.2.3. Conscientiously abandoning the afflictions*

This heading implies that having identified the afflictions, one needs to apply conscientiousness and joyful effort as a way to abandon the afflictions.

This section of the text has three subdivisions:

2.2.3.1. Contemplating the faults of the afflictions

2.2.3.2. How it is unsuitable to tire of the difficulty of abandoning the afflictions

2.2.3.3. Meditating on joy knowing that if one makes an effort it is possible to abandon the afflictions

### **2.2.3.1. CONTEMPLATING THE FAULTS OF THE AFFLICTIONS**

This has three further subdivisions:

2.2.3.1.1. Contemplating how the afflictions harm oneself

2.2.3.1.2. How it is unsuitable to meditate on patience for the afflictions

2.2.3.1.3. Generating courage to destroy them

#### *2.2.3.1.1. Contemplating how the afflictions harm oneself*

This is subdivided into four:

2.2.3.1.1.1. They take away our freedom

2.2.3.1.1.2. They generate boundless suffering

2.2.3.1.1.3. They harm over an infinite amount of time

2.2.3.1.1.4. The reason why it is unsuitable to befriend the afflictions

Following the earlier presentation where the great master Shantideva entreated us to look into ourselves and really contemplate the sources of the confusion that cause all of the aforementioned faults - hesitation about practising, procrastination and so forth - when we genuinely and honestly look within we will be able to identify that it is the afflictions that are the main cause. So, as a way of overcoming them, we need to think about the disadvantages of these afflictions. Shantideva then presents four disadvantages.

### 2.2.3.1.1.1. They take away our freedom

Once we are dominated by the afflictions, they overpower us and we are completely under their control.

The verse that relates to this heading reads:

28. *The enemies of anger, craving and so forth  
Do not have legs, arms and so forth,  
They are neither brave nor wise,  
How did they make me like their slave?*

We need to see this presentation as being related to our own circumstances, right now, and not just as some dry hypothetical presentation. While we are easily able to acknowledge the very good conditions that we enjoy now, we also need to identify what prevents us from fully utilising our potential, and taking full advantage of these conditions. It is not sufficient to look within once or twice, but rather we need to implement this in our regular daily practice, investigating our minds again and again.

The more we analyse our own state of mind, the clearer it becomes that the afflictions, or delusions, are the real cause of all our faults. It is not immediately apparent to us that anger, for example, is a cause of our faults and our mistakes. When it comes to attachment, it is even more difficult for us to recognise attachment as being a fault. Thus it requires careful analysis again and again, and careful attention to fully identifying and recognising these delusions such as anger, attachment and the like as being the real causes of all our problems. When we take initiative to really personalise this investigation in our contemplations, then that, in itself, becomes a very worthwhile and productive object of meditation.

Gyalsab Je's commentary on the verse reads:

My enemies of anger, craving and so forth, which are contained in the root and associated afflictions, do not have legs, arms or weapons in their hands and they are not very brave with great effort, nor are they wise with skilful means.

How did they take away my freedom and make me their slave?

In order to acknowledge the afflictions as being faults, we need to first identify them. To understand what the afflictions are, the Lam Rim presents them under these headings: identifying the delusions; the stages in which the delusions develop; the causes of delusions and the faults of the delusions. Some Lam Rim texts present the delusions under four headings and some under three, however, the main structure is essentially the same: identifying the delusions, understanding how they are developed, and knowing their causes and their faults.

Here, the identification of the delusions is presented in summary form. In order to abandon the afflictions, they definitely need to be identified. If one doesn't even recognise the afflictions for what they are, then there is no way that one can abandon them. For example, if one doesn't acknowledge anger as an affliction then there is no way one

will take the initiative to abandon anger; it is the same with attachment and so forth. One will be able to recognise anger as a faulty state of mind when it is clearly identified as a delusion that is not based on reality, but on a faulty perception, and thus has no sound basis. Then the initiative to abandon this affliction can be strongly generated and one will make the effort to abandon anger. It is the same with the rest of the afflictions: first we need to clearly recognise and identify what they are, and then, based on the understanding that they are faulty states of mind, we then take the initiative to abandon them.

The text presents the afflictions identifying two of them, *the enemies of anger, craving and so forth*—which includes all other afflictions in summary form. As explained clearly in the text, the real enemies that hinder our wellbeing are the delusions or afflictions.

As indicated here, these delusions such as anger, craving and so forth are the real enemies, *yet they do not have legs, arms or hold weapons in their hands*. The comparison here is with an enemy that has form, such as a well built, muscular person protected by amour and carrying weapons and so forth. It would be difficult to face such a powerful enemy if we are comparatively smaller in size. However, these afflictions are not like that. As they are not form, they don't have legs, arms or weapons and so forth. Again we can take note of how, as explained in the teachings, it is seemingly easier to practise a bit of patience with a powerful figure because of our sheer incapacity to be able to combat or to fight them. So it is no wonder that we show a bit more tolerance toward someone who is more powerful! But practising patience with someone who is weak and meek and thus much easier to defeat, is much harder. So when one is able to practice patience with such weak beings, it is much more admirable.

Unlike a powerful external enemy, the delusions such as anger and craving and so forth are not equipped with any physical protection or intimidating size. Furthermore, it is not as if these delusions are also *very brave with great effort*, meaning that they are not very persistent. We need to also remind ourselves that one reason why the delusions are not very persistent is that they are aided by another delusion, called laziness. Furthermore, it is not as if these delusions are *wise* and have *skilful means*; in fact, they are not based on sound wisdom or intelligence of any sort. That is because they associate with yet another delusion, which is ignorance.

So if the afflictions do not have any of the aforementioned attributes then *how did they take away my freedom and make me their slave?* This is a significant point, implying, by means of a rhetorical question, that one is essentially enslaved by the afflictions. A powerful master can make his slaves do anything he commands, because the slaves are completely under his control. The slaves have to follow every wish or command of their master, who completely dominates them. Likewise, we are enslaved by our own afflictions. Why else would we do things that we know are not really wise or favourable to our wellbeing? Yet still we find ourselves following the commands of afflictions such as anger and craving and engage in actions that ultimately harms us.

This is a very significant point about why we continue to create negative actions, even though we understand that they are faults, and know the consequences are not favourable. There is no other reason than being dominated by the afflictions that overpower us. It is the same with the faults or misdeeds that others commit. When they see others committing murder or stealing and so forth, some people



comment 'Why is there so much violence in the world? Why are people killing each other?' We need to understand that the reason they engage in the negative actions of killing and so forth is because they are completely dominated by the afflictions. When the afflictions compel them to engage in those actions it is as if they don't have any control over their own actions. Analysing things in this way enables us to understand the real motivator behind the negative actions others commit, and thus becoming more tolerant and compassionate towards them, rather than seeing them only as negative and evil. These are important points to keep in mind.

For as long as the delusions have complete control or dominance over us, we don't have much choice. But if we recognise the afflictions for what they are, then we have a chance of not being influenced by them. About two years ago, Maria's daughter, who was sitting in the very place where Maria is sitting right now, commented that having been introduced to the afflictions and their disadvantages, she came to a point in her meditation where she was able to recognise how those afflictions affected her. Even though this recognition did not prevent the afflictions from arising, she felt that recognising them had definitely helped her to become a little more wary, and helped to reduce their intensity. She said that she had been meditating for about a year and found it had been really helpful for her. She was making a really significant point, and had used a lot of intelligence and understanding to come to that conclusion.

In summary, we need to recognise the delusions for what they are. But if we don't do anything once we have recognised them, then the act of recognising afflictions would be quite pointless. As Shantideva has so very precisely presented here, we do have the potential, and we do have the ability to overcome the afflictions. So it is possible not only to identify the delusions, but to apply the antidotes and overcome them as well. Shantideva is giving us really profound advice: we have these great conditions of the freedoms and endowments, so it is definitely possible for us to overcome and abandon the afflictions.

#### 2.2.3.1.1.2. They generate boundless suffering

Having briefly identified the afflictions, the next section presents their disadvantages.

As I have mentioned many, many times, these are very essential points to keep in mind, because this is a profound practice that can really protect your mind. When seeing others engaging in inappropriate deeds or saying inappropriate things, we need to be able to identify that it is the fault of the delusion, rather than a fault of the person *per se*. That will help to generate a sense of compassion for them rather than agitation and feelings of annoyance and anger. This is a really profound practice that we need to keep in mind. That recognition and understanding in relation to others can only come about when we have fully identified and recognised the delusions within ourselves, and understood how they actually dominate us so that we are then compelled to engage in negative deeds and actions, even though we don't want to. Then, based on our understanding of our own difficulties, we can recognise and apply that to others. It is really important to remember this if we want to maintain a good harmonious relationship with those around us. I have spoken about this many times in the past, and the point cannot be stressed enough.

The following points on the faults or disadvantages of the afflictions will encourage us to really try to overcome the afflictions, and apply the appropriate antidotes. Why should

we want to do that? Because delusions generate boundless suffering and so forth.

The verse relating to this heading is:

29. *While they remain in my mind  
They harm me joyfully.  
Bearing this patiently without anger,  
Is unsuitable and this patience is an object of  
criticism*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of the verse in this way:

To practise patience with regard to those that joyfully create the sufferings of the lower realms whilst they abide in my mind is unsuitable. This patience is an object of criticism and one should regard the afflictions as enemies and strive to abandon them.

Having identified and recognised the delusions or afflictions for what they are, it would be inappropriate to patiently and willingly allow them to remain within us, because not only do the delusions that lurk within us cause immense suffering, but they lead us to the extreme *sufferings of the lower realms*. Willingly being patient with these causes of immense suffering is not appropriate. As you would recall, not retaliating to the harms and sufferings inflicted by others is one of the classifications of patience. However, willingly enduring the dominance of the afflictions, rather than ensuring that one overcomes them, is inappropriate.

*This patience is an object of criticism* indicates that the buddhas and bodhisattvas would take a dim view of such patience, and not regard it as an appropriate type of patience. Being patient with anger would mean allowing anger to arise and infest our minds. Even from a worldly perspective we can all see that wrong deeds, such as killing and so forth, come from none other than the influence of delusions such as anger. Such misdeeds arise from being willingly submissive to anger and following its dictates. Just as we recognise this in others, it is exactly the same for ourselves. Being patient here means becoming submissive and allowing anger or attachment to arise and then following every command they give.

As the commentary explains, *one should regard the afflictions as enemies and strive to abandon them*. This means that as soon as an affliction arises, we need to immediately recognise it as harmful and, rather than willingly becoming submissive and patient with it, apply an antidote to overcome whatever affliction it is.

In order to do that, the commentary further explains:

One should work at understanding the definitions, divisions, causes and functions of the afflictions as they are explained in the *Knowledge Treatises* and mainly meditate on their disadvantages.

The author of the commentary, Gyaltsab Rinpoche, is explaining that one should know the afflictions in detail *and mainly meditate on the disadvantages*, which is the key point. For as long as we don't recognise or contemplate the disadvantages of the afflictions, then the need to overcome or abandon them will not arise. Therefore, contemplating the disadvantages of the afflictions again and again is, as explained here, a key point.

This relates back to that very intelligent and wise comment which I related earlier, about the fact that even just recognising the delusions definitely helped that student to become a little more wary, and helped to reduce their intensity. Recognising the afflictions for what they are definitely helps to minimise their intensity.

As presented in the teachings, the definition of an affliction is, that which causes discomfort and unease in our mind as soon as it is developed. We know this from our own experience; we can see that the moment certain kinds of afflictions are generated, we immediately feel weighed down, uncomfortable and unsettled. The fact that there is this discomfort is the sign that it is an affliction.

There are many people who make comments about how they sometimes, without any apparent reason, feel unsettled, unhappy, or disturbed. If we contemplate the real cause of that, it will be understood that is because of the delusions being prevalent in the mind.

As presented earlier in the commentary, there are six root delusions and twenty associate or secondary delusions.

The Lam Rim teachings present six causes of the delusions.

1. **Basis:** This means having the very seed or imprint of the delusions within one's mental continuum.

2. **Object:** It is very easy to understand that one develops attachment to an attractive object, and aversion or anger towards an unattractive object.

3. **Social context:** This refers to the people with whom you associate, where conversations with them can cause delusions such as attachment, anger and so forth to arise.

4. **Faulty narration:** This refers to faulty treatises and so forth that cause delusions to arise. For example, there are treatises that define sexual positions and so forth, which would cause attachment to arise and manifest themselves within one's mind. Likewise, friends might talk about things that can cause various delusions to arise.

5. **Habituation:** The more one is familiar with a particular delusion, the more likely it is that the delusion will be generated—and we can be affiliated with certain delusions from a very young age. We see people who are intolerant with the most insignificant and minute things, such as feeling strong attachment when they see an attractive object, or feeling angry and great disappointment when things don't go their way, or feeling despondent and so forth. These are delusions that manifest easily due to long-time habituation.

So we need to use our situation now to try to minimise our familiarity with the delusions as much as possible by applying the appropriate antidotes. If we continuously allow ourselves to become more and more familiar with delusions, then that will be the cause for the delusions to become more dominant and increase even more. Therefore we need to utilise our conditions to de-familiarise ourselves with the delusions.

6. **Inappropriate attention:** This refers to paying attention to the objects that cause the delusions to arise. We might see something that looks very attractive. If it is a mere glance and we pay no further attention then it may not cause much attachment to arise, however if we pay further attention to the details of that attractive object, then the more attention we pay to the colour, shape and so forth, the more the attachment will increase. If we take the example of a man being attracted to a woman, then the more the man thinks about her attractive figure, the smoothness of her hair, the complexion of her skin and so forth, the more his attachment will increase, to the point where he is obsessed. Likewise with anger, when one thinks about someone who has inflicted harm upon us, the more we pay attention to what they did; and thinking how they have harmed me in the past, 'They used this kind of measure to harm me', 'They harmed me just the other day, and they will harm me again

in the future'. So in this way the more we pay attention, thinking again and again about how they harm us, the more reasons we find to become angry with them, to the point where anger becomes intense like a burning fire in one's heart. Many of you would have had the experience of paying attention to past memories of particular incidents and so forth, resulting in feeling sad or angry, despondent and so forth. These, in brief, are the six causes of delusions.

This explanation here is in accordance to the knowledge treatises, the *Abhidharma* in which three primary causes for delusions to arise are presented. I have explained this to you several times in the past, and they are very significant points to keep in mind. As presented in the *Abhidharma*, when 1) the delusions are not been abandoned, and 2) one is in close proximity with the objects of delusion, and 3) one applies incorrect attention to those objects, then the causes for the delusions to arise are all intact.

As presented here, for an ordinary being whose afflictions have not been abandoned, even if the delusions are always dormant, even though they are not manifest at present. Thus, the delusions manifest immediately as a result of not having abandoned the delusions, when one is in close proximity to an object that causes delusions to arise coupled with the incorrect attention that one applies whilst perceiving that object. The incorrect or improper attention is a faulty state of mind which taints one's perception to exaggerate the qualities or faults of the objects. So, just recognising a delusion as a fault will help to prevent incorrect attention from overpowering one's perceptions when perceiving any object.

The functions of the afflictions will be presented later on in the text. As I have mentioned previously, it is good for you to be able to identify and understand the six root delusions which are attachment, anger, ignorance, pride, and deluded doubt and wrong views. Wrong views can have a fivefold and a ten-fold classification. Basically there are five wrong views and this becomes ten if you include the five non-views.

The reason the term 'wrong views' is used is that there can also be correct views, such as the view of realising emptiness. Likewise, not all doubts are necessarily afflicted or deluded. There can be some virtuous doubts, so to be included as one of the six root delusions, the doubt must be a deluded or an afflicted doubt. The associated afflictions are belligerence, resentment, concealment, spite and so forth.

As presented in some of the texts I have come across—although not many mention it—the distinction between the root delusions and the associated delusions is that root delusions are generated in many different ways with many different objects whereas secondary delusions are more targeted at specific objects. The associated delusions are described as being closely related to either of the six root delusions<sup>1</sup>. When we understand that associate delusions are closely related to one of the six root delusions, we can see how they stem from one of the main root delusions.

It would be good to have a list the six root delusions and the secondary delusions along with the six causes, as such a list is good for those who are not familiar with them. The delusions are clearly explained in the Lam Rim texts and it also good to go to other sources and become more familiar with their explanations.

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: Proximate delusions might be an appropriate term.

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## Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སློབ་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

15 April 2014

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Based on the motivation we have generated we can now engage in meditation practice.

[Meditation]

For receiving the teachings, we can generate our motivation along these lines: in order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for this purpose I will listen to this Mahayana teaching, and by studying and understanding it, I will put it into practice well.

### 2.2.3.1.1.2. They generate boundless suffering (cont.)

The two verses under this heading read as follows:

30. *Even if all the gods and demi gods  
Arise against me as enemy,  
They are not able to guide me into  
The fire without respite.*
31. *This enemy of the powerful afflictions  
Throws me in an instant into  
Where even the ashes of Mount Meru  
Do not remain upon contact.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains these verses.

Even if all the gods and demi gods arise as my enemies, if I do not fall under the control of the mental afflictions, then they are not able to guide and place me into the fire without respite.

But this powerful enemy of the afflictions in my continuum throws me in an instant into the fire without respite, where even the ashes of Mount Meru do not remain upon contact.

Therefore one should strive to destroy the enemy of the afflictions.

The verses explain that the afflictions which are within oneself are extremely powerful, more so than any kind of external enemy or entity. Powerful enemies could include gods, such as Brahma, who is said to be extremely powerful in terms of might and ability; also demigods and their retinues who have extremely powerful means to engage in combat. Even within humans, there are certain individuals known to be very brave and skilled in combat. There are stories of how one human being was capable of killing thousands of people. So there are definitely powerful humans who could be our enemies.

What is being explained here is that even if all of these powerful enemies: gods, demigods and powerful humans, were all combined together and simultaneously rose up as one's enemy, they cannot place one in the hot hell realms, such as the fire without respite. It is, of course a given that if from one's own side one does not allow the afflictions to overpower oneself, then all those powerful external enemies cannot place us in the hell realms from their side.

Note here that if someone were to kill another living being, then just through the act of taking the other's life they are not placing them in the lower realms. Rather through the negative act of killing, they are creating the karma to go to lower realms themselves.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on the next verse begins with, *But this powerful enemy of the afflictions in my continuum.*

The main point one needs to reflect upon here is that the powerful enemy of the afflictions are within one's own mental continuum and it is none other than these internal afflictions that lead one to the lower realms. The main instruction here is that the afflictions are not random categories of phenomena that lie outside of oneself. If one thinks 'Yes there is anger, there is attachment, there are delusions' - relating to them as a mere categorical list, then that doesn't help one to identify the delusions within oneself. Even if one is able to list many afflictions and describe them in detail, if one doesn't recognise the afflictions within oneself, one will not be able to take any initiative to overcome them. The emphasis here is that one must look within one's own mental continuum to identify the delusions within oneself, so that one can take the initiative to overcome them.

As mentioned previously, the first step to overcoming the delusions is to identify them, and then to contemplate the causes and the disadvantages etc. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains, it is these *afflictions* within one's mental *continuum* that throw me *in an instant into the fire without respite*, which is the hot hell realms. Even Mount Meru, the most grandiose of mountains, will be rendered to ashes upon mere contact with the intensity of the heat in the fire without respite. Thus the consequences of being born in such a place of unimaginable suffering is the result of the afflictions. Here, Gyaltsab Je highlights that one must destroy the enemy of the afflictions.

To take on board what is being explained here, it is by engaging in personal reflection to identify the afflictions or delusions within oneself, recognising their causes and particularly their faults, that one can slowly and gradually take the initiative to overcome them. Even the process of identifying them is a gradual process—the afflictions are not something that we are able to recognise right away.

Of course it is easier to recognise delusions in others! It is easy to identify the faults of someone else's anger, attachment and so forth. However, when it comes to one's own faults of anger and so forth, we always have good excuses thinking, 'I am OK, there is no problem.' If we are not able to identify the anger within oneself, then that is a real problem. Even if one recognises it, but rationalises it, and thinks that there is no problem, then that will prolong the process of taking the initiative to abandon it. So one really needs to take to heart the need to recognise the shortcomings of the afflictions within oneself, and that one's own anger and attachment etc. have been the cause of all of then one's problems.

I am not referring to those of you who don't have any delusions. But for those who are able to identify the delusions within yourself, then you need to take careful consideration in recognising how the delusions affect

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your wellbeing. Harboursing the delusions in one's mind causes turmoil and an unsubdued mind.

The very function of a delusion is to make one's mind unsettled and troubled. Therefore if one aspires to achieve a subdued mind, one definitely needs to take the initiative to recognise and really acknowledge the afflictions within oneself, then one can gradually take the initiative to overcome them. We need to take a gradual approach, the afflictions are not something which can be abandoned quickly. Even the study and understanding of them takes time and needs to be a gradual process. We need to ensure that the study and understanding of Dharma becomes integrated with our mind-set, slowly but steadily transforming our minds.

When studying texts which identify the delusions, the main point is not to treat it as a mere list that one goes over, as if they are not related to oneself. Rather we need to use these explanations as way to identify the delusions within oneself. Having identified and clearly seen the faults of the delusions, one can then take the initiative to slowly abandon them. As Dharma practitioners we need to ensure that whatever we do becomes the means to subdue the mind and overcome the delusions. The great Kadampa master Geshe Potawa said that regardless of whether one is engaged in the Dharma or worldly activities, if the activity becomes an antidote for overcoming the delusions, then it has served its purpose well. This is the kind of advice that the great Kadampa masters give; not many words but really to the point.

If one does not ensure that our so-called Dharma practice is an antidote for overcoming delusions, then the very aspect of the Dharma practice can become a worldly concern. This is because one has not protected one's practice to ensure that it overcomes delusions.

The Lam Rim teachings explain that the way to measure one's progress in studying and practising the Dharma is that if one's practices actually help one to gain more and more confidence, and more faith, and one's mind gradually becomes more subdued, then one can feel confident that one's practice is working (whatever form it may take). However if we find that certain practices or study are making one more and more agitated, more and more deluded, and one is losing one's faith in the Dharma, then that is a sign that it is not making a positive effect within oneself.

In relation to developing love and compassion, particularly in the section of how to develop the superior intention, the Great Lam Rim text explains that meditating just once in a while is not sufficient to develop this mind. Rather one must meditate on love and compassion again and again for the superior intention to develop in one's mind. Quoting from another text the Lam Rim uses an analogy to illustrate this point—it would be like attempting to sweeten a big sour tree with just a few drops of a sweetener. If one wishes to transform a sour tree into a sweet one, one needs to put many, many drops of a sweet substance over a long period of time. Then eventually it is possible for a sour tree to actually become sweet. His Holiness the Dalai Lama uses this analogy in his teachings regularly. The delusions within our mind are like a sour taste which is hard to transform into a sweet taste. If one meditates on

love and compassion just once in a while we cannot expect to transform the afflictions in our mind and develop superior intention; we cannot expect a positive outcome from just a few attempts. Rather we need to make a consistent effort in identifying the delusions, seeing their disadvantages, and applying the antidote, whereby we will gradually overcome the delusions within oneself.

It will be good for you to refer to that quotation by reading the section in the Lam Rim that explains how to develop the superior intention. These are important points for us to reflect upon and as way to improve our practice.

We need to consider the fact that we are not deprived of the means—we do know how to engage in Dharma practices. What we need to keep in mind, is that if we leave aside certain practices that we already know how to engage in now, and try to adopt other practices that may well be beyond our reach, then that would be completely missing the mark. It is far more productive to actually implement the practices that we are familiar with now. Lama Tsong Khapa mentions that we do not have the fault of not knowing the practices, but rather we might be incurring the fault of not implementing the practices that we do know. The point is that we need to take the initiative to actually apply the practices with which we are already familiar. Then a gradual but true transformation takes place.

To summarise Shantideva's main points, what he is advising us in simple terms is this:

The trouble maker for all your problems is not something which lies outside, but rather within yourself which are called the afflictions. When you recognise them within yourself, you can then take measures to apply the antidote and abandon them. So, you need to apply effort in doing just that.

If one really uses one's study and practice as a means to combat the real troublemaker within oneself by taking that initiative at the very outset, that motivation can make a tremendous difference in our approach to the study or practice of the Dharma. I am not implying that I have gained great insight or developed realisation from my attempts, but what I can assure you is that I have definitely had a proper motivation from the very outset. Early on when I was studying in the monastery, studying the texts and engaging in the debates, my intention was always, 'When I finish my studies, I definitely want to put what I have learnt into practice by spending time in meditation and doing retreats'. This was definitely my intention. That has not become a reality because I have come to a foreign country to teach instead, so I have not had the opportunities to do long-term retreats. However because the studies were done with that intention, I can definitely say that they have had a positive effect on my mind. What I am sharing here is that if from the very outset one has the proper motivation for doing the studies and practice, then to that extent there will definitely be a positive effect.

#### **2.2.3.1.1.3. They harm over an infinite amount of time**

The afflictions are unlike external enemies, which no matter how powerful and mighty they might be, will

eventually disintegrate of their own accord, even without us taking many measures to try to vanquish them. Over time that is what will occur. However with the internal enemy, by leaving delusions as they are they will not just disintegrate by themselves. Even after a long period of time they remain intact. If we don't take any measures to apply the antidotes and just leave them as they are, they can become even more powerful rather than disintegrating.

This point is explained in the following verse:

32. *No other enemy has  
Such long term ability  
Like the enemy of my afflictions,  
With extensive time, without beginning or end.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Another drawback of the afflictions to contemplate:

No other worldly enemy has such an ability to live for a long time like the enemy of my afflictions, who abide for extensive time, without beginning or end.

Since meditating on the antidote to the afflictions only for one session at a time does not do anything, one should strive to have an uninterrupted stream of effort in destroying the afflictions.

As the commentary clearly explains here, *no other worldly enemy has such an ability to live for a long time like the enemy of my afflictions, who abides for extensive time without beginning or end.* Unlike the external enemy which won't live for long, the inner enemy of afflictions abides much longer and harms one to greater extent. The external enemy can give us a certain amount of harm periodically, but because it cannot take us to the lower realms it cannot give us extensive sufferings. However the internal enemy of afflictions is the one that can lead us to the most extreme sort of sufferings.

Following that is, *Since meditating on the antidote to the afflictions only for one session at the time, does not do anything, one should strive to have an uninterrupted stream of effort in destroying the afflictions.* In relation to the earlier analogy, a big sour tree cannot be expected to become sweet by pouring just one drop of sweetener a few times. But if one were to constantly apply sweeteners then there is a possibility to transform it into a sweet tree. Similarly with the afflictions within oneself: we cannot expect to subdue them by meditating on the antidote just once, or periodically, rather we need to constantly apply vigilance over one's state of mind and apply the antidote whenever the afflictions arise. It should not be as if one aims to go out and have a good time outside, and doing one or two meditation sessions when one feels like it. Otherwise one could spend all the time just going around and having a good time. That sort of attitude will not overcome the delusions.

The analogy also shows that *one should strive to have an uninterrupted stream.* The Tibetan word actually refers to a stream of water. In the same way as a small stream of water can be consistent and run for a long period of time, our practice should be like that. Even though we might not be able to apply great measures of practice right away, whatever practice we can apply with uninterrupted effort, continuously will have an effect. Where we have a burst of energy and get excited about a

certain practice, that is something which we need to be a wary of because it may not last too long and might actually cause discouragement afterwards.

#### 2.2.3.1.1.4. The reason why it is unsuitable to befriend the afflictions

This heading explains that one may attempt to befriend external enemies by being kind to them or generous to them, and with this it is possible that they will start to become friendly to us. However with the internal enemy of afflictions, one cannot expect that by befriending the delusions they will not harm us; the more we befriend the delusions, the more powerful they become in harming us. This is explained in the next verse and commentary.

33. *When agreeably and respectfully relied upon  
Then everybody acts beneficial and causes  
happiness,  
But if one relies on the afflictions  
They will retaliate and cause harm.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning:

When one relies on the outer enemy after having honoured them agreeably by serving them food, drink and so forth, then they will benefit us and help us to have happiness.

But if we rely on the enemy of the afflictions and act agreeably to them, then they will increase in strength, retaliate and cause us harm. To destroy them is the only method to attain happiness.

I have summarised this earlier, but to reflect again upon the main point. If you relate to an individual external enemy kindly, followed by giving gifts, food and so forth then it is possible that someone who was once disagreeable to one, or who considered you an enemy, can turn around and actually become a friend. With an external enemy, if we keep our distance and show an attitude of antagonism then that will only cause the rift to become bigger and the dislike greater. Then there is no possibility of befriending them. It is a very significant point that if we don't want enemies we should take the initiative ourselves. The great beings will act in ways that show gratitude and repay harm with kindness, whereas ordinary worldly beings will return harm for harm. Returning kindness for harm inflicted upon oneself is an act of a great being who takes the initiative to engage in this way.

Unlike the external enemy, if one acts kindly to the internal enemy of afflictions, as though they are our masters. By saying 'yes' to whatever the delusion wants, bowing down and not doing anything to confront them or combat them from within oneself, they will increase in strength, retaliate and cause us harm. You will notice through your own experience that certain delusions or afflictions act like adding fuel. If we harbour them and keep contemplating on them, the stronger they become. So if you find yourself in a situation now where the delusions are occurring like a stream of water, continuously affecting you one after another, then that is because we have not applied the antidotes previously and we are not making any attempts to apply them now. If we make an attempt to apply the antidote to whatever extent we are able, during the time we apply it, the delusions will actually stop. In this way one can see that it is possible to begin to overcome an otherwise

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continuous stream of delusions. If we don't apply the antidotes then the afflictions won't subside naturally by themselves. If destroying the delusions within oneself is the only method to experience genuine happiness and wellbeing, then we have no choice but to apply the antidotes.

#### 2.2.3.1.2. *How it is unsuitable to meditate on patience for the afflictions*

This has two sub-headings

2.2.3.1.2.1. Contemplating how they harm the mind

2.2.3.1.2.2. Contemplating how they harm the body

##### 2.2.3.1.2.1. **Contemplating how they harm the mind**

The root text states:

34. *Therefore, if this continual long time enemy,  
The singular cause for the increase of the  
accumulation of harm,  
Takes up permanent residence in my heart,  
How can cyclic existence be fearless and joyful*

The commentary on this verse reads as follows:

Therefore, if this continual long time enemy, who is the singular unrivalled cause for the strong increase of the accumulation of all harm, takes up permanent residence in my heart, then how can cyclic existence be fearless and joyful?

Since there is no chance for happiness, strive in destroying the afflictions.

Gyalsab Je's commentary states that *if this continual long-term enemy* (the afflictions), identified here as *the singular unrivalled cause for the strong increase of the accumulation of all harm, takes up permanent residence in my heart* (meaning that if we don't do anything to overcome the afflictions and therefore maintain them in our heart), then while we abide in *cyclic existence*, how can we be *fearless* and how can we be *joyful*? We need to take this as real personal advice on how to overcome the causes for our own unhappiness. What is being explained here is that the real cause for one's unhappiness, whatever the situation, are the afflictions within one's own mind. So regardless of the external situation, the actual causes of mental agony lie within oneself. If we fail to identify this and constantly try look outside for external causes and so forth, we are completely missing the point.

Harbouring the enemy within, and looking for solutions outside to overcome them will not bring real joy and fearlessness to one's life. Again, one needs to reflect that if we make a genuine attempt to slowly identify the real enemy (the afflictions within) and make genuine attempt to gradually apply the antidote and overcome them, then it is possible for one to gradually experience a real sense of joy regardless of external situations. Wherever one goes, one will be able to maintain some inner sense of tranquillity within one's mind which can definitely have a positive effect upon one's physical body. There are clear signs that a joyful and happy mind can contribute to good health. Take this into considerations for your own benefit.

Practical measures that assist one to develop the inclination to overcome the delusions really rely upon identifying the negative effects the delusions have within oneself. One can reflect upon one's own state of being and ask oneself, 'Would I want to be in a very angry state,

or would I rather be free of anger? Would I like to be feeling completely attached, and upset with attachment or would I rather be in a state free from the pangs of attachment?' Likewise with jealousy, would you like to harbour jealousy in your mind, or would you rather be appeased and not have jealousy? Likewise with pride and so forth. By having an internal dialogue with oneself, and clearly and honestly answering that one would rather be free of these negative states of mind (the afflictions), then knowing there is a means to overcome them, one needs to apply the antidotes.

Equally and naturally we would all like to have mental and physical happiness. There might be other measures presented by other traditions, or even worldly means to gain some happiness, but these may or may not contribute to genuine happiness.

We are in the category of people who look internally to attempt to resolve afflictions to develop genuine mental and physical happiness. To recap, to do this one must identify the causes for mental agony and physical suffering which are the result of afflictions. As we can consider ourselves as beings who look internally to deal with our internal world, we might as well actually make that attempt now and put this understanding into practice. This is how to take this explanation as personal instruction.

We can assume that you coming here is a rare opportunity and you can take pride in yourself for coming here. In a normal worldly situation, after work people might say, 'I have gone to work. I have been busy all day so I am tired now, and I'd just like to lie down and relax and take it easy'. So while many of you have gone to work during the day, and are busy and tired, you have still taken the initiative to come to a teaching here and listened to it. So having sacrificed relaxation time at home don't feel that it is a waste of time. Making an attempt here will definitely have a positive effect and will help overcome hardships and difficulties. On a practical level, if you were to stay home, you may not really have a full opportunity to relax and have a good time anyway. You might get into an argument with your partner, or be annoyed by the children, and not have a very relaxed time at home. So you might as well come here to have a genuine relaxing time.

Some have confided in me that even before they leave work, they already feel anxious about what they have to face at home. Some lament saying, 'I have a headache when I think of what I have to do when I get back home.' I tell them, not to worry about the next job before finishing the first one. This is giving oneself extra worries and agony. Some seem to see going home to cook, and do the washing up, and take care of the children as an extra burden. If one thinks about these as a chore then it does present itself in that way, so try to have a proper attitude. It often seems that causes for conflict and argument are based on who is trying to do what in the household. Indeed the outside work may seem harder and more difficult in comparison to someone who is staying home, but I would think that the work involved with staying at home and cleaning up, looking after children etc. is not easy work either. It is very important to look after the wellbeing of children. For example someone that I know

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has a family of three children, and the mum said 'If I have another child I might go crazy' and she related how difficult it was to care for the young one's. I can relate to that.

Again, I acknowledge you coming here to the teachings. I definitely admire it and am happy about it and appreciate that you take the initiative and sacrifice some time to do the study. While that is incredible and such a fortunate occasion for you, what I am attempting to add on to what you learn here, is to encourage you to try to implement it in your life. Try to put the teachings into practice a bit and that will be really worthwhile and beneficial for you. Even though I am not able to practise extensively, as I mentioned earlier, I do feel there is definitely great benefit to be achieved as a result of practice.

In the material you have already studied, for example the previous text *Precious Garland* by Nagarjuna, recall how precise and practical the advice was; one verse after another on how to engage in practice. We went through the extensive explanations according to that text: first of all what causes us to achieve high status, then how to achieve the definite goodness. Prior to that was Aryadeva's *400 Verses* text which explained the path based on the conventional truth as well the ultimate truth, again these were presented very precisely. We have studied these, we have all heard them and we have created a very, very positive imprint in our mind by going through these texts.

Prior to that we studied Chandrakirti's *Madhyamakavatara*, where again explanations of the five paths and ten grounds were very clearly presented.

Having the opportunity to study these texts and reflect upon them is a great fortune. We need to acknowledge that, then and now, as we can still derive benefit from these teachings every time we rejoice, and dedicate the merits of the attempts we have made, to the study and practice. Rejoicing helps to increase the virtue, then we can dedicate the virtue we derive, and benefit from that.

Before this was the teaching *Liberation on the Palm of your Hand*. You indicated that you didn't care how long it took and we actually spent about six years on it. With all this time spent, we were able to go into great detail on this Lam Rim teaching and actually many of you have been able to use it as a basis for presenting and teaching to others. This again is a significant point to recollect as a way to generate joy in one's mind, and to acknowledge the great fortune one has had to be able to study these texts. However one should also make prayers to be able to continuously meet with the conditions to study and practice these teachings, from life to life, in all one's future lifetimes.

Up until now we may all equally assume that we have not had much opportunity to accumulate much external wealth, however we have definitely spent time and energy acquiring some inner wealth. We have obtained something that is indestructible. No matter how much external wealth we might have accumulated, it is not something that we can take with us—not one single dollar can we take with us to our next life. However with the internal wealth of the studies and the practices, and good positive imprints in our mind is something that we

can all confidently take with us to our future life. In making a choice between external wealth and internal wealth, we have made the choice to spend more time and energy acquiring internal wealth. So we have definitely made the right choice.

However, I have also regularly said that we do need external means. While we are making attempts to acquire internal wealth, we also need access to external wealth as for our survival, for ongoing, good conditions for our life. It is a reality that without adequate external conditions we will not be able to practise the Dharma.

I recall when I escaped from Tibet, on the route there were certain occasions where we passed some really beautiful areas, like beautiful valleys. When you looked up there were mountainous regions and I could even detect that there might be a cave up there. On a few occasions I definitely thought, 'Oh how nice if I could just go up to the cave and stay there to meditate. Wouldn't that be wonderful?' And even though there was a strong intention to want to do that, immediately the next thought was 'Who would feed me?' 'How would I get anything up there?' There were no villages around, and it was doubtful whether there would be any natural plants that I could eat. In the winter especially there is hardly anything growing in that remote area, up so high. So that was the practical aspect which prevented an otherwise noble thought of wanting to go into the little cave.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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*Edited Version*  
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## Tara Institute 'Shantideva's Bodhicharyavatara' Block 1, Study Group 2014

### **Discussion Week 11 (22.04.2014)**

*The login username is "studygroup", the password is "bwol" (just remember "Bodhisattva's Way of Life").*

#### **Week: 1 (11 February 2014)**

1. In which way do we come to understand how self-grasping is the root cause of all our unhappiness?

2. When the Buddhist teachings present selflessness, it is not suggesting that the self does not exist at all, and that there is no 'I'. Rather, selflessness is what?

#### **Week: 2 (18 February 2014)**

3. While Bodhicitta is not an actual antidote for abandoning the grasping at the self at its very root, what does it serve as and how does this work?

4. How do bodhisattvas benefit beings in order to eliminate their sicknesses?

#### **Week: 3 (25 February 2014)**

5. Bodhicitta is not developed instantaneously; it requires effort and a great amount of training. Explain how we can slowly and gradually establish a firm foundation for Bodhicitta.

#### **Week: 4 (4 February 2014)**

6. What are the four means of gathering disciples? Give a brief explanation of each

#### **Week: 5 (11 Mar 2014)**

7. Explain why allowing bodhicitta to degenerate is the heaviest of the root downfalls of the bodhisattva vows.

#### **Week: 6 (18 Mar 2014)**

8. 'If reborn in the lower realms one has no opportunity to generate virtue'. List the three subdivisions of this heading.

#### **Week: 7 (25 Mar 2014)**

9. What are the reasons for not becoming disheartened because we have accumulated so much negativity in the past, or the fact that we find ourselves continuously engaging in negativities now?

#### **Week: 8 (1 Apr 2014)**

10. List the 6 root delusions and the 20 secondary delusions

#### **Week: 9 (8 Apr 2014)**

11. What is the distinction between the root delusions and the associated delusions?

12. The Lam Rim teachings present six causes of the delusions. List them and give a brief explanation of each.

#### **Week: 10 (15 Apr 2014)**

13. What is the analogy of attempting to sweeten a big sour tree with just a few drops of a sweetener referring to? (Answer: Page 2 – last paragraph of 1<sup>st</sup> column, first paragraph of 2<sup>nd</sup> column.)



*Exam*

*Name:*

*29 April 2014*

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1. In which way do we come to understand how self-grasping is the root cause of all our unhappiness?

2. When the Buddhist teachings present selflessness, it is not suggesting that the self does not exist at all, and that there is no 'I'. Rather, selflessness is what?

**3. While Bodhicitta is not an actual antidote for abandoning the grasping at the self at its very root, what does it serve as and how does this work?**

**4. How do bodhisattvas benefit beings in order to eliminate their sicknesses?**

**5. Bodhicitta is not developed instantaneously; it requires effort and a great amount of training. Explain how we can slowly and gradually establish a firm foundation for Bodhicitta.**

**6. What are the four means of gathering disciples? Give a brief explanation of each**

**7. Explain why allowing bodhicitta to degenerate is the heaviest of the root downfalls of the bodhisattva vows.**

**8. 'If reborn in the lower realms one has no opportunity to generate virtue'. List the three subdivisions of this heading.**

**9. What are the reasons for not becoming disheartened because we have accumulated so much negativity in the past, or the fact that we find ourselves continuously engaging in negativities now?**

**10. List the 6 root delusions and the 20 secondary delusions.**

**11. What is the distinction between the root delusions and the associated delusions?**

**12. The Lam Rim teachings present six causes of the delusions. List them and give a brief explanation of each.**

**13. What is the analogy of attempting to sweeten a big sour tree with just a few drops of a sweetener referring to?**