
The Middle Length Lamrim

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Mahayana motivation

Since we are studying Mahayana Buddhism, we must make sure that our motivation for studying is a Mahayana motivation, which is bodhicitta. We can generate bodhicitta through training our mind. Bodhicitta is an altruistic attitude of wanting to benefit others wholeheartedly without any selfish and ulterior motive.

There are two main instructions or methods for generating bodhicitta which are the sevenfold cause and effect which comes from the masters Maitreya, Asanga, Chandrakirti, Kamalashila and others, and exchanging self for others comes from Manjushri, Nagarjuna, Shantideva and others. Originally both methods came from Shakyamuni Buddha and they merged together through Atisha, who received both lineages. We must know that we can generate bodhicitta by relying on these methods.

Method and wisdom to actualise the buddha potential

Why do we need to generate bodhicitta? We must generate bodhicitta because we are all seeking happiness, and the most effective and supreme cause for it is bodhicitta. Happiness arises from a positive and wholesome state of mind and bodhicitta really stands out as the best of all virtuous states of mind. Bodhicitta qualifies a person to be called a bodhisattva. With bodhicitta they then engage in the six perfections.

So, bodhicitta represents the intention or spirit of bodhisattvas, while the six perfections represent the deeds of bodhisattvas. These deeds have two aspects - the wisdom aspect and the method aspect. The ultimate goal of bodhisattvas is buddhahood, or perfect and complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Buddhahood is comprised of two ultimate bodies: rupakaya or form body, resulting from method; and dharmakaya or truth body, resulting from wisdom.

We must understand we can achieve the perfect and complete enlightenment of buddhahood by utilising method and the wisdom. The popular reason to prove that we have the potential to achieve buddhahood is that we have the buddha lineage or buddha nature within us. When we attain the state of buddhahood, this buddha lineage will become a buddha.

The buddha lineage refers to the basic nature of our mind, which is clear and luminous, and is not affected by any stains. For example, the stain of mental afflictions in the mind are adventitious or temporary, which means they can be separated from the mind. When they are separated, the true nature of mind will manifest - that is called the truth body of a buddha. We can actualise it through realising the wisdom of selflessness which is the direct

antidote to the ignorance of selflessness, together with its roots and latency. The truth body refers to the ultimate and perfect quality of the mind which will manifest when it is completely free of the two obscurations - afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations. Wisdom - which is the wisdom of selflessness - results in the truth body of a buddha, and method - which is primarily bodhicitta rooted in love and compassion - results in the form body of a buddha.

Two methods to generate bodhicitta

If we wish to generate bodhicitta then there are two main methods or instructions taught by past great masters; no other methods are mentioned. So, if we wish to generate bodhicitta we must make an effort to learn about these two methods and implement them. If we do this, then even if we are not able to produce bodhicitta in this lifetime, it is guaranteed that the benefit of our effort will ensure a good rebirth in the future, such as in a human life, and surely in that future human life we would be able to produce a genuine and uncontrived bodhicitta mind.

Other than the two main instructions - the sevenfold cause and effect and exchanging self for others - there is no other path, instruction or advice that the Buddha and bodhisattvas left for generating bodhicitta.

We hear a lot about how precious bodhicitta is. The preciousness of bodhicitta is because it is rooted in true love and compassion towards all other sentient beings. Both the methods focus on developing love and compassion to generate bodhicitta. The **method of equalising and exchanging self with others** comes from Shantideva and includes a few essential points of meditation and reflection.

- Thinking how oneself and all other sentient beings are equal in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. We contemplate until we realise this.
- Thinking about the disadvantages of the self-cherishing mind, which one must see, not just from one angle, but from as many angles and ways as possible.
- Thinking about the advantages of the mind of cherishing other beings; again, from as many angles as possible.
- And then once you have done that, meditating on giving and taking, which is to enhance or intensify love and compassion for all other beings. This will result in producing a superior or extraordinary intention of fully taking on the responsibility of benefiting all other sentient beings upon oneself. Although the arousing of this extraordinary attitude is not mentioned in the texts, as part of meditating on this method, it is a very important one.

The **method of the sevenfold cause and effect** starts from recognising all sentient beings as our mother, remembering their kindness, repaying their kindness, lovingness or endearment, compassion, superior intention, and the result which is bodhicitta. In either method, the most important factors to induce bodhicitta are love and compassion for all other sentient beings. Both methods are very effective means to wholeheartedly develop love and compassion for others. Prior to that

however it is imperative that we develop a sense of renunciation, which is a wish to emerge from suffering by thinking about the suffering and the karmic cause and effect of our own samsaric situation.

Recognising all other beings as mother

We must think over and gain some conviction and faith in the existence of lives before and after this life to recognise all sentient beings as our mothers, which is the first instruction of the sevenfold cause and effect.

The way to understand the concept of life before and after is through employing logical reasoning. If we don't believe in life before, then there is no avenue to recognise all others as our mothers as obviously we only have one mother in this life. However, once we establish that we had a past life, we can then rationalise that we had another life before that and another before that. In this way we can infer that we had countless or an infinite number of lives.

We can also infer that we had a countless number of lives born from a mother's womb. As we logically think about the infinity of our past lives, we can get the idea that we must have been born from a womb many, many times and that there are not enough sentient beings to serve all our lives.

Hearing that all other beings have been our mother is very powerful in giving us a completely different mental attitude. If all other sentient beings have been our mother, not just once but countless times in the past, and this includes our current mother, then whatever love and kind support we have received from our current mother, we have received this also from all other sentient beings. This recognition helps us develop our sense of wishing to repay their love, compassion and so forth.

Remembering the kindness of mother

When meditating on 'remembering the kindness', it is easier to focus first on the kindness of our current mother. When we were conceived in her womb, she cared for us with so much love that she would forsake her own life to protect ours. When she gave birth to us, she went through excruciating pain, yet her main concern was for our safety, and when we were born, she was still experiencing pain and her health was weakened, but she forgot all about that and held us with so much joy, as if she had found a wish-fulfilling gem. After that she supported and taught us a lot during our upbringing, and at the end when she died, she would leave all her belongings to us.

So, in the meditation on remembering the kindness, we try to acknowledge our mother's affection, selfless love and supports for us. As an effect of this meditation, we will then naturally see our mother as someone who truly loves and cares about us and who has done a lot for us. In this way we feel a close motherly bond with her and a sense of gratitude.

We then have to think that all other sentient beings are also kind and close to us in the same manner and feel the loving intimacy with them in the same way. We have a strong feeling of intimacy with our current mother, because of her pure love and support for us, and whenever

we think of, hear or see her, we recognise her as being someone very special and close to us.

Through training our mind, we can feel the same way towards all other sentient beings, to the point that any other sentient being that comes to my mind, we would feel that loving intimacy and a deep sense of gratitude. So, when we say 'kindness of mother sentient beings or repayment of their kindness', it is not just lip service, but it is embedded in our mind. When we have this, then we can naturally feel love and compassion towards other beings. So, we can see the potential of this meditation on recognising others as mother and their kindness for generating love and compassion for all other sentient beings.

Love means wishing others to have happiness and compassion means wishing others to be free of suffering. So, having cultivated love and compassion, there is no way that we would think of causing harm to others or would feel anger, lust, jealousy and so on towards other beings.

When we talk about recognising the kindness of other sentient beings - for example, recognising the kindness of our mother or parents - it is not just about benefitting or paying them back. It is also important that we see it as an important factor for bringing more peace and happiness to ourselves. If we think of whether we get more gain or more loss by maintaining a good healthy relationship with our parents, I would say there is more gain, or only gain for us. We must realise that showing respect, acknowledging parents' love and support, and making them happy makes our relationship with them healthy and stronger. By doing that, not only are we pleasing our parents, but we will also find more satisfaction and more joy. On the other hand, bad parental relationships can bring misery to both parents and children.

In short, if we recognise all beings as mothers, which is the first of the sevenfold cause and effect method, then subsequently the next step - remembering their kindness - will arise easily and after that the repayment of their kindness and the rest will arise easily.

The seven are causes and effects. In a way what we are trying to achieve here, such as remembering the kindness of mother or parents and repaying their kindness, is not just a spiritual practice but also accords well with worldly culture and social norms. In the world, generally speaking, people who don't acknowledge, appreciate or who are disrespectful, especially to others from whom they've received help and support, are called ungrateful and bad mannered.

Loving kindness and compassion

The fourth cause to generate bodhicitta is cultivating loving kindness which here is more in the sense of lovingness, fondness or endearment - a sort of attraction towards all mother sentient beings. In the context of the sevenfold cause and effect method, this loving kindness, or sense of endearment, is considered a prerequisite cause for generating great compassion. However, normally it is not necessary to cultivate loving kindness prior to

cultivating great compassion. After this, we meditate on great compassion.

Compassion refers to an intention or wish to free others from suffering. The full development of love and great compassion will culminate in the next cause arising which is a superior or extraordinary intention of taking upon oneself complete responsibility for placing all mother sentient beings into the state of happiness and freeing them from suffering.

Superior intention & bodhicitta

The cultivation of this extraordinary sense of responsibility will naturally lead us to consider how we can possibly achieve it. We will realise that to fulfill our aspiration to benefit all beings we must ourselves achieve complete enlightenment or buddhahood. There is no other way to free all sentient beings and place them into lasting happiness. Achieving the state of liberation of a sravaka or pratyekabuddha or becoming a superior or arya bodhisattva is not enough. Only achieving the fully awakened state of a buddha has the capacity to fulfil our aspiration to benefit all sentient beings.

So, we must cultivate an aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. This is technically bodhicitta, but when we first generate it, it is artificial or contrived in the sense that it arises or is conditioned upon our effort in transforming our mental attitude and engaging in meditation.

Bodhicitta is an aspiration to achieve buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings. As we meditate to acquaint ourselves to this contrived bodhicitta, it will increase further and then will arise with less and minimum effort. When it arises spontaneously, naturally, or effortlessly - for example, in relation to any sentient being that we see or come across - the bodhicitta becomes uncontrived. That's an actual or genuine bodhicitta which qualifies the person to be called a bodhisattva and to enter the Mahayana path of accumulation.

In summary, there are two methods or instructions to generate bodhicitta. Initially, whichever of the two we apply, we must follow each stage. For example, if we are following the sevenfold cause and effect method then we must meditate on each step, one by one, beginning with recognising all beings as our mother, and then remembering their kindness, repaying their kindness, loving kindness and compassion and the extraordinary attitude, and then, we generate bodhicitta, which is the effect.

The initial moments of bodhicitta depends upon our effort in cultivating each step of the instruction through our meditation practice. So, the bodhicitta we generate is a contrived one. However, if we train ourselves and meditate on this, repeatedly, then the bodhicitta will arise easier, faster, with minimum effort and eventually, as I said before, it will arise spontaneously and effortlessly. That is the actual bodhicitta, which is uncontrived, and which arises naturally with respect to all sentient beings.

We must meditate on these instructions to generate bodhicitta because they include the actual causes to achieve complete enlightenment.

For example, through these instructions we can develop love, compassion, and superior intention and then bodhicitta. The actualisation of all these inner qualities brings us closer to the state of buddhahood.

Hence, engaging in this meditation is a true Dharma practice because it serves as a cause to achieve buddhahood, develop faith in the Dharma, guru devotion, taking refuge in Three Jewels and brings true benefits to us. In fact, in Lama Tsongkhapa's *Great Stages of the Path* we can find the criteria to determine whether the practice is a Dharma practice or not. We need to know that in order to ensure that what we practise is a Dharma practice.

We will leave it here. Please could some of you bring the tea. Thank you.

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Edited Version*

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