

---

# The Middle Length Lamrim

༄༅། །ལམ་རིམ་འབྲིང་། །བྱང་སེམས་སྤྱོད་བའི་རིམ་པ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

25 June 2024

---

## Bodhicitta motivation

As usual, it is good to generate a bodhicitta motivation, by which we aspire to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

## The difference between the yanas or vehicles

Bodhicitta is the spirit of Mahayana or the Great Vehicle. How can we distinguish the Great Vehicle from the Lesser Vehicle or Hinayana? The term 'vehicle' or 'yana' in Tibetan is called *thekpa*, meaning to be able to carry, lift or bear. So, the bodhicitta mind explains the practice that one follows as being the Great Vehicle distinguishing it from the Lesser Vehicle from the point of view of what goal we aspire to achieve and for whose purpose.

Both these unique features of the Great Vehicle are reflected in the meaning of bodhicitta which is an aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment or buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings. The goal of the Great Vehicle is buddhahood, a fully awakened state free of all faults and endowed with all excellent qualities. The purpose of the Great Vehicle is to benefit all sentient beings.

On the other hand, when we talk about the Lesser Vehicle, for example, the sravakas or Hearer Vehicle, in comparison with the Great Vehicle, it is called a lesser vehicle because the goal is just liberation from cyclic existence, and the purpose for which we achieve it is merely for oneself.

Besides the two vehicles, there are various Buddhist schools of tenets. The basis for differentiating the schools of tenets is their different philosophical views, while the basis for differentiating the vehicles is their conduct. For example, in the Great Vehicle, the main conduct involves engaging in the six perfections, whereas in the Lesser Vehicle, it primarily involves the threefold trainings.

Within Mahayana, we have Sutrayana and Tantrayana, which are differentiated primarily based on the conduct or method each vehicle employs, not their views. Thus, the yanas or vehicles are differentiated based on conduct, and the schools of tenets are differentiated based on views.

The Great Vehicle is called great because its purpose is to benefit all sentient beings, and the goal we aim to achieve is the highest enlightenment. In contrast, the purpose of the Lesser Vehicle is primarily for one's own sake, with the goal being self-liberation. While we may consider ourselves followers of the Great Vehicle, in terms of our practical position on the spiritual path, we are still far from even entering the first path of the Lesser Vehicle. There are followers of the Lesser Vehicle who have

completed all their paths and attained liberation. These realised beings of the Lesser Vehicle are highly accomplished noble beings, honoured for their profound inner realisation.

The differences between one school of tenets and another are based on each school's views of things. In contrast, the main criteria for differentiating the vehicles, such as the Great Vehicle or Lesser Vehicle, or within the Great Vehicle, between Sutra and Tantra, is the conduct or the method offered in the vehicle. Therefore, we can have an example of someone who, by tenet, is a follower of a Lesser School of tenets but, by vehicle, is a follower of the Great Vehicle by being on the Mahayana first path of accumulation.

## All beings can attain buddhahood

With the bodhicitta mind, we aspire to achieve buddhahood or complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. The state of buddhahood we aspire to achieve refers to the state of buddhahood to be achieved by us in the future. If it is a position or a status, we are the only ones who can occupy it. It does not refer to the state of buddhahood as achieved by other buddhas, such as Shakyamuni Buddha and Maitreya Buddha.

Hence, when we say all beings have buddha nature, the buddha lineage or buddha potential, we are saying they have the potential to achieve their own future state of buddhahood. From this perspective, we can become a buddha ourselves in the future, for example we can ourselves become Manjushri.

Here, we find that every sentient being has buddha nature and can become a buddha. If all beings can become buddhas, then just as there are countless sentient beings, there can be countless buddhas. This sheds some light on the fact that Buddhism is polytheistic as opposed to monotheistic. Christianity is monotheistic because it believes in one Almighty God, although I have heard that the Lord Jesus said somewhere in the Bible that "you too can become like 'me.'"

Anyway, if we say everything is the creation of the Almighty God, despite its practical usefulness, the concept opens up too many unanswered questions and is logically untenable. On the other hand, the Buddhist view that all sentient beings have buddha nature and can attain buddhahood is viable through unlimited reasoning and logic.

## The path to buddhahood

So, the question is how can we achieve the state of buddhahood or the state of the omniscient mind of a buddha? The state of buddhahood is actualised through fully developing our mind. We first must generate bodhicitta which is an aspiration to achieve buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings. Infusing our mind with bodhicitta, we must engage in the six perfections to achieve buddhahood. But to generate bodhicitta and engage in the practice of the six perfections, we must first gain an understanding of them through learning. Prior to generating bodhicitta, we need to learn about and develop renunciation. Simply generating bodhicitta is not

---

---

sufficient to achieve buddhahood, as we must also engage in the practice of the six perfections.

### **Taking refuge and generating bodhicitta**

It is said that bodhicitta is the door to Mahayana, or the Great Vehicle. This means that whether someone is a Mahayanist or not depends on whether they have bodhicitta. Upon generating bodhicitta, you become a Mahayanist and a bodhisattva.

However, some texts mention that there can be a bodhisattva without bodhicitta in their continuum. This refers to those who are very close to becoming a bodhisattva, having progressed through training to generate bodhicitta, such as through the sevenfold cause and effect method, and having reached the sixth cause of generating superior intention, followed by generating an aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

When you generate this aspiration after the superior intention, the only factor left for you to become a true bodhisattva is to further habituate yourself with this aspiration until it becomes bodhicitta—that is, when it arises effortlessly or spontaneously.

Bodhicitta distinguishes the path we follow from the lesser path, while taking refuge in the Three Jewels distinguishes it from the wrong path. That's why at the beginning of practice, we take refuge to ensure we are on the right path. Following that, we generate bodhicitta to ensure the path we follow is the great path.

It's important to understand why and how we engage in practices such as taking refuge and generating bodhicitta. The sole purpose of Dharma practice is to achieve buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings. When we take refuge by saying, "I go for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha," we think of the Buddha as the perfect teacher, the Dharma as the Buddha's teachings or the truth of the path and the truth of cessation that we must actualise, and the Sangha as our fellow Dharma friends whom we should emulate and who support us. The Dharma Jewel also refers to the Buddha's teachings, such as the discourse on the Four Noble Truths, which we must apply in practice.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama often expresses his hope to attain the state of cessation, which is constituted of the truths of cessation and the path. He also mentions that he meditates on bodhicitta and emptiness every day. We must understand that His Holiness is undoubtedly a fully awakened being, but he shares his practices and experiences to lead and inspire us on the path to enlightenment. Therefore, we must practice the Four Noble Truths, generate bodhicitta, and meditate on emptiness to achieve complete enlightenment.

If we strive hard in this endeavour, without allowing laziness to discourage us, we can achieve enlightenment. We can generate an uncontrived and genuine bodhicitta, even if it seems difficult given our current state of mind, which may feel wild, vulgar, and agitated. However, we can begin by generating an artificial or contrived

bodhicitta, which is within our reach and can benefit us tremendously.

For the sake of our practice, it's essential to have a good understanding, so we need to put effort into understanding the Dharma. For example, we can cultivate bodhicitta through the sevenfold cause and effect instruction. The seven steps are recognising all sentient beings as our mothers, remembering their kindness, repaying that kindness, developing a sense of endearment or loving attitude, cultivating great compassion, generating superior or special intention, and ultimately achieving bodhicitta.

### **Sevenfold cause and effect instruction**

Following the sevenfold cause and effect instruction, when we generate loving-kindness and compassion, the love we generate brings about a strong desire to bring happiness to others, while the compassion we generate fosters a strong wish for others to be free from suffering. When thoughts of wishing others happiness and freedom from suffering arise strongly, we then contemplate how to act on these wishes. This leads to the generation of a superior intention, where not only do we wish for others' happiness and freedom from suffering, but we also take complete responsibility for achieving that ourselves.

With the superior or special intention, we not only have an intense desire but also a strong sense of responsibility to alleviate all beings from suffering and bring them happiness. However, having a strong sense of responsibility is insufficient; we must also consider how to fulfil it. We may realise that we lack the capacity or qualifications to do so, whereas a fully awakened being or Buddha possesses all the power and qualities necessary to free all sentient beings from suffering and lead them to happiness.

Consequently, we generate an aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. This aspiration is a bodhicitta that initially arises through our efforts, which is why it is called contrived bodhicitta. After further habituation, it will arise effortlessly or spontaneously and become uncontrived bodhicitta, the actual bodhicitta.

### **Immeasurable equanimity**

Before engaging in the sevenfold cause and effect instruction or as preparation to generate bodhicitta, we must cultivate a state of equanimity by overcoming all sense of discrimination that holds some beings close and others distant with attachment and hatred. We can do this by observing our current mental attitudes toward others. We will notice that we categorise other beings into three groups: friends, whom we feel close to and attached to; enemies, whom we feel distant from and have hatred toward; and strangers, whom we feel indifferent about.

We must engage in meditation on immeasurable equanimity to overcome this biased attitude and develop a completely even attitude toward all beings. Here, immeasurable equanimity refers to the state of equanimity in our own mental attitude, which serves as a

---

prerequisite for engaging in the meditation to generate bodhicitta, such as the sevenfold cause and effect instruction. In contrast, the immeasurable equanimity in the context of the four immeasurables refers to the state of equanimity within the continuum of other beings, such as wishing and praying for others to have equanimity so that their minds are not disturbed by attachment and hatred.

Prior to meditating on the sevenfold cause and effect instruction, we meditate on immeasurable equanimity. We imagine all other sentient beings in three groups: the friends to whom we feel close and attached, the enemies from whom we feel distant and harbour hatred, and the strangers toward whom we feel neither closeness nor distance, often resulting in carelessness. We generate attachment toward friends, hatred or animosity toward enemies, and indifference or neutrality toward strangers.

We then ask ourselves why we have such different attitudes toward others. The reasons are obvious. We consider some individuals as friends or close to us and become attached to them because we remember them as being friendly, related to us, or doing favours for us. We view some others as enemies and hate them because we remember them as being unpleasant and nasty. We see some individuals as strangers and share no feelings of love or hatred because we don't remember having any form of relationship with them. Thus, whether we consider others as friends or enemies is based on our recollections of them in the present moment or as far back as our memory goes.

However, if we take into account our relationships with others in all our past lives, it will become evident and logically clear that all beings share the same relationship with us. If one being is our friend, then all other beings have equally been our friends. If one being is our enemy or is a stranger, then all other beings have also been our enemy or a stranger. Hence, those whom we currently consider friends were our enemies in the past who harmed us or acted undesirably toward us, while those we perceive as enemies now were our friends who benefited us countless times in the past. Similarly, those we see as strangers were also our friends and enemies in the past.

From this broader perspective of time, there is no valid basis for us to like some and dislike others, or to ignore some, as all beings are the same to us; there is no reason to feel close, distant, attached, or hateful. In this way, we eliminate all our biased mental attitudes and cultivate a state of equanimity.

If you want to know what to practice and meditate on, there is no more profound practice than meditating on equanimity and the sevenfold cause and effect instruction.

### **Summary**

In tonight's discussion we focussed on generating bodhicitta mind with which our primary goal is to benefit all other sentient beings and attain complete enlightenment. What should we do to keep ourselves engaged in activities that lead to achieving complete

enlightenment and benefitting other beings? The most important cause is generating a strong force of love and compassion towards all other beings.

If our mind is filled with strong love and compassion, we would have a powerful urge and passion to reach complete enlightenment, and this would leave us with the feeling that there is so very little time to practice the Dharma.

We should have the same sense of responsibility and urgency as the man in the story that went in search of food for his family. According to the story, there was once a famine. The man found a piece of meat, which he ate himself, instead of feeding it to his family. He did this so that he could continue to search for food for his family. Just as this man felt great pressure and an urgency to find food to rescue his family from famine, we should engage in our practice with the same passion to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

Each morning, we should generate bodhicitta and remind ourselves to use all our time to benefit other beings and to never cause them any harm. It is essential to remind ourselves and repeatedly affirm this intention.

*Transcript prepared by Chelsea Shi  
Edit 1 by Llysse Velez  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute