
The Middle Length Lamrim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

19 July 2022

We have just recited The *King of Prayers* for Noel Young who died recently. She was involved in this Centre for many years.

We will continue from the Middle Length Lamrim text. We are up to the main section called:

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

Here, mind generation refers to bodhicitta, which essentially is a genuine sense of caring and kindness towards others rather than a self-centred mental attitude. We can say that the essence of the entire teachings of the Lord Buddha is to cultivate bodhicitta rooted in love and compassion for all other beings. All the other major religions also advocate love, kindness, and compassion for other beings. But what is unique about the Buddha's teaching is the impartiality of love and compassion for all sentient beings without any discrimination whatsoever. The Buddhist practice is based on the principle of non-violence, compassion and altruism.

Our usual view of what is beneficial and harmful to us is externally orientated. When we think of what we need, we always think of and look for external objects. We don't think of our needs and look inside ourselves for things. The word 'Dharma' or *chod pa* in Tibetan, means to change, modify or amend. More specifically it means to change and transform our mind from a negative to a positive state. So, Dharma practice means changing our mental habits that continuously go after or fall under the influence of mental afflictions. Our mind falling under the influence of any conceptual thought is a problem, but here we are primarily concerned about 'unwholesome and destructive thoughts'. We already have positive and constructive thoughts, such as showing love and compassion for other beings, but we need to develop them. The Dharma is an effective means of getting rid of destructive states of mind and cultivating constructive and positive states of mind.

In the heading '*assume the mind-generation by means of ritual*', mind-generation is 'bodhicitta' which essentially is an altruistic mental attitude of benefitting others. From this perspective, even though we lack actual bodhicitta, we all have the essence of altruism within us. So, we all have a seed or potential to cultivate bodhicitta and achieve the state of buddhahood. However, we must realise that the extent of developing that seed into bodhicitta depends on how much effort we put into meditating on bodhicitta. This enables our mind to become more acquainted with bodhicitta. So, we must meditate as often as we can.

Many of you have heard about the method of generating bodhicitta in terms of the sevenfold cause and effect method and the method of equalising and exchanging self for others. Applying these two methods is a true meditation practice. In a sense, whoever engages in this meditation will experience its effect of shaking or jolting the mental afflictions, thereby

bringing a true blessing to their mind with a sense of ease, peace and happiness.

I know from my own experience what peace and joy bodhicitta brings to me. We must practise bodhicitta to truly know its great benefit. Bodhicitta is one of the most important causes of achieving buddhahood. The more bodhicitta arises within us, the closer we are to moving toward the state of buddhahood. The state of buddhahood represents the state of perfection in terms of removing all the faults and endowing ourselves with all the excellent qualities. That is the meaning of the state of buddhahood.

Even though we may pray 'May I achieve the state of buddhahood quickly', honestly, there is no such quick or short path or an immediate leap or jump to the state of buddhahood. To achieve buddhahood we have to get rid of all faults and accomplish all excellent qualities; this is only possible through making gradual and sequential progress on the stages of the path, stage by stage before we reach the final state of buddhahood.

First, we have to work hard to counteract the main obstacle to bodhicitta which is the self-cherishing mind. We have to ask ourselves, 'Can we overcome the self-cherishing mind?' The answer is yes. How? By cultivating love and compassion, and through this we can cultivate altruism which is the thought of benefitting others. This altruistic thought directly opposes the self-cherishing mind. We can tell from our own experience that we cannot have both the thought of benefitting and harming someone at the same time because these two mutually oppose each other.

The way to assume it by means of a ritual

This has three subheadings: 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.

Receiving that which has not yet been received

There are a further three subheadings: from whom: the object from whom it is taken; by whom: the basis that takes it; How: the ritual by which it is taken and the preparatory ritual.

FROM WHOM: THE OBJECT FROM WHOM IT IS TAKEN

The text says:

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.

BY WHOM: THE BASIS THAT TAKES IT

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 in transforming their mentality into bodhicitta due to having trained the mind in the stages of the path as explained previously.

It is emphasised here that when we are ready to hold or to generate bodhicitta by means of a ritual, as Atisha's *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* says, *repulsed by cyclic existence*, there must be some sense of renunciation towards cyclic

existence, and *mindful of death with wisdom and great compassion*. Based on such realisation of renunciation, death and impermanence, we must have some sustained experience of bodhicitta. If we have this, then we are ready to engage in the ritual to hold the bodhicitta.

HOW: THE RITUAL BY WHICH IT IS TAKEN

There are three subheadings: The preparatory ritual; the actual ritual and the concluding ritual

The preparatory ritual

Is explained under another three subheadings: Special going for refuge; accumulating the accumulations and training in the attitude

Special going for refuge

This has another three subheadings which are: Decorating the place, displaying representations, and setting up offering substances; making a request and going for refuge and stating the trainings of having gone for refuge

Decorating the place, displaying representations, and setting up offering substances

This section is concerned with the preparation of the ritual in terms of cleaning and beautifying the place, setting up offerings and holy objects and so forth.

First: Clean an isolated place, smear it with the five cow substances, anoint it with exquisite perfumed water such as sandalwood water, and scatter fragrant flowers.

In Tibetan 'training in the attitude' is *sam-pa jang-wa*. *Sam-pa* means 'mental attitude' and *jang-wa* means 'training and purifying'. So overall, it primarily implies accumulating merit and purifying negativities.

It says here, *first clean an isolated place*. The word 'isolated' in the context of the place connotes a peaceful place free of or distant from the disturbance of external noise and other beings. But what is more significant is isolating our minds from distracting thoughts; this is very important. You then prepare the place as instructed, *smear it with the five cow substances, anoint it with exquisite perfumed water such as sandalwood water, and scatter fragrant flowers*. The *five cow substances* refer to pure substances of milk, butter, yogurt, manure and urine collected under special circumstances from specific brown cows fed only medicinal herbs.

The text then reads:

Set out representations of the Three Jewels, metal statues and so forth, texts and so forth, and images of bodhisattvas – on a throne, a table, or a raised platform. Do the preparatory ritual with as valuable offering items such as canopies and flowers as possible, as well as music, food, and so forth. Arrange a throne for the virtuous friend and also adorn it with flowers.

In essence, we must ensure the place where we conduct the ritual is thoroughly clean, dusted and filled with aromatic scents; all of the offerings are arranged in a beautiful manner, such as the decoration of the master's throne with beautiful flowers. If you have attended the ritual ceremony such as one led by His Holiness the Dalai Lama you would have observed the exquisite preparation of place, offerings and the throne.

Then it says:

You accumulate the accumulation of merit by paying respect to the former masters, the Saṅgha, and giving an offering cake to the elemental spirits.

In receiving the lamrim teaching, when it comes to this section of holding bodhicitta by means of a ritual, as part of accumulating merit, we have a tradition of making offerings to all the Saṅgha, members of the community and so on.

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Edited Version

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