
The Middle Length Lamrim

ཅུམ་ལམ་རིམ་འབྲིང་། རྒྱུ་སེམས་སྦྱོང་བའི་རིམ་པ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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We will start with the usual meditation. [*Tonglen Meditation*]

We often hear about the importance of beginning a practice with the proper motivation. So, keeping this in mind, we should try to cultivate bodhicitta as a motivation for listening to this profound teaching. Bodhicitta, as you know, is a genuine wish or aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings.

We will now continue with the teaching.

C. Generating the mind cherishing others

In the previous session we learnt about the pitfalls of the self-cherishing mind, and we will now find out about the benefits of cherishing other beings. As the text says:

Thinking about the advantages of cherishing others again and again in this way, you will generate strong enthusiasm to do so from the bottom of your heart.

If we look into each of the words of this single sentence and reflect on them, we will gain a very clear understanding of what we are supposed to learn and know the practice that we are supposed to do. The text is saying that we have to not just learn, but to think about what we learn over and over again; for example, by mentally listing all the benefits of cultivating the mind of cherishing other beings.

When the text says *from the bottom of your heart* it is emphasising that we should try to recognise the benefits of cherishing other beings from the depths of our hearts, and through this we will find that cultivating this thought of cherishing other beings is the best method to generate the bodhicitta mind.

There is tremendous benefit in contemplating the thought of cherishing other beings, even for just a minute. Think of the great positive impression that this will leave on our minds, which will culminate in the precious mind of bodhicitta in the future. We are all interested in meditation and here is a true meditation practice, a practice that is both profound and beneficial. If we practise a different kind of meditation, then we are really making a big mistake. If we don't practise generating the mind of cherishing other beings, then as the text states:

Then you will not generate the mind neglecting others that has not yet arisen, and that which has arisen will not last long.

This line is talking about how, having cultivated this mind of cherishing others, you will have genuine concern and empathy for all other beings. Then, as it says, you will be able to prevent a mind of negligence about the suffering and problems of other beings that has *not yet arisen* by making sure it doesn't arise, or if it has arisen making sure that it doesn't last long. Then:

By means of the thought that others are dear, pleasant, and attractive, as far as it has arisen, you should generate the mind cherishing others, just as you previously cherished yourself.

Here again the text is emphasising that we should generate this thought of cherishing other beings to the same degree as the strength of our previous self-centred mind. We should train our mind so that whenever we see any other being a very positive and delightful mental impression will arise, and we will feel a sense of pleasantness, endearment and fondness for them.

In terms of generating the bodhicitta mind, the main obstacle that we face is the self-cherishing mental attitude and that is what we need to overcome. Otherwise there will be no way that we will be able to generate bodhicitta or an aspiration to benefit other beings. With respect to the spiritual person on the small stages of the path, the main obstacle is attachment to this present life, which they must overcome in order to achieve their goal of finding a good future rebirth. The main obstacle for a person on the middling stages of the path is an attachment to cyclic existence or samsara. In order to achieve their goal of the mere state of liberation from samsara, the person on this stage must overcome their attachment by cultivating a true sense of renunciation. The main goal of somebody who is following the great stages of the path is to benefit all other beings through achieving complete enlightenment. So, they take on the universal responsibility for benefitting all other beings. Hence, their main obstacle is the self-cherishing mind; without overcoming that they cannot develop an aspiration to benefit others. In other words, they cannot generate the bodhicitta mind.

D. How to meditate remembering the teachings of earlier holy beings

The Elder said: "The Tibetans know bodhisattvas who do not know how to train in love and compassion. Well then, how do you do it? You should do it having trained sequentially from the beginning."

In order to generate bodhicitta we must feel love and compassion for all beings. In this context the *Elder* is saying that it is not possible for there to be bodhisattvas who lack love and compassion – unless Tibetans have found one. Relating this to our own practice, we may feel that even though we lack any real element of love and compassion we have reached the status of a bodhisattva. Then the text asks *how do you train in love and compassion? How do you do it?* The answer is that *you should do it having trained sequentially from the beginning*.

We have to follow the training stage by stage. We may want to bypass all of the lower stages in order to move more quickly to the higher levels. This is unrealistic and will not be successful. The text is emphasising that in order to cultivate bodhicitta, we first have to cultivate all the stages of the path that are common to the persons of the small scope and the middling scope. So, we first follow the path, common to the small stages of the path and then move on to the stages of the path, common to the person of the middling scope. On this path, our goal is to achieve the state of liberation from samsara for ourselves, and not only that, we develop the faith and conviction that, through our own knowledge and reasoning, we can achieve liberation.

However, at that point we begin to realise that it is not sufficient to achieve liberation just for ourselves, we must also place all other beings into that state of liberation. As we show this concern for the wellbeing of all other beings we begin to move into the training of the great stages of the path. We must train and progress along the path from the bottom of the stages of the path common to the person of

small scope and then to the path common to the middling scope, in a systematic and sequential order. In that way, we will make very smooth and steady progress on the great stages of the path.

The point being made here is that there is an order in which we should practise. When we engage in the training, we must follow it stage by stage in the correct order from the beginning to the end. What kind of practice do we have to do in the beginning and what is the practice after that and so on? That is what is being emphasised here.

Then the text says:

Langri Tangpa said: "Shawopa and I have eighteen human methods and one horse method, nineteen altogether. The human methods are to generate the mind set on supreme enlightenment and train in doing whatever one does for the welfare of sentient beings. The method of horses is the self-cherishing that does not allow bodhicitta that has not arisen to arise and that which has arisen to remain and increase. Therefore, having taught it in passing, we train in whatever harms it. As for sentient beings, we train in whatever benefits them, having taught this as the fundamental point.

We won't be listing the *eighteen human methods* here because, while some scholars list eighteen things, there are others who consider 'eighteen' as merely implying many methods and not just one. Human methods refer to the method of protecting of our own self-interest, such as our friends and relatives, and in this context it means focusing on the training to generate bodhicitta and to benefit other beings. Whereas the focus of the *one horse method* is primarily to counteract hindrances, and the main hindrance is self-cherishing. It says:

"The human methods are to generate the mind set on supreme enlightenment and train in doing whatever one does for the welfare of sentient beings.

We should strive to generate the supreme mind of enlightenment and, having generated this mind, we train ourselves in actions that benefit other sentient beings. As these lines emphasise, it is not enough to simply read them. It is important to deeply reflect on and contemplate their meaning. It is said that the words of the profound texts carry powerful inspiration and many blessings. Nevertheless, we cannot receive inspiration and blessing simply by reading them out; we must also reflect deeply on their meaning.

With the *horse method* we need to counteract and destroy the hindrances, or whatever prevents us from generating bodhicitta. Having generated bodhicitta, we need to counter anything that prevents that mind from arising, or from decreasing if it has arisen or which causes it to degenerate. So, we must recognise the nature of that hindrance. It is self-cherishing that prevents bodhicitta from arising or if it arises, causes it to degenerate or prevent it from increasing further. It is imperative that we recognise what harms our bodhicitta. Here, we need to direct our attention inside ourselves rather than outside. We have to point our finger at the self-cherishing mind that lies within ourselves as the main hindrance to developing bodhicitta.

Then the text says:

"Therefore, having taught it in passing, we train in whatever harms it.

The implication here is that having recognised the self-cherishing mind as the main enemy that causes the degeneration of bodhicitta and prevents it from increasing,

we have to take a very dim view of that self-cherishing and do everything we can to counteract it. Then as the text says:

"As for sentient beings, we train in whatever benefits them, having taught this as the fundamental point."

Our attitude towards sentient beings is that they are our most cherished things. With that kind of attitude, we should engage in any act that will benefit them. In this way, we are engaging in the training of developing the mind of cherishing other beings while at the same time diminishing self-cherishing.

Then the text continues:

Khamlungpa said: "Since we act deviously toward noble sentient beings, they will also do the same to us."

Here the translation uses the word 'devious' for the Tibetan word *yo.le.cho* which literally means 'inconsistent'. We can interpret this as not being consistent, such as being dishonest in our dealings with other sentient beings. Otherwise, as it says here, *they will also do the same to us*. So, their attitude towards us, or their dealings with us can also be very unpredictable and dishonest.

Normally our attitude towards others is based on how they treat us. If they are not honest with us then we think, 'Why should I be honest with them'? Of course, we will be hurt if people are not honest or nice to us. Therefore, the advice here is that we should always be honest and pleasant towards others. If we do this then they will reciprocate in the same manner.

Now we come to the fifth sub-heading which reads:

E. The appropriateness of putting effort by many approaches into the methods for mind generation

As the text reads:

It is good if a habit develops that constantly checks to what extent this mind has been generated since everything stems from it: whether or not the root of the Mahāyāna has been planted and whether or not one is included among Mahāyānists.

Here we find out about the excellent qualities of bodhicitta, which is, as it says here, *the root of the Mahāyāna*. Whether or not we have planted the root of the Mahayana path really depends on our generation of the bodhicitta mind. So, thinking 'what is the point of making an effort if it is too hard to generate a bodhicitta mind' is not the right attitude. What is important is to at least try our best and put some effort into cultivating the bodhicitta mind. When we put in an effort, like reading this text and then reflecting on its meaning, we are continuously implanting and nourishing the seed of bodhicitta within us.

We must remember that all of our efforts will make a difference to generating bodhicitta in the future. For example, any effort we put into generating bodhicitta in this life leaves an imprint in our mind to give rise to bodhicitta in a future life. When it says *whether or not one is included among Mahāyānists*, the text is saying that the bodhicitta mind determines whether someone is a Mahayanist or not. It says in Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* that the moment the bodhicitta mind arises in the continuum of an animal, it becomes a worthy object to be venerated by gods and humans.

You have also heard that even if the arhats of the hearer or shravaka path of the Lesser Vehicle have attained the state of liberation or nirvana, (which means they have completely abandoned all of the mental afflictions, together with their

seeds), they are not qualified to be called a bodhisattva or a Mahayanist despite their high level of spiritual attainment. Whereas one who freshly enters into the Mahayana path of accumulation - simply by virtue of giving rise to bodhicitta - is qualified to be called a Mahayanist and a bodhisattva. As the text says:

Even if it does not arise, do not leave it at that but rely on a virtuous friend who teaches it, and always keep company with the companion that is mind training.

This again is very powerful advice from Lama Tsongkhapa. Whatever our circumstances we must always practise the Dharma to the best of our capacity. Rather than simply giving up on a practice such as cultivating bodhicitta on the ground that it is too hard or whatever, we have to think of what we can do, and how we can facilitate the development of bodhicitta. As it says here, we should befriend people who suit our mind training practice in terms of inspiring us to practise bodhicitta. For the same reason, we have learnt that we should rely on Avalokiteshvara as our meditational deity to cultivate compassion and rely on Manjushri to cultivate wisdom.

Then the text continues:

Read the scriptures of the Teacher and their commentaries.

There is no need to mention that there are lots of other things that we can do to generate bodhicitta or to create a cause to generate bodhicitta. For example, as it says here, reading scriptures such as Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, is a wonderful text for cultivating bodhicitta. Then:

As its cause, accumulate the collections and purify your obstructions.

As part of cultivating a bodhicitta mind we must also engage in the practice of accumulating virtue and purifying negativities. We can clearly understand why accumulation and purification are so important. We should also note that in the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, which we use as a formula to cultivate bodhicitta, the prayer begins with taking refuge in the Three Jewels, which is to increase merit, and then confessing all negativities, which is to purify negativities. Having engaged in the practice of accumulation and purification, then the prayer moves on to cultivating the bodhicitta mind.

We should make a special note of the sentence *Even if it does not arise, do not leave it at that but rely on a virtuous friend who teaches it, and always keep company with the companion that is mind training*. This is not only important with this practice, but we can also apply this advice to all other practices that we are trying to do to develop our spiritual qualities. So, this line is very encompassing.

The text continues:

Since it is certain that if you train your mind in this way, the seed will be fully planted, for these actions are of no little importance and a reason for joy.

The *reason for joy* emphasises that the effort that you make in cultivating bodhicitta is not a small one. No matter how much time or effort is necessary to generate bodhicitta, every single moment of effort and time that we put in is of great purpose and should never be underestimated. Rather it has enormous benefit, and so you should rejoice in your own practice. The text then continues:

It is as the Great Elder said:

For those who wish to enter the gate of

Mahāyāna Dharma it's worth an eon
Of effort for bodhicitta to grow
Which like the sun and moon eliminate
Darkness and pacify scorching heat.

The analogy here is that the bodhicitta mind is like the sun and moon which eliminate darkness and torment. Bodhicitta has the same effect in dispelling mental darkness and torment. Therefore, it is worth making the effort to generate bodhicitta, even though it will take eons of years to produce.

F 2B4B-2B3B-2B The measure of it having arisen

The second: [180] that should be understood from what was already explained above.

This refers to the earlier section in the text which explained the measurement of having cultivated the mind of enlightenment.

We need to know the meaning of bodhicitta and the method of cultivating it. When we cultivate bodhicitta we also need to know when we can say that we have actually cultivated the fully-fledged bodhicitta mind.

Bodhicitta is a genuine wish to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. Given that the definition of bodhicitta is this strong wish or desire to achieve enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings, the measure of having generated it is when such a wish becomes strong and infuses our mind, arising spontaneously with respect to each and every sentient being. For example, just as such a wish will arise spontaneously, naturally and forcefully in relation to a tiny ant that you see, it arises in the same manner towards all sentient beings. This is considered the measure of having generated bodhicitta.

The measure of having generated love and compassion towards all beings is similar. The difference is that love is defined as a wish for all beings to have happiness, whereas compassion is the wish for all beings to be free of suffering. The measure of having generated great love and great compassion is when this wish that every single being has happiness and is free from suffering arises spontaneously, forcefully and naturally.

EXPLANATION OF HOW TO ASSUME THE MIND GENERATION BY MEANS OF A RITUAL

2B4B-2B3B-2C The way to assume it by means of a ritual

- 1 Receiving that which has not yet been received
- 2 Guarding that which has been received without it degenerating
- 3 The method for restoring it if it has degenerated

The third has three points: receiving that which has not yet been received, guarding that which has been received without it degenerating, and the method for restoring it if it has degenerated.

These three sub-headings present the procedures for taking the bodhisattva vows. They show what we have to do to receive them if we have not already done so.

2B4B-2B3B-2C1 Receiving that which has not yet been received

The text states:

The first has three points: from whom: the object from whom it is taken; by whom: the basis that takes it; how: the ritual by which it is taken.

The first refers to suitable objects from whom to take the bodhisattva vow. The second refers to the qualifications of

the person who takes the vow, while the third explains the actual ritual.

2B4B-2B3B-2C1A From whom: the object from whom it is taken

First: The assertions of the earlier masters accord with Master Jetari that it is not enough for the person from whom the vow is taken to possess the vow of aspiring bodhicitta and to be abiding in the trainings, rather he must possess the vow of engaging bodhicitta.

This sentence defines the qualities of the person from whom one takes the vow.

2B4B-2B3B-2C1B By whom: the basis that takes it

This refers to the person taking the vows.

Second: All gods, nāgas, and so forth who are physically and mentally suitable to generate aspiring bodhicitta are also a suitable basis for it. The Commentary on the Difficult Points of the “Lamp for the Path” says:

Repulsed by cyclic existence, mindful of death,
with wisdom and great compassion.

Thus it should be someone who has gained a little experience of transforming his mentality into bodhicitta due to having trained the mind in the stages of the path as explained previously.

The explanation in this text follows that of *The Commentary on the Difficult Points of the “Lamp for the Path”*. Here the focus is on the suitable basis or candidates for ritually developing bodhicitta. The text says that a suitable candidate for engaging in rituals to generate wishing bodhicitta, should be *repulsed by cyclic existence, mindful of death, with wisdom and great compassion*. Stage by stage they should have developed the sense of renunciation of cyclic existence, the experience of mindfulness and awareness, along with wisdom and great compassion.

Essentially *it should be someone who has gained a little experience of transforming his mentality* which in Tibetan is *yi.gyur.gi nyong.wa*. Literally *yi* means mind, *gyur* means changing and *nyong.wa* means experience; so *yi.gyur.gi nyong.wa* means a mind-changing experience of bodhicitta following the step-by-step development in the mind-training practice. We could ask the question, ‘When will we have that mind-changing experience of bodhicitta?’ One interpretation is that it refers to the point where we generate the bodhicitta mind after we have progressed through all of the practices of the small and middle scopes, and then engaged in the great scope by following the seven-fold cause and effect method, or exchanging self and others.

According to the seven-fold cause and effect method, we meditate on recognising all sentient beings as our mother, remembering their kindness, developing a sense of wishing to repay them, feeling compassion and then loving kindness. Following that, we meditate to cultivate a superior intention. There we feel not only strong love and compassion for all other beings, but there is also a sense of personal responsibility, where we personally take on the responsibility for leading all beings to happiness and freeing them from suffering. That sense of universal responsibility gives rise to a kind of bodhicitta – an aspiration or a wish to achieve enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. Initially such a wish or aspiration is not a natural wish, so it is called a fabricated or an artificial wish. This can be called the mind-changing experience (in Tibetan *yi.gur.gi nyong.wa*) of bodhicitta. So, a suitable person to engage in the ritual to

generate bodhicitta is the one who has the mind-changing experience of bodhicitta.

Next week we will continue with:

2B4B-2B3B-2C1C How: the ritual by which it is taken

This has three sub-headings:

1. The preparatory ritual
2. The actual ritual
3. The concluding ritual

We have just mentioned the seven-fold cause and effect technique for generating bodhicitta. The other well-known method for cultivating bodhicitta is called equalising and exchanging self and others. There we begin by meditating on the equality of self and others, and then reflect on the shortcomings of self-cherishing, and the qualities or advantages of cherishing other beings. Having gained some experience in that, we then engage in the meditation of giving and taking. We meditate on taking after having enhanced the force of compassion, and we meditate on giving after having enhanced the force of love. It is said that due to the force of our experience of this meditation of giving, taking - which is the experience of superior intention (and which is the next step) - will naturally arise. There you fully take upon the burden of freeing all beings from suffering and placing them in the state of happiness.

With this superior intention you have developed a deep sense of responsibility. The next question is: can you fulfil this great responsibility? Realising that you can’t because of your limited knowledge and power, you investigate who has such the capacity to free all beings from suffering and lead them to happiness? This leads you to reflect upon the excellent qualities of a fully enlightened being, such as a buddha.

As you start to recognise all the excellences and unique qualities of a buddha, you begin to admire the Buddha and the develop faith in him, which naturally culminates in the aspiration to achieve all of those excellent qualities. Thus, you pave the way for bodhicitta – a wish or an aspiration to achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings – to arise. Initially we generate a fabricated bodhicitta or bodhicitta with effort. In Tibetan *tsol.che* means with effort and *tsol.me* means without effort. As we have mentioned earlier, giving rise to such a fabricated bodhicitta or bodhicitta with effort is called gaining the mind-changing experience of bodhicitta.

Then, after you further familiarise yourself with this bodhicitta mind, it will eventually arise without effort, which is the true and fully-fledged bodhicitta that we are talking about – one which arises spontaneously, forcefully and naturally with respect to all sentient beings.

I think it is very beneficial to study the Dharma by attending the teachings and so forth. There are many of you here who have appreciated the benefit of studying the Dharma such as my teaching on the *Bodhicharyavatara* and bodhicitta and so forth, because this helped you to understand better when you attended teachings by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

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