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# The Middle Length Lamrim

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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We will continue with *Exposition on the Middling Stage of the Path* from where we left last time, which was the fourth virtuous practice.<sup>1</sup>

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

### Ripening sentient beings

Like the first three virtuous practices, the fourth virtuous practice is explained in terms of object, intention and action.

*The objects of the fourth virtuous practice are the sentient beings who are ripened by you. The action is to enable them to hold to complete enlightenment without wishing for a temporary vehicle.*

So clearly the **object** of this fourth white virtuous action is all the other sentient beings.

Here the word ‘ripened’ refers to all other beings being ripened by you to achieve complete enlightenment.

Your **intention** is to ripen all sentient beings to the highest and complete enlightenment.

The **action** is to lead them to complete enlightenment instead of leading them to enter into the lesser vehicles.

*Without wishing for a temporary vehicle* means you do not intend or wish to lead other sentient beings to the lesser path, such as the small or middling stages of the path.

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.

Your intention or motivation is to lead other sentient beings to the highest and complete enlightenment. But what if, despite your intention and effort to lead them to the highest enlightenment, they show no interest in it? It isn’t your fault, because you do not have control over the mind of other sentient beings, or what things interest them. Therefore, if they show no interest in complete enlightenment, it is not your fault.

Having said that, as instructed in the lamrim teaching, we reach the highest enlightenment in a progressive and sequential manner through initially following the stages of the path of the small and middling person and then that of the great person. Without traversing along the stages of the small and middling path, we cannot move on the stages of the great path.

Then the text continues:

*By means of this virtuous practice you abandon the second non-virtuous practice, for if you wish, from the depths of your heart to establish others in the ultimate of all types of happiness, you would not do something to cause them to give rise to mental unhappiness so that they give rise to regret that is, in itself, mental unhappiness.*

The fourth virtuous action is an antidote to the second non-virtue or black action. [I]f you wish, from the depths of your heart to establish others in the ultimate of all types of happiness says that just hearing these words or studying the altruistic thought or aspiration to achieve enlightenment is not enough. Rather, we must generate this aspiration from the depths of our hearts and for this, we must train and transform our mind. If we generate this aspiration to place all other sentient beings into the highest enlightenment which is *the ultimate of all types of happiness*, we will rid ourselves of ill thoughts so that they won’t arise, even if we want them to.

To benefit all sentient beings in terms of placing them into the state of highest enlightenment, we must first achieve enlightenment ourselves. So, we must generate bodhicitta which is the aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. We can have an aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings but the aspiration within us at the moment is not bodhicitta. Realistically speaking, it is difficult for us to generate actual bodhicitta in this life, but if we train our mind and meditate we can generate an artificial or contrived bodhicitta. This is certainly possible.

### The sevenfold cause-and-effect instructions

One effective method to generate bodhicitta is called the sevenfold cause-and-effect instruction. So, to generate bodhicitta, we need to study this instruction and meditate on it as vigorously as possible. We can do this.

The sevenfold instructions are, namely: recognising all other beings as one’s mother and the same as one’s current mother; remembering their kindness, repaying their kindness, developing a pleasant sense of endearment; great compassion; special intention and mind-generation. The seventh one is the effect, which is bodhicitta. By meditating on these seven sequentially, we can generate an aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. This aspiration characterises the definition of bodhicitta but as it arises by depending on our efforts in meditation and transforming our mind, it is called a contrived or fabricated bodhicitta.

As we become more habituated with this meditation, less effort is required, and eventually it will arise effortlessly and spontaneously whereupon it becomes actual bodhicitta. The first step of recognising all beings as one’s mother is based on our acceptance of the concept of a life before and a life after, indicating that our life is beginningless. This means we have had an infinite number of lives in the past and hence every single sentient being could have been our mother in the past, not once, but countless times. In this way, we can come to recognise from the depth of hearts that just like our

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<sup>1</sup> *Middle Length Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, page 217. This topic was introduced on 17 September 2024.

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current mother, all other sentient beings have been our mothers too, and there is no difference between them and our current mother. So, we can cultivate a deep and intimate motherly bond with all other sentient beings. So we can see how powerful and effective even the first of the sevenfold cause-and-effect instruction is in fostering a close bond with all other beings and thereby preventing any harmful thoughts towards others from arising.

### **Combining hearing, contemplating and meditating**

One of the unique features of Lama Tsongkhapa's teaching is its emphasis that the more you learn the more there is to contemplate, and the more there is to contemplate, the more there is to meditate on. Hence, integrating or combining learning, contemplating and meditating, not practising one without the others in our practice. If we combine the three we can then truly reap benefits from our practice and progress on the path. We should not leave what we learn there - we must contemplate and meditate and apply it in our practice otherwise there won't be much benefit and we won't be able to progress.

We might feel that it is too difficult to generate the actual bodhicitta because among other things, we must have the perfect state of single-pointed concentration called calm abiding. However, we can start our bodhicitta practice by, for example, studying the sevenfold cause-and-effect instruction, meditating on it and through that generate at least a contrived bodhicitta. Even generating a contrived bodhicitta will bring the tremendous benefit of a calmer and happier mind filled with more love and compassion towards others.

In this way, through our practice, we generate a virtuous state of mind, such as kindness, a good heart and compassion which will benefit and support us now, in the future and always. If we have a virtuous mind now we will find happiness now, and it leaves a positive imprint in our mind which will result in happiness in the future, for example by taking a good rebirth. So, even if we are unable to generate bodhicitta in this life, we can secure a good human life in the future just as we have now as a result of our practice.

In that future rebirth, we will develop bodhicitta even more because we already developed some in this current life. In the life after that, we will further develop it. So, we can see how any effort in creating virtues in this current life can go a long way and become a guaranteed path for us to reach complete enlightenment. The point is, as I always say, what goes with us all the time is our mind. So, any virtue that we cultivate results in mental happiness. If we have a happy mind, we are happy. Since the mind goes with us into the future life, if we maintain this happy mind well, then we can have happiness even in that future life too. Therefore, through training our mind we can bring about everlasting happiness.

### **Making steady progress**

When we talk about achieving complete enlightenment, it is not something we can achieve all at once. Rather, we have to progress stage-by-stage. Lord Buddha himself said that enlightenment is not some phenomenon that

will suddenly fall upon us from the sky. Rather it is the perfect and supreme state of awakening that we gradually achieve through the successive and progressive process of eliminating faults, one by one on the one hand and cultivating all the excellent qualities one by one on the other.

### **The importance of the Sangha**

Due to the efforts made in their past continuum as a sangha, the buddhas have become fully awakened and perfect. Their complete enlightenment didn't happen naturally or suddenly come from nowhere, but because the Sangha who could be ordinary beings like us, strived hard on the virtuous path. Hence, the Sangha are precious and esteemed beings - they are the perfect model and a source of inspiration for us. The Sangha are a true object of veneration and sanctity. Those who understand the noble qualities of the Sangha pay respect even to the robes of the Sangha - as a show of respect and faith, they place the Sangha's robe on their head.

With the bodhicitta mind, we are aspiring to achieve complete enlightenment. In order to achieve that, we must receive Dharma teachings from others. From whom do we receive Dharma teachings? From the Sangha. Not only that, but we must also practise the Dharma. So, the support and inspiration of the Sangha is a very important part of our journey on the path to enlightenment.

### **The five paths to complete enlightenment**

Reaching the complete state of enlightenment happens gradually and progressively, step by step gaining excellent qualities and eliminating faults through the five paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation and no-more-learning. Prior to becoming a buddha, they were an arya bodhisattva. Prior to that, they were an ordinary being. In terms of the five paths, how one progresses to the state of buddhahood is implied in *The Heart Sutra* mantra: TAYATHA (it is like this) GATE (go) GATE (go) PĀRAGATE (go beyond) PĀRASAMGATE (go thoroughly beyond) BODHI SVĀHĀ (go to enlightenment and become stabilised there).

The first *go* indicates entering the bodhisattva path of accumulation by generating bodhicitta. The next *go* indicates entering the path of preparation by attaining the realisation of selflessness through the union of special insight and calm abiding. However, you don't just remain in the first two paths but *go beyond* which is entering the path of seeing through qualifying one's realisation of selflessness as a direct realisation rather than a conceptualised one. Furthermore, one should not just remain in the path of seeing but enter into the path of meditation which means going thoroughly beyond through further developing and refining one's direct realisation of selflessness to remove all the layers of the two obstructions. The path of meditation is progressed in terms of progressing along the ten bodhisattva grounds<sup>2</sup>. Having traversed the path of meditation through the ten

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<sup>2</sup> I gave a very extensive explanation of the ten grounds when I taught Chandrakirti's *Supplement to the Middle Way*. The book is supposed to come out but I'm not sure where it is at the moment. I heard Ven. Fedor is doing a retreat.

bodhisattva grounds, you 'go to enlightenment and become stabilised there' by entering into the path of no-more-learning.

TAYATHA GATE GATE PARAGATE  
PARASAMGATE BODHI SVHA

So, generating bodhicitta marks the commencement of the first Mahayana path of accumulation. What do we have to do to generate bodhicitta? We have to generate compassion which is said to be a very important factor on the path in the beginning, in the middle and at the end. Compassion is important in the beginning because it is like the seed of bodhicitta, and important in the middle because like soil, water, manure etc. it is a condition to ripen and develop bodhicitta. It is important at the end because when we reach buddhahood, the bodhicitta yields an inexhaustible fruit to benefit all other beings because of the full and perfect growth of compassion.

It's okay if we cannot generate the actual bodhicitta at the moment, but it is very important that we should at least generate and hold onto a wish or intention to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all other sentient beings. This mind of enlightenment reflects the bodhicitta. If we hold onto this mind, keeping it present within our hearts all the time, we will find happiness in this life, take a good rebirth in the future, and keep getting better in each of our lives until we achieve complete enlightenment.

We will continue with reading from the text.

*In the Sūtra Requested by a Lion it says:*

*"By what means is bodhicitta  
not given up in all one's lives,  
not even in one's dreams,  
much less while one is not asleep?"*

The implication here is to hold bodhicitta within us, not losing it at any cost. With bodhicitta, we want to establish all other beings in the state of complete enlightenment. This means that we want them to have bodhicitta within their continuum. If we wish them to have bodhicitta, then it is imperative that we generate bodhicitta ourselves first. So, if we put in effort and generate bodhicitta there is the benefit of establishing others in the mind generation of bodhicitta too. One should familiarise oneself with bodhicitta such that you don't give it up even in your dreams, not to mention when you are awake.

*He spoke: "In cities or in villages  
in the countries where you live,  
guide others correctly to enlightenment.  
Through that, bodhicitta will not be  
abandoned."*

If bodhicitta is well established and stabilised, you won't lose it no matter where you go. Here the text refers to *cities* and *villages*. In Tibetan, the word for city is *dong-kyer* and *dong* or *dong-seb* is a suburb within the city or a village. I am not sure if you have clear definitions of cities and villages, but we have a definition based on the size of the place in terms of the number of people and the number of tradesmen.

We must practise bodhicitta and compassion ourselves, otherwise we won't be effective in teaching the same to others and benefitting them.

The text continues:

*Furthermore, Array of Qualities in Mañjuśrī's  
Buddhafiield teaches that the aspiration is not abandoned  
if one possesses four qualities: having abandoned pride,  
having abandoned envy, having abandoned miserliness,  
and being mentally joyful when seeing others' wealth.*

This is clearly taught in the *Cloud of Jewels of Sūtra*:

*[I]f you train in bodhicitta in all behaviors and generate  
bodhicitta before starting any virtuous activity, you will  
not be separated from this precious mind in other lives  
either. As it is said, "if a person investigates time and time  
again..."*

### **The method for restoring it if it has degenerated**

Finally, before we stop for this evening:

*If you transgress the precepts, other than giving up the  
aspiring mind and mentally giving up sentient beings,  
there is no infraction from the point of view of a  
bodhisattva as long as you do not have bodhisattva vows.  
However, since it transgresses the precept of the promise of  
interim, it becomes faulty conduct and therefore should be  
confessed by means of the four powers.*

The *four powers* refers to the four powers of the antidote to purify evil actions or negativities.

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