

Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ཅུ་ལམ་རིམ་རྣམས་གྲོ་ལ་ལག་བཅུང་ས།



27 May 1997

As usual first try to set the right motivation.

422.3: The Stages of the Path of Persons of Great Scope

སྐྱེས་བུ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པར་སློབ་བྱུང་བ།

We are now up to the lam rim teachings on the stages of the path of a person of great scope, and this has three headings.

422.31: Showing Bodhicitta as the only Entrance Door to the Mahayana Path, and an Explanation of the Benefits of Bodhicitta

ཐེག་ཆེན་གྱི་འཇུག་སློབ་སྐྱོད་སྐྱེས་བུ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པར་སློབ་བྱུང་བ།

422.32: How to Generate Bodhicitta

བྱང་ཆུབ་ཏུ་སྐྱེས་བུ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པར་སློབ་བྱུང་བ།

422.33: Engaging in the Deeds of a Bodhisattva after the Development of Bodhicitta

སྐྱེས་བུ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པར་སློབ་བྱུང་བ།

422.31: Showing Bodhicitta as the Only Entrance Door to the Mahayana Path and an Explanation of the Benefits of Bodhicitta

ཐེག་ཆེན་གྱི་འཇུག་སློབ་སྐྱོད་སྐྱེས་བུ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པར་སློབ་བྱུང་བ།

Since bodhicitta is said to be the entrance door to the mahayana path, then anyone who wants to follow that path must generate bodhicitta. Having this bodhicitta mind also determines whether someone is a mahayanist or not. In other words, if you generate this bodhicitta mind, you are joining the members of the mahayana without needing any other qualification. In general, we say that taking refuge is the entrance door to buddhism. Thus, whether someone is a buddhist or not is a matter of whether they have taken refuge in the three jewels. Likewise if someone has generated bodhicitta, then they are a true mahayanist.

Bodhicitta is a quality to be generated within our mind, and since we have obtained this wonderful human life of leisure and endowment, we have a wonderful opportunity to actually develop this bodhicitta mind. So we should make an effort to study, and if possible generate genuine bodhicitta. However if this is not possible, then you should try to generate an artificial, or fabricated, bodhicitta. If that is not possible, then with a sincere interest one can learn about bodhicitta, praying to generate bodhicitta one day. In this way the effort we put in can at least leave some impressions, or plant some seed in our mind, so that one day we can actually produce this bodhicitta mind.

For us, the expression of bodhicitta is cultivating a good

heart towards others, and the whole teaching on bodhicitta inspires us to develop this good heart.

Distinction between Vehicles and Schools of Tenets.

Bodhicitta is the entrance door to the mahayana, because bodhicitta is the defining quality of a mahayanist. However there are a few general points to mention at this stage.

We hear of two vehicles, or "yanas", in buddhism. These are:

1. Hinayana, which is the lesser vehicle
2. Mahayana, which is the greater vehicle.

We also hear of the various buddhist schools of tenets or philosophy. We need to know the basis of distinction between the two vehicles, and between the various schools of buddhist tenets.

The main basis for making this division into two yanas is the deed, or act. On this basis of different deeds, the follower of hinayana is someone who has generated true renunciation, which is a strong wish of seeking liberation from cyclic existence for one's own sake. Motivated by this renunciation, the training the hinayanist undertakes is the three fold training. Whereas the follower of the mahayana has the motivation of bodhicitta, and out of this motivation the deeds that they engage in are mainly the six perfections.

The division into two vehicles (or yanas) is made on the basis of deeds, whereas the division into schools of tenets is made on the basis of different philosophical view. For example, in the mahayana there is sutrayana (or the perfection of wisdom vehicle) and the tantrayana (or the secret mantra vehicle). However these two divisions of mahayana are not regarded as schools of buddhist tenets.

We also have to realise that simply engaging in the stages of the small and medium scopes is not enough. We must engage in the mahayana (or great scope) in order to reach complete enlightenment, or buddhahood, as quickly as possible. Contemplating middle scope teachings helps us to generate renunciation - the strong wish to achieve liberation and to leave cyclic existence. Out of this strong motivation of renunciation, following the middle scope path will yield the result of liberation, or nirvana. That goal of nirvana does not mean that we have successfully helped all other living beings to achieved their goals - it does not even mean that one has perfected one's own self. Nor does achieving nirvana mean that one has got rid of all that needs to be removed, or has achieved all that needs to be achieved. Indeed it is said that achieving this state of nirvana can even delay the achievement of the state of buddhahood or complete enlightenment.

Therefore, we have to realise that in order to achieve full enlightenment quickly, it is essential to enter the mahayana path right from the beginning. Compare the person who engages in the path of the lesser vehicle and achieves liberation, with another person who engages in the

mahayana path, but due to strong obstacles falls into a lower rebirth. Of these two who would achieve full enlightenment or buddhahood first? It is said that it is possible for the person who followed mahayana vehicle from the outset to attain enlightenment first, despite falling into lower rebirth.

The follower of the path of great scope should see that the lower and middle scopes are the preliminaries, and that bodhicitta is the actual path, and that all the training in the mahayana deeds is a training to fully develop bodhicitta.

Benefits of Bodhicitta

Traditionally the benefits of bodhicitta are taught first, and we shall follow this tradition. The reason is to develop joyful interest in the minds of those who are intent on following the mahayana path. As mentioned in the text, the benefits of bodhicitta are:

- Bodhicitta is the only entrance door to the mahayana path
- You receive the title of “Buddha’s child”
- You outshine hearers and solitary realisers by virtue of race or nature
- You become an excellent object to be venerated
- You quickly and easily amass enormous merit
- You quickly purify your negativities
- You fulfil all that you wish
- You are protected from harm
- You quickly complete all grounds and paths
- You become a source of joy and happiness for all living beings

We have now finished the topic of bodhicitta being an entrance door to the mahayana path. Regarding this Lama Tsong Khapa instructed:

“It is more important for a person to qualify as a mahayanist, than to check whether or not the dharma that you study is mahayanist.”

This means that you automatically become a part of the mahayana family when bodhicitta is generated.

What is more important for us is to incorporate this bodhicitta into any practice that we do, because we have learnt here that bodhicitta is the main element which determines whether or not the practice we are doing is a mahayana practice. Bodhicitta determines whether any practice is following the example of the deeds of a bodhisattva. It is bodhicitta mind which determines how quickly we can reach the state of buddhahood. The secret mantra vehicle is generally regarded as the quick way to achieve the state of buddhahood. Without the mind of bodhicitta, then it is doubtful that sacred mantra practices such as doing the sadhanas of tantric deities are a cause to achieve buddhahood, let alone being a path to buddhahood. Without bodhicitta, this secret mantra practice is not a cause to be called a mahayanist, let alone attain buddhahood.

On the other hand if we always integrate bodhicitta with what we do, then even if we simply recite just one round of “OM MANI PADME HUM”, this becomes a perfect cause to quickly achieve buddhahood.

In the commentary text there is more detail on this topic, but for our practice the essential thing to take from the text is that we must integrate the bodhicitta mind into the motivation for our practice.

Receiving the title “Buddha’s Child”

The second benefit is to be called a buddha’s child.

To quote Shantideva’s *Bodhisattva Charyavatara*,

“The very moment even a very pitiful being, who is bound in the prison of samsara, generates bodhicitta, then all the

tathagatas, or the buddhas, call that being ‘our child’.”

This shows how the bodhicitta mind is highly regarded as a spiritual quality or realisation. Once this bodhicitta mind is born within you, regardless of what form of life you are in, even if you are born as a dog or pig, then you become a very special being and one who is greatly respected, admired and even a source of joy for all the buddhas.

With regard to the term “Buddha’s child”, in Tibetan terminology the term literally means “Buddha’s son.” There are many other terms beside this one, where one or other gender is used. Unfortunately some people take issue with this, claiming sexual discrimination or bias in the Buddha’s teaching without checking the root of these terms, and thoroughly checking the Buddha’s teachings. Upon this basis one can become very doubtful and suspicious of the Buddha’s teachings.

It is important to properly check whether any of these terms are discriminatory. The origins of this Tibetan term “Buddha’s son” is derived from the story of the universal chakravartin king who, in order to continue the lineage of his kingdom, required a son and heir. For the king nothing could bring him greater joy than to hear of the birth of a son. It is said that far greater than this joy is that joy in the mind of the buddha when the bodhicitta mind is born in the mind of any being. So this term “Buddha’s son” was used as an analogy to the sense of the joy that the chakravartin king would feel when presented with his heir. Anyone who generates the mind of bodhicitta is respected, and pleases all the buddhas.

In Tibetan “gyal-sas”¹ is synonymous with bodhisattva, and literally “sas” equals son or male. But it does not mean son born of the buddha. Being a “gyal-sas”, or Buddha’s child, does not mean you are born of the buddha, or that the buddha is your father.

Another explanation of using the term “Buddha’s child” or “Buddha’s son” is that you are the child of the one upon whom you have relied to learn how to cultivate bodhicitta.

Some of you might remember the line from Chandrakirti’s text the *madhyamika-avatara*, or *Supplement to the Middle Way* where it says that “all the buddha’s are born from bodhisattvas”. However we shall not continue with this since it may cause confusion.

Is it clear why someone who has generated bodhicitta is called a buddha’s son? It is important to realise that there is no gender bias in the attitude of the buddha since it says in the Heart Sutra “both son and daughter of the race”.

Q: (from a student) I understand that the Buddha is not biased but what about the assumptions of gender throughout the sutras.

A: (Geshela) When we doubt the usage of the terminology, then you must find out how and when that particular term was first used. For example in Tibetan we use the term “Lotus flower”. So if you take this term literally it means “born from the lake.” But in fact this is not the case but beyond that there is no other reason. So there is no point in having any doubt in the mind because of the use of some terms.

In the Tibetan culture sometimes boys names are deliberately given to girls, and vice versa.

If you generate bodhicitta in Tibet you are “Buddha’s son” - “gyal-sas”. That is the literal translation but it does not mean you are male, as this term has no connotation of male or female.

¹ Editor: “gyal” = conqueror and “sas” = son.

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3 June 1997

Everyone should make sure that they cultivate the bodhicitta motivation by thinking that we are receiving these teachings on the lam rim to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all beings, and for the same purpose generate the thought of putting these teachings into practice.

Controlling our own mind is the most beneficial dharma practice that we can do, it is a reflection of the essence of all the dharma teachings. Materially, we have no shortages to sustain the body, so there are no better conditions than we already have to practise dharma. Making the most benefit of those conditions means to practise the dharma so as to control and calm our own mind.

To further inspire and motivate us we should see the benefits of dharma in controlling the mind, and in being mentally and physically at rest. If your mind is calm and at rest through meditation and dharma practice you are at peace. Whereas if your mind is uncontrolled and delusions enter it, you will experience many problems and unnecessary difficulties in life.

The most essential spiritual practice we undertake is counteracting delusions. No matter what else we do, even if we are physically isolated there will not be much benefit in spiritual practice if at the same time, our mind is not isolated from the influence of thoughts concerning the affairs of this life, or future lives, or of the self-centred mind. We cannot achieve anything from our practice with a mind that is not free of troubling thoughts. Realising that the goal of spiritual practice is to remedy delusions, the most intense or forceful delusion should be attacked first, then the lesser forms of delusion can be tackled. As we make progress by decreasing our delusions, we can truly find joy in our practice. It will be personally rewarding in the sense that we shall possess more virtue and shall have developed our mental concentration.

The teachings always emphasise that we should see the dharma or the spiritual teachings as our mind's best and most reliable companion. All mental unhappiness is the result of keeping bad mental company with delusions. From this point of view, we have to understand that the reason we engage in any dharma practice is to remove delusions from the mind.

422.313 Third Benefit of Bodhicitta: Outshining the Qualities of Hearers and Solitary Realisers by Virtue of Race

ཉན་རང་རིགས་གྱི་སྣོན་སེལ་གྱིས་འོན་པ།

The third benefit of bodhicitta is to outshine the qualities of hearers and solitary realisers by virtue of the mahayana race or nature.

We may have doubts about contemplating the benefits of bodhicitta because we might think that we have not yet generated actual bodhicitta. However if we have not actually fully generated bodhicitta, but have a thorough understanding of what it is, then we can theoretically understand the benefits of bodhicitta, and then go on to develop it.

When thinking of benefits of bodhicitta in terms of our own practice we must first know the essence of the bodhicitta mind. It is the genuine thought of benefiting or helping other sentient beings. It is said that the root cause of bodhicitta is compassion. We may not possess actual bodhicitta, but we all do have the main cause of bodhicitta mind, which is this love and compassion for other beings, even though it is very partial and not perfect. So in thinking about and studying the benefits of bodhicitta, we can relate these benefits to the love and compassion which already exists in our mind. We have to understand that this love and compassion within us means that we are closer to developing the bodhicitta mind.

We might feel some inspiration to generate bodhicitta after knowing all its benefits. Then we should ask ourselves what we can do to generate this bodhicitta, knowing that its root cause is the compassion which already exists within our minds. What needs to be done is to make that compassion perfect, by making it impartial and extending it to all beings without any discrimination. If we make an effort to cultivate such impartial compassion then, as said in the text, we accumulate a large store of merit, equal to the number of sentient beings. In this way our practice leaves a very special mahayana seed to produce the bodhicitta mind.

How Bodhicitta Outshines by Race

In regard to the benefit of outshining hearers and solitary realisers, one sutra says "It is like how the jewels which come from the ocean can outshine all the other ordinary jewels in the world".

Another sutra says “From the very moment that a son is born to the king he will outshine all the senior ministers of the king”.

Even at a very young age, a child born to a king just by virtue of being born to the race of a king, will be superior to and outshine even the king’s senior ministers.

The qualities of hearers and solitary realisers are very great. The hearer who has achieved liberation has completely abandoned mental delusion, yet someone who has developed bodhicitta mind can outshine that hearer. This is because the bodhicitta mind is the buddha’s nature or buddha’s race. Therefore, because of this superior race, a person who has developed bodhicitta outshines all hearers and solitary realisers.

On another level is the analogy of the king’s child, who even though young and lacking knowledge still outshines by virtue of race. However as the child becomes older it will master all the necessary skills and knowledge, and thus outshine all ministers by way of knowledge, as well as by way of race. ‘Outshining hearers and solitary realisers by way of race’ refers to conventional bodhicitta. Whereas, ‘outshining by way of ultimate bodhicitta’ is like the king’s child outshining all the ministers, by virtue of having gained all necessary knowledge in addition to race.

It is also said that bodhicitta is the essence of all the 84,000 bundles of Buddha’s teachings. One instruction Atisha constantly gave to his students was to renounce the world, and to meditate on love and compassion to generate bodhicitta

422.314 The Fourth Benefit: An Excellent Object of Veneration

མཚོན་པའི་ཞིང་མཚོག་ཏུ་འགྱུར་བ།

Becoming an excellent or supreme object of veneration means that anyone who has generated bodhicitta is a worthy object of respect and veneration. When we make offerings we visualise an assembly of holy objects in our mind. However, if through your own effort you generate bodhicitta mind, you are also worthy of being included in the assembly of holy objects of offerings and prostrations.

We should understand that it takes a great deal of time and effort to produce bodhicitta. Even Atisha spent twelve years in meditation in order to do so. As mentioned in the commentary, it is good to read stories of such great masters and their main practice in order to be inspired. It is said that it is more beneficial and worthwhile if we put the same effort into generating bodhicitta, as in chanting mantras and visualising deities.

So we have to always remember the benefits of bodhicitta mind so as to sustain our motivation, and constantly make an effort towards producing that bodhicitta mind. The result, it is said, will be to deposit some seed or impression of bodhicitta in our mind. Although we may feel that producing impartial love and compassion is remote, by making continuous effort our current imperfect love and compassion will one day become impartial love and compassion.

The high godly beings such as Brahma or Indra also pay respect to one who has generated bodhicitta, giving all their support, and becoming a friend. Physically, by virtue of having generated bodhicitta one becomes magnificent and glorified. It is said that paying homage to bodhisattvas is equivalent to paying homage to the buddhas. It is like paying homage to the waxing moon. This analogy means that paying homage to the waxing moon at the beginning of the month is equivalent to paying homage to all the full moons to come. Likewise, paying homage to bodhisattvas is like paying homage to the buddhas, since it is said that the buddhas are born from bodhisattvas, and the bodhisattvas are born from bodhicitta¹. Even the buddhas pay homage to bodhisattvas. So here we also are learning about the causes to become a buddha, and the main cause is producing a bodhicitta mind.

We talk of the bodhisattva’s practice. Initially they generate bodhicitta mind, and then they engage in the bodhisattva’s deeds of which there are two sets:

1. Primarily to ripen their own continuum by means of the six perfections. These are generosity, morality, patience, joyous effort, concentration, and wisdom
2. Primarily to ripen the continuum of other beings by the four means of gathering disciples.
 - i. Giving. People always like to be given gifts. Even if someone is angry with you, if you give them gifts they will lose their anger.
 - ii. Speak kind words. When people become closer to you, speak nicely using pleasant, skilful speech. This mainly refers to the type of speech which people regard as pleasant, good speech.
 - iii. Teaching dharma to suit the needs or interests of the person. This also means that the manner in which you give dharma must also be both verbally and physically pleasant.
 - iv. Putting into practice what you teach to others. This means that by showing an example not only are you teaching dharma, but it becomes clear to their mind that they have to put into practice what they have learnt.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga’s commentary.

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Note on authentication

The original typescript is prepared by Jenny Molloy from Alan Molloy’s original transcript, which has been checked against Damien Busby’s notes. Adair Bunnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.

¹ Editor: Chandrakirti *Madhyamika Avatara* “Buddhas are born from bodhisattvas. The mind of compassion, non dual understanding and the altruistic intention to full enlightenment are the causes for children of the conquerors.”

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10 June 1997

Make sure that you cultivate the bodhicitta mind as your motivation for listening to these teachings on the stages of the path to enlightenment, or the lam rim. Generate the bodhicitta thought, which is that you are listening to these teachings to gain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

We have been going over the benefits of cultivating bodhicitta. At the moment we are just assuming that we have actually produced this bodhicitta in our mind when we generate bodhicitta as our motivation. However we have not produced actual bodhicitta. The benefits of the bodhicitta mind which we are studying refers to the benefits of generating actual bodhicitta. The purpose of learning these benefits is to inspire us to cultivate this bodhicitta mind. By focusing on our motivation before we undertake an action is to understand the reasons for which we undertake that action. Even with non-spiritual matters, it is important to cultivate a strong thought of doing that action before we commence a task, so that our aim for completing the action becomes clearer.

422.315 You Amass an Enormous Collection of Merit with Ease

ཚོགས་རྒྱུ་ཚོན་པོ་བདེ་སྤྲུག་ཏུ་རྫོགས་པ།

Of the ten benefits of bodhicitta we are now up to the fifth benefit: amassing enormous merit with ease.

Regarding this Geshe Nyurgumpa said, "When bodhicitta is generated then it accumulates merit by itself, it purifies all obscurations by itself, and removes all obstacles." So there are tremendous benefits in generating bodhicitta.

As discussed in the past, bodhicitta practice means perfecting the love and compassion that we feel towards others. We can do this by thinking of the degree of love and kind feeling that we have towards other beings, and fully develop this thought. For us, making progress in this bodhicitta practice means making these feelings of love and compassion unbiased, and trying to remove the influence of the attachment and hatred that overlays them. These feelings of love and compassion are the seeds of actual bodhicitta. If we focus on these qualities and try to develop them, then actual bodhicitta will arise naturally out of them.

What do we understand when it says that bodhicitta will automatically accumulate merit, automatically purify all our obscurations, and automatically remove all obstacles? This benefit of bodhicitta applies from the point of view of our own practice, and even from a beginner's perspective. Merit is accumulated by engaging in very

beneficial deeds such as generosity, observing moral ethics, and practising patience or tolerance. These practices boost our merit. What is the driving force leading us to undertake such meritorious action? It is the thought of benefiting other beings, which is basically the meaning of love and compassion.

On the other hand if we think of love, compassion and bodhicitta as a genuine thought of extending benefit to other beings, then naturally we have genuine thoughts of giving, and not having any harmful thoughts towards others. So our actions become very moral and we bring moral ethics into our actions. Likewise if we feel love and compassion towards others, we shall be more patient and tolerant. So our merit increases.

Bodhicitta is also said to be a means of purifying our obscurations. This is similar to accumulating merit. That is, out of the thought of benefiting other beings if we engage in the practice of generosity, we eliminate obscurations such as miserliness. By engaging in moral ethics we purify all the obscurations of immoral actions, and likewise through the practice of patience we overcome the obscuration of anger towards other beings.

Once this bodhicitta is cultivated then all our actions become a source of accumulating merit, and a means of removing even the obscurations preventing the development of single pointed concentration and wisdom. We can all naturally develop this concentration and wisdom because of having laid good foundations with practices such as generosity, ethics and so forth.

Bodhicitta is also said to remove all obstacles. It is even said in a sutra "A person with fortunate merit will obtain all that is desired". To elaborate, this means that if our merit and fortune are enhanced, we shall not face any form of obstacle.

Lama Tsong Khapa said that bodhicitta is like an alchemic water for accumulating the two types of accumulation of merit.¹ The two types of accumulation refer to the accumulation of merit, and the accumulation of wisdom. Just as alchemic water can transform any metal into gold, so bodhicitta will make all our actions part of these two accumulations of merit and wisdom.

[Lama Tsong Khapa also states that] bodhicitta is also

¹ Lama Tsong Khapa "Concise meaning of the stages of the path"

"Producing bodhi mind is the king post of the mahayana path,

The base and support of bodhisattva's great deeds

A philosopher's stone (ie alchemic liquid) transmuting all into merit and wisdom

A treasure of merit assembling glorious virtue."

like a “treasure of gold of where all the virtues are gathered.”²

Achieving the state of buddhahood depends upon the full accumulation of merit and wisdom. The accumulation of merit is regarded as the method to reach buddhahood, whereas the accumulation of wisdom is regarded as the knowledge to do so. When one reaches the final state of complete buddhahood, the end result of the accumulation of merit manifests as the buddha’s physical or form body. Whereas the completion of the accumulation of wisdom is manifested as the truth body of the buddha, which is the omniscient or all-knowing exalted wisdom mind of the buddha. This is the brief meaning of the two accumulations.

In terms of these categories of the two accumulations of merit or wisdom, the six perfections can be divided as follows:

- The first three - generosity, morality, and patience - belong to the category of creating merit.
- The last two - concentration and wisdom - belong to the category of wisdom
- The perfection of joyous effort belongs to both categories, being part of both the accumulation of merit and of wisdom.

What follows next is the benefits of bodhicitta in terms of our virtue becoming inexhaustible and continuously increasing. In the commentary there are many quotations from Shantideva’s text *Bodhisattva’s Way Of Life* showing how once bodhicitta is generated, then even a very small action creates a huge and endless result.

Having studied the benefits and significance of bodhicitta you can now understand why it is important to try to apply this motivation of bodhicitta right at the beginning of any practice. You may not yet have generated actual bodhicitta, but you have at least learnt and understood what this mind is about, so, at least at this theoretical level, you can cultivate this bodhicitta mind. You do this by thinking at the beginning of any practice, that the reason why you are engaging in the practice is to remove the suffering of all living beings. Even if this is very fabricated, and not a completely genuine thought, still make some effort to produce the thought that through this practice may all living beings find happiness.

If we infuse our motivation with bodhicitta, then our actions will yield an inexhaustible result and benefit. Therefore try to remember bodhicitta at all times when engaging in any practice. Whether that practice be saying a mantra, or offering even a flower to the buddha, or making prostrations, or being generous, try to think that this practice is to benefit all beings, or to attain full enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Doing this shows that we are at least trying to follow the example of the bodhisattva’s deeds.

Regardless of the type of practice, the length of time, or the amount of effort we put into it, if we incorporate bodhicitta at the beginning, and during the practice, we should try to remind ourselves that we are doing this practice to attain enlightenment for the sake of all

sentient beings. Likewise, at the end, with this mind of bodhicitta we dedicate the practice so that all sentient beings will be free of all suffering, and find everlasting happiness. If on a regular basis we remember this bodhicitta motivation whenever we do a practice, then gradually we shall see ourselves making some progress; in terms of actually having a genuine feeling of love and compassion for others.

Bodhicitta will bring more peace and happiness within our own mind as well. What we are trying to develop is the thought of others, but when such a thought is generated in our own mind there is an immediate benefit in that one’s mind becomes calmer and more peaceful. This peace and happiness in the mind is what we cherish. In order to obtain that feeling each individual being must create its cause. It is not something which a higher being can grant to us as a gift. If it were there is no reason why Buddha couldn’t give us this gift. So cultivating bodhicitta also has this personal benefit of enhancing our own inner peace and happiness.

We can only be successful with this bodhicitta practice if we train ourself. We may find it difficult in the beginning because we are not accustomed to this unfamiliar practice. But, if we train the mind by trying to infuse this bodhicitta mind as our motivation, throughout all our actions - even sleeping, eating, and drinking - then such thought will arise naturally without depending upon a deliberate effort to generate the thought. So we should not feel very discouraged and abandon our efforts just because the practice we are doing appears to be very hard and unrealistic. We should remind ourselves of what Shantideva said, “There is nothing which cannot become easy by the force of becoming familiar with it.” So, in this way try to develop bodhicitta mind throughout all our actions.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga’s commentary.

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² ibid

Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུང་ས།



17 June 1997

Cultivate the bodhicitta motivation, which is genuinely wishing to attain the state of buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings. With this genuine wish for enlightenment for the sake of all beings, we listen to the teachings on the lam rim, or the stages of the path to enlightenment, with the strong intention of putting them into practice.

Fifth Benefit of Bodhicitta (cont)

Last week we discussed the fifth benefit of bodhicitta, quickly and easily gathering a huge amount of merit. We learnt that when bodhicitta is integrated into our spiritual practice, then that practice represents the deeds of a bodhisattva being, and is a cause to achieve buddhahood, or full enlightenment. Furthermore, the merit that we accumulate from that practice is as countless as the living beings throughout the universe.

It is said in Shantideva's text *The Bodhisattva's Way Of Life* that having generated bodhicitta, and having taken the bodhisattva vows, then your virtuous merit will increase continuously, and become as infinite as space. It will keep increasing even if you are doing nothing. Keeping all these benefits in mind, we should see how important it is to always incorporate bodhicitta into our practice.

From our own experience we can understand how bodhicitta gathers enormous merit. By observing our mental continuum, and discriminating between the various thoughts and states of mind that we generate, we can analyse which thoughts and states of minds are harmful, and which are beneficial. On the basis of such investigations, we can see how if we sustain this altruistic thought which cares for other beings, then automatically we create very wholesome deeds, bringing benefit to both our own life and the lives of others. We can also see that by generating this altruistic attitude of bodhicitta, our attitude to the world and ourself becomes very wide and broad. It also reduces all disturbing and worrying thoughts, bringing us a very stable inner peace.

The selfish mind and selfish actions, on the other hand, bring harm to both ourselves and others. The influence of that mind narrows our vision, and also paves the way for various disturbing and worrying thoughts to arise. Of course, if we perform an action with a selfish motive, then more often than not, that action will bring more harm to our life than benefit. In the short term, selfish deeds may appear to bring benefit, but in the long term they bring harm.

422.316: Sixth Benefit: Quickly Purifying all Negativities and Obscurations

རྣམ་ཐོབ་ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་

The sixth benefit means that if we generate bodhicitta, then all our negativities and mental obscurations can be quickly purified.

Firstly we must define the difference between negativities and obscuration.

Negativities are any actions which produce, or which are a cause to produce undesirable results, for instance the actions of killing, stealing, adultery, and so forth. All these non-virtuous or unwholesome actions are negativities.

An obscuration is something which obstructs one from reaching liberation from cyclic existence, or achieving the all-knowing state of buddhahood. Obscurations are generally of two types.

1. Obscuration to liberation.
2. Obscuration to the all-knowing state of buddhahood.

Obscuration means something which "obstructs". Examples of obscurations to liberation are all the mental delusions, together with their seeds. They are called obscurations to liberation because they are mainly an obstruction to the achievement of liberation. Whereas the imprints left by all the mental delusions are obscurations to the all-knowing state of buddhahood. Another example of an obscuration to the all-knowing state of enlightenment is the appearance to the mind that things exist inherently or truly, which is a dualistic state of misconception.

It is said in Shantideva's text *The Bodhisattva's Way Of Life* that "Even in the instant when bodhicitta is generated, it can get rid of the negativities, even very sinful actions which have been committed in the past." There is no more powerful practice than bodhicitta to purify negativities. This also implies that there are no negativities which cannot be purified by cultivating bodhicitta.

It is relevant to recall here the story of Asanga who spent twelve years in a cave meditating in order to see a vision of Maitreya buddha. Maitreya had been with Asanga throughout those twelve years in the cave, but due to his negativities Asanga could not see the object of his meditation. Having failed to see Maitreya, Asanga came out of the cave, and saw a female dog experiencing agonising suffering. The dog was lying on the dirt and

infested with maggots. Asanga wanted to remove the maggots without harming them, so he decided to do it with his tongue, and because of this strong compassion all his negativities were purified, and he immediately saw Maitreya buddha. After this Maitreya said to Asanga "If you do not believe that I was always with you, carry me into town on your back". When Asanga did this, most people saw nothing on his back, except for some who saw him carrying a dog.

If it were not for our obscurations and negativities, there would be no reason for us not to see all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. There would also be no reason for us not to directly see the invited Tara when we do a Tara practice.

This practice of developing love and compassion for others is therefore most powerful, effective and helpful in purifying negativities. Therefore, in our daily practice we should place some emphasis on developing whatever degree of love and compassion that we all possess. For instance if we see others with sickness and suffering, try to understand their pain and suffering, and feel sympathy for them. As Geshe Chekawa always said "May I always be able to see other beings with eyes of love and compassion". If we generate love and compassion towards even a few people, it effectively purifies negativities. If we extend this feeling to one hundred beings, not only do we purify any negativities we might have created towards those beings, but we also purify all other negativities stored in our mind.

The more we develop love and compassion towards others, the closer we are to giving rise to bodhicitta, and that means we are closer to reaching the state of buddhahood. So we should think of this practice of meditation on love and compassion as being something with which we are all familiar. In other words it doesn't require much learning. If we have accumulated many karmic crimes or negative actions, there is no reason to feel great fear or regret about this. Rather, we should think that if we focus our meditation on showing love and compassion to others, then all these negativities can be purified.

We should encourage ourselves by thinking that if we do not wish for the outcome of those negative actions that we have done in the past, then we have to purify these negativities, and the best means of purifying negativities is meditating on love and compassion. It is said that someone who has generated bodhicitta, or true love and compassion for others, is like the brave, fearless person who walks in unsafe areas of town. Like this, a person who has generated bodhicitta has no fear, because even if you have created negativities in the past, there is no reason to fear the outcome of those negative actions.

With an unbreakable stick, we can break a room full of clay tiles very quickly. If we want to purify all our negativities, then meditating on love and compassion is like that unbreakable stick. It has the power to purify all negativities in one instant: using other methods it might take one hundred years to purify them.

For the examination the compulsory question is to elaborate on the refuge prayer "I go for refuge to the

buddha, dharma, sangha until I achieve enlightenment". This prayer also incorporates bodhicitta. Geshe-la wants us to study the three jewels or objects of refuge: buddha, dharma, and sangha. We use his refuge prayer all the time, so it is good to study it, and understand its meaning.

It is a very important prayer, as taking refuge in the three jewels is very significant. It shows that the path we have chosen is not perverted, misleading or wrong. Generating bodhicitta is also significant, since it shows that the path you have chosen is not perverted nor is it inferior.

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TARA INSTITUTE

STUDY GROUP DISCUSSION NIGHT - 24 June 1997
Covering discourses 27/05/97 to 17/06/97

- 1/ How do the small and medium scope stages of the path serve as foundation the the great scope stages of the path? Discuss the main practices and goals of each scope.
- 2/ What qualifies one to be called a "Mahayanist"?
- 3/ What is the essence of Bodhicitta? Discuss how we should try to integrate Bodhicitta into our daily life.
- 4/ The Mahayana and Hinayana differ on the basis of deeds, whereas the Buddhist school of tenets differ on the basis of philosophical view. Explain.
- 5/ List the 10 benefits of Bodhicitta mentioned in the Lam Rim.
- 6/ In what respect do Bodhisattvas outshine the qualities of Hearers and Solitary Realisers. Give examples.
- 7/ List the 6 Perfections and the 4 means of gathering disciples.
- 8/ In order to achieve Buddhahood, it is necessary to complete the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. Discuss why Bodhicitta is the main cause for these accumulations.
- 9/ Why is one who generates Bodhicitta referred to as a child of Buddha?

Compulsory question

Elaborate on the meaning of the following refuge prayer:-

"I go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha until I achieve Enlightenment."

TARA INSTITUTE
STUDY GROUP TEST-3
1st July, 1997

Answer any four from questions no. 1-6

Question.no.7 is compulsory

Time allowed one hour

1. How do the small and medium scope stages of the path serve as foundation for the great scope stages of the path?
2. How should we integrate Bodhicitta into our daily life practice?
3. On what basis are the two vehicles of hinayana and mahayana differentiated?
4. List the ten benefits of Bodhicitta.
5. What does it mean by Bodhisattvas outshining the qualities of Hearers and Solitary Realizers?
6. Why is it necessary to complete the two accumulations in order to achieve Buddhahood?
7. **(Compulsory)**
Elaborate on the meaning of the following prayer:

I go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha until I achieve Enlightenment.
Through the merits I create by practising generosity and so forth
May I achieve Buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings."

