
The Middle Length Lamrim

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Motivation

It would be wonderful if you could generate uncontrived bodhicitta, an aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings, effortlessly and spontaneously. But if you cannot generate an uncontrived bodhicitta, at least try to generate a contrived bodhicitta based on your own effort and understanding of bodhicitta. As you have heard about bodhicitta many times now, it is worthwhile to simply assume that it is arising in your mind when you recall your understanding of it. In this way, you ensure that you are generating bodhicitta as your motivation for listening to the teaching, or for any spiritual practice you undertake.

Two methods for generating bodhicitta

There are two main methods or instructions which show how to generate bodhicitta in a systematic way. The first one is called the *sevenfold cause and effect* - recognising all sentient beings as our mother, remembering their kindness, repaying their kindness, generating love - in the sense of endearment or loving-kindness - then compassion, and following that, generating a superior intention whereby we wholeheartedly and single-handedly assume responsibility for fulfilling the welfare of all sentient beings.

We realise, however, that right now we don't have the capacity to benefit all sentient beings. Even the arhats of the hearers and solitary realisers and the bodhisattvas on the high spiritual grounds don't have the capacity to benefit all sentient beings; only the fully awakened ones or buddhas have the capacity to benefit all sentient beings perfectly.

So, after generating the superior intention, we generate an aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. It is only when this arises effortlessly and spontaneously that it becomes bodhicitta.

The first six stages are the causes, and the seventh stage - bodhicitta - is the result of the sevenfold cause and effect.

The second instruction to generate bodhicitta is called *equalizing and exchanging self and others*. With this method we meditate on the equality of self and others, the disadvantages of self-cherishing, the advantages of cherishing others and the actual thought of exchanging self with others. And then we meditate on giving and taking to enhance love and compassion. After this, we generate the superior or special intention, which serves as an immediate cause to generate bodhicitta.

Differences between Mahayana and Hinayana

We all have a seed of bodhicitta, but it is not enough to simply have it; we must nurture it so that it ripens into

bodhicitta by applying the above two important methods. It is said that it is beneficial even just to wish for bodhicitta to arise, by thinking 'how wonderful if this precious mind were to arise in me'. Any effort we put into generating bodhicitta will cause the seed of bodhicitta to ripen within us.

We consider ourselves Mahayanists or followers of the Great Vehicle and we must understand that bodhicitta is the main criterion which defines a person as a Mahayanist. The word Mahayana in Tibetan is *tekpa chenpo*. *Tekpa* can mean 'carrying' and *chenpo* means 'great'. So, a Mahayanist is one who carries a great burden.

In the context of the term 'Mahayanist', the 'great' signifies the greatness of the Mahayana path in two ways. The greatness is in terms of the goal to be achieved, which is unsurpassed, perfect and complete enlightenment, whereas the goal of the Lesser Vehicle is to achieve the state of liberation from samsara or the cessation of afflictive obstructions.

The greatness is also in terms of for whose purpose we follow the path. As a Mahayanist we wish to benefit all sentient beings, whose numbers are infinite. Whereas the purpose of the Lesser Vehicle followers is only for themselves to achieve liberation from samsara. However, we must never think that the Lesser Vehicle is an inferior path. It is called a lesser path in comparison with the Great Vehicle path. Nevertheless, the followers of the Great Vehicle must progress by first training in all the common practices of the Lesser Vehicle.

Framework of Mahayana - basis, path and fruit

To achieve complete enlightenment, we must accumulate an immeasurable amount of merit, and this becomes possible only through cultivating bodhicitta. Hence, bodhicitta is very precious as a cause to achieve complete enlightenment and is the most important preliminary Mahayana practice. We must make every effort to understand bodhicitta and then cultivate it. The generation of actual bodhicitta gathers enormous merit but even just faking the arising of it in our mind, based on our limited understanding, gathers enormous merit.

Bodhicitta is an aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all other sentient beings. With bodhicitta it is not sufficient simply to wish to benefit other beings, we must also engage in the actual deeds of benefitting others - the six paramitas or perfections: the perfection of giving, moral ethics, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom.

Although we have not yet achieved the perfection of giving, morality and so forth, we can achieve them, and we have the capacity and opportunity to engage in each one. We know we can engage in the practice of giving and the others, but to make it the practice of the perfection of giving and so forth, we must incorporate bodhicitta in our intention to engage in the practice, with the wisdom of emptiness during the action, and at the end we dedicate the merit towards benefiting others. So, we ensure that our intention or motivation is to wholeheartedly fulfill the temporary and ultimate purposes of other beings.

Whatever Dharma practice we do, such as listening to the teachings, if it is infused with the motivation of bodhicitta it will become a Mahayana Dharma, otherwise not.

In the Mahayana framework, bodhicitta is the basis, the six perfections are the actual path, and the two bodies of a Buddha - the truth body and the form body or dharmakaya and rupakaya - are the result. The truth body characterises the fulfilment of the ultimate purpose for oneself, whilst the form body characterises the fulfilment of the ultimate purpose for other beings.

Bodhicitta constitutes the two aspirations to achieve the purposes for oneself and others. In generating bodhicitta we generate an aspiration to achieve the purpose of others through cultivating loving-kindness and compassion, and then an aspiration to achieve the purpose of oneself. However, at the result time, we achieve our ultimate purpose of buddhahood first, before achieving the ultimate purpose of other beings - which is placing them in the state of buddhahood.

In any case, bodhicitta is indispensable even just to begin the Mahayana path, as well as for making continuous progress along the path to the state of buddhahood. It is also crucial to engage in the six perfections, which are significant causes to reaching buddhahood.

Of course, to be able to fully benefit all sentient beings and attain complete enlightenment we must attain the six perfections. Not only that, even to meet all the favourable causes and conditions and make our journey on the path to enlightenment successful, we must engage in the six perfections. For example, the practice of giving ensures that we have all the necessary things we need for our life and to facilitate our practice. It is obvious that we are dependent on essential things to live our lives, let alone to practise the Dharma, hence, we must engage in giving to overcome poverty or material problems in the future which could impede our practice.

It is because of their practice of giving that the bodhisattvas can devote aeons to accumulating merit and wisdom to achieve complete enlightenment without facing the hardship of lacking good conditions to support their Dharma practice.

To make progress on the path we must continuously secure an excellent form of life such as a perfect human life. The main cause for this is the practice of moral ethics. Hence, we must practise the perfection of moral ethics.

On the path we should have enough patience and courage to get over any hurdles so that we don't fall off the path. Therefore, we must practice the perfection of patience.

There are three types of patience: taking on suffering, non-retaliation or not being concerned about receiving harm, and thinking only of the Dharma. Patience gives us tolerance and resilience in the face of difficulty or hardship, including receiving harm from others, so that nothing impedes our practice of Dharma.

The practice of joyful effort that delights with enthusiasm in virtue will ensure the successful completion of the path to reach its ultimate goal. If we lack joyful effort, then we

either don't commence the practice or we commence it but don't complete it to achieve the goal.

Finally, the last two perfections of concentration and wisdom are for directly counteracting afflictive and cognitive obstructions. Concentration and wisdom will ensure that our practice is not weakened and corrupted by distracting thoughts and mental afflictions.

In the context of the resultant state of buddhahood, as mentioned earlier, the Buddha's form body (rupakaya) is called the form body for the sake of others or for directly benefitting others, whereas the truth body (dharmakaya) is for one's own sake, in the sense of indicating the realisation of one's ultimate goal. This means that the first three perfections are the primary cause of the form body, characterizing the purpose of other beings, and the last two perfections of concentration and wisdom are the primary cause of the truth body, characterizing one's own purpose. And the perfection of joyful effort is the common cause of both the form and truth body.

We have the capacity to engage in the practice of each one of the six perfections. We can practice giving, varying what and to whom we give. So, we can engage in the morality practice, joyful effort and so forth according to our own capacity. We are practising joyful effort when we take pleasure in doing virtue ourselves, or when we admire others doing it. Even feeling good about having a positive thought is joyful effort.

It is however very important, especially if we engage in the Mahayana path, that our motivation is to benefit other beings and is not related to any self-serving purposes. For example, when we practice giving, we must ensure our motivation is not for increasing our own wealth or receiving something back.

Someone said to me that giving was good because his wealth has been increasing ever since he started giving. We shouldn't have any expectation to receive any reward from our practice of giving. It should be unconditional. Likewise, all our practices should be based wholeheartedly on an intention to benefit others. This is how all the buddhas practised when they were on the bodhisattva path. If we follow the same path, emulating the practices of the buddhas, then just like them we too will attain complete enlightenment.

Three Refuge Objects

As part of our practice, we take refuge in the Three Jewels because they provide us with protection. How do the three objects of refuge protect us? The refuge object Buddha provides protection because the Buddha taught the Dharma, such as creating virtuous actions. And if we follow the Buddha's teaching in thought and deed, we receive protection from going in the wrong direction. Although we receive the teachings directly from our gurus, the teachings originally derived from the Buddha. So, we can understand how the Buddha is our refuge object.

The refuge object sangha provides us protection or support in the sense of being a good friend or practice model for us. Relating to the refuge object Dharma, it is

said that it refers to the inner realizations and quality of the truth of cessation within the continuum of an arya or superior being. If that is the case, it refers to the attainment of another person, as we have not yet attained that quality. So, the question is, how can it serve as an object of refuge or protection for us? Practically, the refuge object refers to the Dharma as a quality which we cultivate within us through applying the Dharma in practice. This is how the Dharma serves as a refuge object or protection for us.

In fact, of the three objects of refuge, the Dharma is the actual or direct refuge object for us. What directly protects us from trouble and unhappiness is the Dharma we cultivate within us through our practice. For example, our practice of moral ethics where we refrain from the ten non-virtuous actions saves us from falling into lower rebirths.

Emulating bodhisattva deeds

Essentially our Dharma practice is simply to understand the deeds of bodhisattvas and emulate them. By doing that we will get closer and closer to complete enlightenment which is our ultimate goal. To reach there we must make our life meaningful by engaging in Dharma practice.

Be aware that we have the full potential to realize all our temporary and ultimate goals with this good human life we have now found, together with all other external conditions which are conducive to achieving our temporary and ultimate goals. There is no point in just having a good form of life and good surrounding conditions; we must make the best use of them by engaging in Dharma practice and ensuring that we enjoy them again in future lives, life after life, or until we achieve complete enlightenment.

Realising that we did not find the current favourable situation such as a good human life and good living conditions by chance, but as the result of causes created in the past, it must occur to us that we have to create the same causes for the sake of our future.

As stated before, the main cause to find a good rebirth is the practice of morality, and to have good living conditions, the main cause is the practice of giving. Everything we have and we are comes from causes. Therefore, we must realise that if we wish to find a good rebirth and enjoy good living conditions in the future, we must create the causes by engaging in the six perfections, infused with bodhicitta. In this way we can find a precious human life which is not too impoverished.

In fact, as far as our life situation goes, we are so fortunate, not only to have been born as a human being with a sound mind and body, but also to be born in a good country surrounded by suitable material conditions and friends etc. However, despite this, we tend to view our life situation negatively and that makes us feel unhappy. So, it is important that we recognise the positive aspects of our lives and as much as possible, try to content ourselves with what we have, that it is enough. We should say to ourselves that whatever wealth we have is enough and the friends we have are wonderful people. We should think how fortunate we are to have what we have. And then we can think of creating the causes to have similar conditions

in the future life, such as a good human rebirth, good friends and favourable living conditions etc.

When we leave this current life there are only two destinations, either we go to an unhappy realm or a happy realm. Of course, nobody wants to go to an unhappy realm. Everyone wants to go to a happy realm. If we go to an unhappy realm, it means we have taken rebirth as a hell being, a preta (hungry ghost), or as an animal. Never mind the level of suffering experienced in the hell realm and the preta realm, which are not visible to us, but even the suffering of the animal realm is too much for us to take.

Given the choice, we would definitely want to be born in the happy realm as a human being or as a celestial or godly being. Therefore, to find a good rebirth and to make it conducive in terms of the supporting factors for our livelihood and for practising the Dharma, we must engage in the practice of the six perfections. Engaging in the perfection of morality practice, for example refraining from the ten non-virtuous actions, is a cause to secure an excellent rebirth. The perfection of giving is a cause to have good living conditions or to avoid poverty. The perfection of patience arms us against any hardship or obstacle we may face or any harm we receive from others. And the perfection of joyful effort is a cause to successfully complete whatever activities we undertake.

The last two perfections of concentration and wisdom are very important because concentration counteracts mental distractions and enhances focus in one's mind, while wisdom counteracts ignorance and enhances a sense of discrimination of knowing what is right and what is wrong.

Cultivate, preserve and increase virtue

When we talk about engaging in the practice of virtue, we are talking about integrating three important steps: engaging in virtue; preserving virtue; and increasing virtue.

First, we must engage in virtue, but as we engage in virtue and cultivate it, we must then preserve or safeguard it from being lost, otherwise we won't be able to increase it, and we must keep increasing it until we achieve the fully awakened state of Buddhahood. All these three are essential - engaging in virtue to cultivate it, and then whatever virtue we have cultivated we preserve it and do not let it disintegrate. Not only that, but we must also then further increase it. Integrating these three factors in the way we engage in the practice moves us closer and closer to complete enlightenment.

Self-responsibility and meditation

We are all responsible for our own physical and mental wellbeing. Our happiness - whether on a mental or physical level - depends on us and is in our own hands. From this perspective, we can say that it is easier to manage our mental happiness because it primarily depends on us, and more specifically on our way of thinking. Whereas our physical wellbeing depends much more on external factors over which we sometimes have no control. For example, when we are sick and experiencing pain in our body, we have to find a good

doctor to diagnose our health problem and rely on medicines, and of course we need money to pay the medical bills etc. Engaging in meditation may help a bit but it is not going to cure our physical sickness and stop the pain.

Nevertheless, meditation and Dharma practice, which is essentially about knowing and subduing our mind, can certainly work in remedying any problems and unhappiness we have on a mental and emotional level. It is not that complicated to understand Dharma practice, and how to meditate, as it is all related to disciplining our mind.

To develop an interest in meditation, first we must recognize the benefit of meditation practice and its effectiveness in terms of overcoming all unwanted thoughts and emotions such as dissatisfaction, stress, anxiety, tension, fears, worries, depression etc., and enhancing true peace and happiness in our mind. I can share the testimony of many people who said to me how meditation helped them find a new meaning in their lives, with more peace and joy, which they had not experienced throughout their whole life.

How to meditate

When we meditate, we are placing our mind on the meditative object, which is a virtuous object, and which enhances inner peace and serenity. Because our mind cannot be on two objects at the same time, when we are meditating on a virtuous object our mind turns away from all other objects, particularly those that stimulate mental agitation and bring disturbance to our mind.

When meditating, it is important to maintain our mental attention on the meditation object. Hence, meditation is a form of training and controlling the mind from being overpowered by disturbing thoughts and afflictive emotions.

Lama Tsongkhapa said that we are controlled by our mind which in turn is controlled by afflictive emotions, and due to the faults of the afflictive emotions we are inflicted with suffering. However, when we meditate, we focus the mind on the virtuous object and through it our mind is under our control, rather than under the control of the mental afflictions and distracting thoughts.

It is important that when we meditate, we maintain the focus on the meditative object, regardless of the duration, even if we can only maintain focus for two or five minutes. If we maintain focus, then our meditation has the effect of easing and resting our mind from disturbing and troubling thoughts and emotions and gives us an experience of peace and joy within ourselves. We will then be more motivated to engage in meditation practice again because we know it is working and is beneficial.

Without maintaining focus, no matter how long we sit in a meditative posture we won't be able to calm and subdue our mind. We will then see no benefit in doing the meditation and will lose interest and enthusiasm, to the point where next time we might even begin to hate the meditation cushion. If we meditate consistently and

repeatedly, we will get used to it and develop more faith in it as we reap more benefits from our practice.

The best time to meditate is in the morning before we have our cup of tea. The practice itself can be as simple as simply emptying our mind of all thoughts concerning the past, the present and the future, and just remain in that state of voidness or emptiness. You will find it very effective tapping into inner peace and tranquillity.

Some practical advice

As part of our Dharma practice, we must always be mindful of our own thoughts and deeds and make a concerted effort to ensure our thoughts and deeds are wholesome. Habituating with such a mindful practice will bring practical benefits in terms of maximising happiness. With mindfulness we try to cultivate harmony in our relationship with others, whether at work or at home. This is a very important factor for the stability and happiness of our life.

Harmony brings about support, joy, and peace of mind. Therefore, we should always be vigilant of our mental and physical actions to ensure they don't cause damage to our harmonious and good relationship with others. Be kind, compassionate, understanding, and respectful to others. If we train enough, it is possible for us to feel love and compassion towards all other beings naturally and spontaneously, just as parents would feel towards their beloved children. If we train our mind, we can cultivate unconditional love and compassion, not only to those people who are close to us, but also to all other sentient beings.

Cultivating love and compassion for other sentient beings will truly bring peace, happiness and satisfaction for ourselves, as well as benefitting them. But to sustain love and compassion we need enough patience for other beings and to face any adversary. Otherwise, as soon as, for example, we receive harm from others, particularly someone close to us and to whom we try to be nice and helpful, we would lose our temper and love and compassion. So, cultivating patience is a good supporting cause to maintain love and compassion for other beings.

We can see that even a pet, like a dog, knows how to reciprocate with appreciation and joy to its caring owner. When they do that, this brings joy to the mind of the owner. So, when we show love to other people, it fosters a close relationship with them, and they will be appreciative and come closer to us. Showing love and compassion to others means expressing our care and concern for their wellbeing, wishing them happiness. This means that we are wishing them what they all want, which is happiness; even the highly evolved bodhisattvas on the tenth ground wish for happiness.

Thinking about the causes and conditions for reducing suffering and increasing happiness, the internal causes are more important than the external ones. We need to remind ourselves of this because we usually tend to consider only the external causes and circumstances for finding happiness and avoiding suffering. There are external causes, but the internal causes - in respect of our mental outlook - are more overwhelming and decisive causes of

happiness and suffering that usually impact our lives. Therefore, we must put more effort into recognising and dealing with the internal causes instead of the external causes.

For example, the happiness that we always seek cannot be found externally; no matter how far we succeed externally we can't achieve it. Likewise, no matter how many external causes of suffering we remove, we will never be able to get rid of the suffering that we are trying to avoid. However, if we direct our attention to our mind and gather all the causes of happiness within and get rid of all the causes of suffering within, we can definitely achieve the happiness we seek and get rid of the suffering we want to get rid of. In this way, we should try to recognize the benefits of integrating meditation into our lives.

We must understand that it is possible to transform or subdue our mind because our mind is very flexible and not static. It can be trained. The unwholesome, destructive, negative mental habits or ways of thinking can be eliminated.

If we train our mind to become habituated to loving-kindness and compassion, it will become habituated accordingly. But if we let our mind habituate with attachment, it will get habituated with attachment and will go after it easily. Likewise, if we let it become habituated with anger, then it will get habituated with anger and be easily influenced by it or go after it.

But we want our mind to be habituated towards loving-kindness and compassion, so we need to meditate on love and compassion. To meditate means *gom* in Tibetan, which means 'to become familiar with or habituated with'. When we meditate on love and compassion, what it also means is that we are trying to make our own mind arise in the aspect of loving-kindness and compassion itself. It is different from meditating on impermanence and emptiness, where we take impermanence and emptiness as objects of our mind to contemplate, to think over. The effect of the meditation is the same, that is it gets our mind habituated with what we are meditating on. And as our mind becomes habituated, it more easily arises in our mind.

Geshe-la thanks everyone for paying good attention to the teaching.

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Edited Version*

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