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# The Middle Length Lamrim

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## Bodhicitta

Please try to generate the bodhicitta motivation, which is not completely foreign to us as we already have some understanding of it. Therefore, what we need to do is to infuse whatever activity we undertake with this bodhicitta mind. By doing this it will make that activity very beneficial. Essentially bodhicitta is an altruistic mental attitude rooted in love and compassion. Love means to sincerely wish others to have happiness and joy whereas compassion means sincerely wishing others to be free of suffering and unhappiness.

## Love and compassion

Cultivating genuine love and compassion within us will bring us tremendous joy and peace. Not only that, when we see any other beings experiencing joy and happiness, we will become happy as well. Whereas if we lack love and compassion towards others, then instead of happiness, we will feel jealous or competitive. As a result, we will get tense, unhappy and feel disturbed.

We must feel love and compassion from the bottom of our heart. Simply closing our eyes and praying 'may all sentient beings have happiness and be free from suffering', does not necessarily mean we show love and compassion towards others. We can do that, but when we open our eyes, we may no longer have that sense of wishing others to have happiness and be free from suffering. This means that our prayers were just empty words.

If we want to know what spiritual practice and meditation we should do, we will find that the most beneficial one, something that will greatly benefit us in bringing peace and happiness, and extending benefit to others is developing love and compassion for other beings. With love and compassion, we will benefit and avoid harming others.

When we see another person who is lacking happiness or inflicted with suffering, whether we will have a thought of wishing them to have happiness or be free from suffering and help them or not is dependent on us feeling love and compassion for them. Right?

For example, usually we are happy to see those who are close to us happy. When they are happy it makes us happy. However, if they are suffering, we naturally feel empathy and sincerely wish them happiness and will do whatever we can to make them happy and alleviate their problems. The simple reason is because we love and care for them.

In a similar way, if we extend love and compassion to all other beings then we will feel the same to them all. By loving and benefitting others we will gain their love and trust, they will become our friends and hence we will receive benefit from them too. So, if you show love to all sentient beings, they will all become your friends which

means you have no enemies at all. Wouldn't that be great? That's true peace.

## Mahayana practice

We all consider ourselves as Mahayana practitioners. This means that the primary focus of our practice is not just to eliminate suffering and achieve happiness for ourselves but to benefit all other sentient beings and release them from their suffering. We must ensure we sincerely put it into practice. Instead of just reciting as a ritual, 'may all sentient beings have happiness and be free from suffering', we have to apply the prayer that we say to instil and arouse love and compassion within us. For example, when we engage in the meditation of 'giving and taking' (in Tibetan *tong-len*), we are not just simply imagining this but feel it in our heart - love with 'giving', and compassion with 'taking' towards all sentient beings.

This whole technique is not simply imagination. To enhance our compassion we focus on the technique of 'taking'. In this meditation we imagine ourselves surrounded by all sentient beings in human form. Focussing on those sentient beings who are lacking happiness, we generate a thought of giving happiness and imagine giving all our goodness to intensify our love, and while focusing on those inflicted with suffering, we generate a thought of freeing them from suffering and imagine taking upon ourselves all their suffering to intensify our compassion. So again, it is not just mere words but we must feel in the depths of our heart the genuine wish for sentient beings to have happiness and be free from suffering and consider what we can do to that effect.

When we think of our life situation, we will know how fortunate we are now. We have a good life with an opportunity to achieve whatever we want to achieve. In terms of spiritual practice, we have an opportunity and resources to engage in meditation practice and progress ourselves through all the stages of the path to fulfil our spiritual aspirations.

Just as we have found a good human life in this life we can also find a good rebirth in our future life, and not only that, we can achieve liberation and even complete enlightenment. As a human being, we are gifted with a very special brain or a human mind with an incredible power of thinking and discernment, as well as all the other advantages that we enjoy as a human being. Since we know we can't have this freedom and special opportunity all the time, we must make sure to get the best out of it or at least not waste it.

So, it is important that we have a set goal and aspiration in our life. As spiritual practitioners, we have to understand that simply making ends meet is too narrow a goal and it doesn't do justice to the meaning of a human life. Even an animal can meet the temporary and immediate needs of life. Therefore, we should do something that not only overcomes our problems and fulfils our needs in this life but also our future lives, for example, obtaining a good future rebirth and not a bad rebirth. To achieve that, we have to accumulate virtues and abandon non virtues. We can do that. But is it enough to obtain a good rebirth in the future?

It is not enough because whatever type of life we take, including a human rebirth, it is in the nature of suffering as long as it is within samsara. By reflecting on the three types of sufferings, particularly the pervasive suffering of

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conditioning, we generate a sense of detachment towards samsara which will culminate in an aspiration to achieve the state of liberation from samsara. So, when this aspiration for liberation evolves to a certain degree of development, it is called renunciation. Driven by renunciation, if we then engage in the threefold training we can achieve nirvana or liberation from samsara. With liberation we achieve the state of everlasting peace and happiness.

We should think this is good - but what about all the other sentient beings? By meditating on love and compassion for all sentient beings, we realise that we must place all others in happiness also and take on the responsibility to liberate them.

There are various meditation techniques which we can apply to firstly developing loving kindness towards all sentient beings and then, based on that, we develop compassion which is really wanting to free and liberate all sentient beings - not only one sentient being - but all sentient beings from suffering. Furthermore, we continue to develop this compassion to the point where we want to take action, to do something to free or to place all other sentient beings into the state of liberation. This is what we call special intention or in Tibetan *lhak.sam*, which arises after the generation of compassion. This special intention fully takes upon oneself the responsibility and commitment to place all other sentient beings into the state of liberation.

Following that, when you think about what you actually need to do to place all sentient beings into the state of liberation, you realise that first you must achieve complete enlightenment. Without that you see that you have no hope or lack the full qualifications to fully benefit all other sentient beings in the sense of leading them to complete enlightenment. The only person who can fully benefit all other sentient beings is a fully awakened being or a buddha. Therefore, this special intention results in generating what we call an aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all other sentient beings. A bodhicitta mind is the full development of this aspiration of enlightenment to the point that it arises spontaneously and effortlessly.

Bodhicitta constitutes two aspirations; an aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment, and an aspiration to achieve the purpose of other sentient beings. Achieving the purpose of other sentient beings means to place them in the ultimate state of happiness of liberation. Of the two aspirations, you generate the aspiration to benefit others prior to the aspiration to achieve enlightenment because you generate it while generating love and compassion.

However, in terms of fulfilling the two aspirations, you fulfil the aspiration to achieve enlightenment first because you achieve enlightenment before all other sentient beings. After having generated bodhicitta, you then engage in the bodhisattva's deeds of the six perfections to achieve complete enlightenment.

We shall now return to the teaching on the *Middling Treatise on the Stages of the Path*.

#### TRAINING IN ABANDONING THE FOUR NON-VIRTUOUS PRACTICES THAT CAUSE IT TO DEGENERATE

##### **An action done out of deceit and shiftiness**

*The fourth is an action done out of deceit and shiftiness but without the extraordinary attitude. Here, the object is any other*

*sentient being. The action done toward them is to act with deceit and shiftiness. Deceit and shiftiness are explained here in terms of deceiving with respect to measures and weights and so forth and like Gyalwa Yechung's actions, for example. In order to send someone off to Rakma, Gyalwa Yechung sent him first just to Tolung so that he would then be willing to go all the way to Rakma.*

Here we find the meaning of these two; deceit and shiftiness. The lamrim reads:

*According to the Compendium of Trainings, deceit is to display qualities that actually do not exist and shiftiness is to take measure for false not to become evident.*

And then we begin the next major heading.

#### TRAINING IN ADOPTING THE FOUR VIRTUOUS PRACTICES THAT DO NOT ALLOW IT TO DEGENERATE

##### **Abandoning lying knowingly**

*The object of the first virtuous practice is all sentient beings. The action is to abandon/eliminate lying to them knowingly even for the sake of one's life or for as little as a joke. If you act in this way, you will be sure not to cheat special objects such as your abbot, master, and so forth through lies.*

##### **Abiding with an extraordinary attitude without deceit or shiftiness**

The object of the second virtuous practice is all sentient beings. The action is to abide with the extraordinary attitude towards them without deceit or shiftiness. This attitude is the antidote to the fourth non-virtuous practice.

Then it continues regarding how there is a need to guard against this.

*Sharawa said that although we have created a little bit of something like virtue, there is no sign of its increase and many signs of its exhaustion. Virtue is exhausted through hatred, disdain, and offense toward bodhisattvas and our companions.*

We finished all of these previously so here it says how in our case there is no sign of virtue increasing but the sign of its exhaustion. We are reminded here that one of the causes of why we are not able to increase virtues is because of holding negative attitudes towards others; instead of admiring others, we look down on them. The text continues:

*Therefore, if we are able to abandon/eliminate offending them/our companions and bodhisattvas, we will no longer experience what is referred to in the Compendium of Trainings as "harm based on persons." Since we do not know in whom bodhicitta is present, we act from the perspective of training in pure appearances, generating the perception of all sentient beings as the Teacher in accordance with the Kasyapa Chapter (Kasyapaparivarta).*

Here the text shows how we can overcome such negative attitudes towards others by making an effort to train our mind with, as it says, *pure appearance*, or a pure perception of others. So, at least try to acknowledge and recognise what excellent qualities, goodness they possess.

We normally have a mental attitude based on a strong sense of pride and ego. We feel and see pride and ego as if it is a positive thing which we must possess for our survival and being able to stand on our own two feet. But in fact, we are wrong and such an egoistic attitude is the main cause of all our problems. We do need courage and determination which is different from pride and ego. With pride and ego, we look down upon others and hence don't see the qualities but only

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the faults in other beings. Therefore, we easily criticise and despise others.

It says here: *Since we do not know in whom bodhicitta is present*, meaning we do not know who is a bodhisattva and who is not. There is a saying that bodhisattvas can be like a fire buried under hot ashes, so criticising other beings is like digging our hand into the hot ashes and harming ourselves. Rather than this, the text encourages us to train ourselves to develop a pure perception of other beings.

### **Generating the perception that bodhisattvas are like the Teacher and praising them**

Then the text continues - the way to express the excellent qualities:

*If there is an audience and an opportunity to express their excellent qualities, do so.*

Here we have to take note when it says *If there is an audience and an opportunity*. This is saying we have to teach the Dharma at the right time, in the sense that if it is not the right time then we should not teach. For example, when the listener lacks interest and lacks faith in the Dharma, there is no point. However, if the listener has strong interest and faith, and if they request for you to teach them, it is saying we should be teaching. Here this is also an indication that in order to teach Dharma properly, we should have some sort of background knowledge of the listener, of the audience, such as their level of understanding, their mental aptitude and so forth.

Then it says, *However, if you do not go to all four directions and proclaim them, this is not a fault*. Here it is advised that rather than criticising others we should admire others, however this doesn't mean that out of our admiration for them, we go to all the ten directions and talk about and proclaim their qualities out loud.

### **Ripening sentient beings**

The text continues:

*The objects of the fourth virtuous practice are the sentient beings who are ripened by you.*

Here the word *ripened* refers to whomever you give the Dharma teaching. Their mental continuum, their inner continuum should be ripened. What this means is that they can easily understand the meaning of your Dharma. For example, when Buddha Shakyamuni taught the Dharma, all the disciples could easily understand him. When the Buddha taught the *Heart Sutra* saying there is no form, no sound and so forth, the listeners perfectly understood what the Buddha meant when he said no form, no sound and so forth. Buddha didn't have to give any further explanation to any teaching that he gave. Therefore, all the Sutras are considered as the oral teachings in the sense that there is no explanatory sutras, because the listeners of sutras always understood these perfectly and the Buddha didn't have to provide further explanations to what he had taught. Since later followers had difficulty understanding the sutras, there are commentaries to the sutras written by the latter masters.

The point here is that whomever you give the Dharma teaching to, that person must be ripened, must have interest and faith in the Dharma and have the ability to understand the Dharma.

The reading continues:

*The action is to cause them to hold to complete enlightenment*

*without wishing for a temporary vehicle. Moreover, while from your side you should cause your disciple to make a connection with it, if that thought does not arise in the disciple, it does not become a fault because you were unable to accomplish it.*

This is referring to the purpose of you giving teachings. The purpose should be to lead them to the long-term goal, not just for the temporary or partial goal. Rather, it should aim to achieve their ultimate, highest and complete goals. When it says here, *it does not become a fault because you were unable to accomplish it*, this just implies that you have shown the full path, the complete path, however if the listener lacks the understanding and failed to understand the full path, then it is not your fault if the listener failed to achieve the aim that you intended the listener to achieve. If they failed to achieve that, it is saying that it is not your fault.

So, can we leave it here.

We will recite the Tara Praises.

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