
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual let us spend some time in our meditation practice.

[*Tong-len meditation*]

We need to set the proper motivation for receiving the teaching, which is primarily based on the bodhicitta motivation. Since we are studying the topic of how to develop bodhicitta, I need not elaborate on the motivation as you are already familiar with it.

However, familiarising yourself with bodhicitta, or the mind aspiring to achieve enlightenment, really means making a genuine attempt to actually develop it, until one reaches a point where merely hearing the word 'bodhicitta' instils such a strong compassionate emotion that one's hair stands on end! Even though we may not be able to develop actual bodhicitta just yet, we can definitely reach a point in our practice where we experience this strong emotion.

THE EXPLANATION OF THE PERFECT METHOD

Aspirational instructions

The preliminary

*Training in the three minds*¹

The three minds are love, compassion and bodhicitta. Verses 10 and 11 are introduced with this statement:

To imply that the necessity of mind-training prior to the actual ceremony of mind generation (bodhicitta), the text goes,

Prior to actually engaging in the ritual to generate aspiring bodhicitta, one needs to have a good understanding of what bodhicitta means, and thus the necessity of training the mind.

This is a crucial point. Prior to the actual ceremony (which will be presented later in the text), one needs to train one's mind. We need to understand that the emphasis on training the mind implies that it is indeed possible to generate bodhicitta. This is the personal instruction that we need to take from this statement.

10. *Next, beginning with an attitude
Of love for all living creatures,
Consider beings, excluding none,
Suffering in the three bad rebirths,
Suffering birth, death and so forth.*
11. *Then, since you want to free these beings
From the suffering of pain,
From suffering and the cause of suffering,
Arouse immutably the resolve
To attain enlightenment.*

The commentary then presents the explanation of these verses:

The first two lines indicate loving kindness, three lines after that indicate the object of compassion, and three lines after that indicate mental aspect of

compassion, as well as practically implying the method of training in the mind of enlightenment.

The first two lines indicate loving kindness, the next three lines show the object of compassion, and three lines after that indicate the aspect of compassion. As I have mentioned previously, the aspect of love is the wish for beings to be endowed with happiness, while the aspect of compassion is the wish for sentient beings to be free from suffering.

Loving kindness

Then the commentary continues its explanation with a question:

What does one do after completing the uncommon refuge ceremony as part of accumulating merits?

In order to generate the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta, one needs to have accumulated a great stock of merit. That is because, without having accumulated merit, there is no suitable basis for generating bodhicitta.

It is explained here that as part of the ritual for taking the aspiring bodhicitta vows, one needs to have first accumulated merit and taken what is called an *uncommon* or exceptional *refuge*. The commentary explains that one needs to meditate on compassion and so forth prior to the actual ceremony, which is presented further on.

As explained here:

One needs to meditate on compassion, but prior to it one needs to cultivate loving kindness towards all motherly sentient beings.

The commentary then gives an explanation according to Sharawa:

Sharawa said in his Sang-dro (Secret Deliberation), 'one with childish mind meditates on and cultivates a mental attitude which is a very uncommon loving heart-felt sense of endearment by remembering the kindness of all sentient beings'.

The point being presented here is that one needs to cultivate the loving kindness that views sentient beings with endearment, holding them dear with a very affectionate mind. Prior to developing compassion, it is necessary to cultivate this heartfelt affectionate love.

The seven point cause and effect sequence of developing bodhicitta is being presented here, so it is good to actually understand the process in detail. The first three in the sequence are **recognising** sentient beings as one's mother, **remembering their kindness**, and wishing to **repay their kindness**. Developing these three states of mind are said to establish the basis for benefiting other sentient beings. That is because the mind generation of bodhicitta is based on two main thoughts: the purpose of others, which is to benefit sentient beings; and the purpose for oneself, which is to achieve enlightenment. The fourth of these seven points is developing **endearment love** that is based on the first three points.

If we separate them into cause and effect, the first six are the causes, whilst the seventh, which is actual bodhicitta, is the effect.

The way that these seven points depend on each other can be understood in the following way. Prior to generating **bodhicitta**, one needs to have developed **superior intention** where one takes the personal responsibility to free all sentient beings from every suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness. Before developing superior intention, one has to have developed **great compassion** for all sentient beings, which in turn is based on having first

¹ The other two headings in this section were 'Accumulating Merits' and 'Taking Extraordinary Refuge'.

developed **endearment love** for all sentient beings. Then, as mentioned earlier, in order to develop this very affectionate *heartfelt sense of endearment* for all sentient beings, one needs to have first developed the first three points – recognising all beings as one’s mother, remembering their kindness, and wishing to repay their kindness.

As we reflect on this presentation, we can see how logically it is presented. In order to develop the wish to repay kindness, one needs to have first recognised that kindness. But in order to recognise that kindness, one needs to have first recognised all beings as having been one’s mother, because a mother’s kindness is the greatest love of all. We can see how logical this presentation is. When one thinks about how all other sentient beings have been one’s mother, that will naturally instil a strong wish to repay their kindness, and one begins to see all beings as very appealing, holds them very dear and develops the *heartfelt sense of endearment* for all sentient beings. That is the type of love that is developed here.

As further explained in the commentary:

According to this statement, it appears that that sense of endearment is loving kindness which therefore is the cause to compassion which is one of the seven-fold cause and effect instruction (to generate *bodhicitta*).

The point being made here is that, in general, there is no certainty about the sequence for developing great love and great compassion. However, great compassion definitely has to be preceded by the love that is a heartfelt sense of endearment; the mind of endearment definitely has to precede the development of compassion.

As the commentary clarifies:

It is however not necessary to generate a form of great loving kindness of wishing others to have happiness as a cause or prior to generating compassion however it is necessary in the case of the loving kindness (as a sense of endearment) as presented in this text. Hence, in here this (loving kindness as a sense of endearment) must also be meditated prior to generating compassion. Langri Tangpa said to Chenga, ‘in my whole life I meditate only on loving kindness’. In respond to this, Chenga took off his hat, and with affectionately nodding his head commended to Jowo, ‘your manner is just excellent’.

These are important points about the practices of the great masters. Further:

Chenga said to Nyugrumpa, ‘to be honest loving kindness is only one that can defeat the enemy.

Here, *defeating the enemy* could be related to the account where the Buddha overcame hordes of demons through the power of his concentration on compassion. In this context, defeating enemies is not achieved just by concentration or other powers, but specifically by generating love for others. This is indeed the best way to overcome enemies. I think this is the main point being presented here. The term ‘enemy’ can also be understood as the negative or unruly minds of others, which can be overcome by expressing love for them.

Then as further explained:

Hence, simply hearing the word “loving kindness” relaxes and soothes one’s heart’.

This is a very significant statement. For the great masters who really perfected their meditation on love, just *hearing*

the word ‘loving kindness’ soothes their mind. We can see how meditating on love made their minds much more relaxed and expansive. These are significant points for us to contemplate. As indicated clearly here, meditating on love is the best remedy for overcoming mental heaviness and tightness. All kinds of uncomfortable emotions and negative states of mind can be completely relieved by generating loving kindness and further meditating on love. This is what we need to understand from these instructions.

What we need to take as a personal instruction from this presentation is that meditating on love and compassion is the optimum way to overcome unruly states of mind. It is the best remedy to overcome afflictions such as anger, attachment, pride, jealousy and competitiveness, as well as all forms of unrealistic hopes and doubts. Of course, the ultimate antidote is the wisdom realising emptiness. However at our level, meditating on love and compassion is a manageable and most effective antidote to overcome these unruly states of mind. Therefore, meditating on love and compassion should be the essential focus of our practice. I am not very impressed with those who may put this essential practice aside and engage in some other forms of meditation. Even making attempts to develop single-pointed concentration is not all that admirable if it is devoid of love.

The main point to be understood here is that we need to relate to the benefit and value of love and compassion on a personal level. Cultivating love and compassion within ourselves will benefit us as well as others. Needless to say, simply talking about the value of love and compassion will not be of much help in transforming our unruly minds. It is crucial that we apply love and compassion on a personal level and implement it into our daily practice.

The way to personalise this practice and implement it is, for example, to replace our normal angry state of mind with love and compassion. When there is a disagreement with someone, it would be a great pity if we immediately resorted to the mind of anger when we have access to the practices of love and compassion. If we put aside our understanding of love and compassion and reverted to our habitual emotion of anger, that would be a great loss indeed. As we all naturally wish for gain and do not want to experience any loss, we need to be reasonable with ourselves, and generate compassion for the other instead of feeling hostility and anger. If we prefer to experience a loss, then fine, we can get angry! If you want loss, then carry on feeling angry towards others. But if you wish for gain, then generate compassion for others, because that is the ultimate gain.

These aren’t just mere words. I try to really apply this in my own practice, and as I do that, I find that there is definitely great benefit. It is based on finding such personal benefit that I feel the need to share this advice with you. If you don’t have an understanding of love and compassion, and knowledge of how to generate love and compassion, then there is not much more that you can do. However, you all have the understanding and knowledge of how to generate love and compassion, so it is a matter of actually putting it into practice. If you don’t put into practice what you already know and understand, then you will experience a great loss.

These quotations from the great masters are all ways to illustrate the benefits of love and compassion. The commentary continues:

Again, Langri Tangpa said, ‘Although one doesn’t know which of the six rebirths one will take rebirth, it

doesn't matter where one is born as long as one doesn't forget to benefitting other sentient beings'.

This is a pith instruction. It all comes down to the essential point of benefiting others, which lies at the heart of all these instructions. As I often say to you, these teachings seem to back up what I usually say. The points in this presentation are essential for you to consider.

The commentary emphasises this point:

One needs to be like that (not losing the thought of benefiting sentient beings).

These are not mere words from these great masters. Indeed, Geshe Langri Tangpa was a great master who actually developed the mind of bodhicitta. We can see this in the succinct and powerful words of his 'Eight Verses of Mind Training'. Really thinking about and contemplating these verses and reciting them can bring us many blessings.

Then the commentary presents the seven point cause and effect sequence for generating bodhicitta:

Upon the cultivation of loving kindness, a sense of endearment is felt strongly at one's heart through reflecting on recognition of all beings as one's mother...

At first glance, recognising *all beings as one's mother* may be difficult to comprehend; it would be hard to ask someone to accept this at face value. But if we use some reasoning and logic to investigate it, then it will start to dawn upon us that this is not just a possibility but is, in fact, how it is.

First, by reflecting on this life, we can all acknowledge we have a physical body. So we need to contemplate the causes of the body that we have now. We can trace it back to the time of conception where our parents were the immediate cause of this body. Next, we also acknowledge that we have a mind. Our awareness or mind is not physical, and therefore could not have been produced by our parents, and it has its own preceding causes. If, at the time of conception, the parents are not the producers of the mind or consciousness, then what would the preceding causes of the mind be?

As presented in the teachings, the preceding causes of a mind, which is of course not physical, can only be another, earlier moment of mind or consciousness. It has to come from a previously existent mind. Prior to the moment of conception, our life as we know it had not yet been established; therefore, the consciousness would have had to exist previously. That previous moment of consciousness at the time of conception would have had to exist prior to the moment of conception. When we trace the consciousness back beyond the moment of conception, we gain an understanding that the consciousness would have had to exist in a previous life.

If the mind existed previously, then it would have to have had a birth. Therefore, there had to have been a previous birth prior to this one. By contemplating in this way and tracing back our consciousness, we begin to see how there is no beginning to the mind. The main point is that, as we trace our consciousness back into the previous existence of the immediate past life and prior to that, the mind would have had to already exist. As we trace it back, we come to understand that there has been no beginning, and we cannot trace back to the first moment of consciousness. Therefore, we can conclude that we have had countless past lives.

Prior to this life as a human, we could have had a different type of existence, and before that, another existence. In each

of these rebirths, there would have to have been a mother to give birth to us. Therefore, as we have had countless past rebirths, we have to have had countless mothers. So all sentient beings would have been our mother at some point in time.

Next comes remembering the kindness of one's mother, which we need to base on our mother in this life. She nurtured us prior to our birth, she gave birth to us, and then nurtured us through our childhood. Once we recognise how extremely kind our mother in this life has been, then we apply that understanding to all sentient beings, who have at some time been our mother, and who have also been extremely kind to us.

When we think about the kindness of our mother in great detail, we come to the point of having a deep and genuine wish to repay her kindness, not being able to bear seeing her experiencing any suffering and not doing anything about it. When that is instilled in one's heart, then that genuine wish to repay the kindness of one's mother is applied to all beings in a similar way. This is how to contemplate the first three causes of developing love and compassion.

The reasoning of those who accept past and future lifetimes is based on this logical syllogism: the mind of a newborn child - has a previous moment of cognition - because it is cognition. By virtue of the mere fact of being a mind, its previous moment must also have been a mind. What is being asserted is that the only cause for a mind can be a previous moment of mind. This is the reasoning that is presented in the teachings.

Those who believe in God would say that humans and so forth are created by God. There are no further reasons other than they are the creation of God. Our reasoning is based on the definition of consciousness. Indeed, scientists are beginning to accept that there is something beyond the physical matter of the brain, and they are beginning to wonder if it is consciousness. They cannot find any sort of atom or molecule within the brain that they can pinpoint as the consciousness. That, in itself, proves that while consciousness is accepted, it is not to be found in physical matter. Our mind is thus a non-physical entity, and its cause also has to be a previous moment of a non-physical entity.

The general stance of scientists seems to be related to the functions of the brain. However, when they are further pressed with questions like, 'If the brain consists of white matter, then which part of it is the mind?', they don't have a clear response. These days, there is a coming together of the Buddhist presentation of mind and awareness, and scientists who are trying to understand the nature of the mind. Scientists are beginning to make room for other possibilities as to what the mind is.

Once, when we attended his teachings in Perth, His Holiness was talking about his discussions with scientists, and their descriptions of the mind and so forth. Afterwards when Geshe Loden and I were having tea together, we discussed the explanations according to the scientists' point of view and the Buddhist point of view. Geshe Loden said that, according to the scientists, the eye consciousness is found at the back of the brain.

Testimonies about people remaining fresh even after their clinical death is bringing up further questions about what is keeping the bodies fresh. If brain function, which they view as the mind, has ceased, then what is keeping the body fresh? These sorts of events are starting to make scientists ponder even further about what the mind actually is.

The basis of the scientific thesis is that the brain is the mind. While scientists are not yet ready to say that the brain is not the mind, they are beginning to acknowledge that there might be something beyond the brain that has the function of the mind. It does seem that they are beginning to open up to that possibility.

I also recall that after His Holiness the Dalai Lama's presentation at one of the 'Happiness and its Causes' conferences, there was a presentation by a renowned Italian neuroscientist. Although he didn't say the brain is not the mind, he implied that there seems to be something beyond the actual physical grey matter, which is something to ponder and requires further investigation. I suspect that he couldn't claim that the brain is not the mind because there would be a lot of opposition from the scientific community.

We have side-tracked a bit, however the main point is that developing bodhicitta is based on recognising all beings as being one's mother, then remembering the kindness of one's mother, and wishing to repay that kindness. As one cultivates that recognition of all beings as having been one's mother in countless past lives, and therefore equally kind to one, one then naturally develops a very pure, unbiased wish to benefit all sentient beings. When one sees all beings as being equally kind to oneself, then the wish to repay their kindness, and the wish for them to be happy will be felt equally and without bias. This is a very unstained and pure sort of love.

Contemplating the kindness of all beings is naturally followed by the wish to repay that kindness. At that point, one develops what is translated here as a real sense of endearment for all beings. When that sense of endearment is developed, then one naturally and spontaneously will have a wish for them to be happy. The stronger the sense of endearment towards the other, the more natural and spontaneous will be our wish for them to be happy. That spontaneous and unceasing wish for them to be happy is what is called 'love'.

A woman once asked a master how to develop this endearing love. She had a son named Teligo, so the master replied, 'Just as you have endearing love for your son Teligo, you need to develop the same love towards all other sentient beings'. The teachings explain that just like a mother loves her child, one develops the same affectionate love for all sentient beings. The spontaneous, unconditional, affectionate love of a mother for her child is something that we can all readily relate to.

When the commentary says *Upon the cultivation of loving kindness, a sense of endearment is felt strongly at one's heart*, the word 'strongly' also has the implication of naturally and spontaneously feeling endearment or loving kindness. This is based on recognising all beings as having been one's mother. This is followed by remembering their kindness and wanting to repay their kindness. Then one commences to meditate on compassion.

Here we can incorporate the four immeasurables into the practice. Having meditated on the earlier points, one reaches a point of having a spontaneous and strong wish for all beings to be happy. This is followed by the wish, 'How wonderful it would be if all beings were to be happy. May they achieve that state of happiness. I will personally make sure to lead them to that state of happiness'. It is when these sentiments are strongly developed that one develops the endearing love that is focused on all sentient beings. This is called 'great love'.

If one has developed this spontaneous and unceasing love that is based on a wish for other beings to be happy, then how could one develop a mind of intentionally wishing to harm them? Here we can see how the wish for beings to be happy is a direct opponent or antidote to wishing for sentient beings to be harmed. So we can see how incredibly valuable such a mind is, as it prevents us from causing any harm towards sentient beings.

The object of compassion

What follows next is the actual object of the compassion, which we can leave for our next session. The root text and the commentary explain this quite clearly. It is also important to remember that Lama Tsongkhapa adds to this the seven point cause and effect technique. Prior to engaging in the practice of meditating on the seven point cause and effect, the unique presentation of Lama Tsongkhapa is to first train the mind in developing equanimity towards all sentient beings. This is really a significant point, because for as long as one lacks that sense of equanimity towards sentient beings, one cannot possibly develop equal love for all sentient beings – it would only be a biased or partial love. Thus, by training one's mind in developing equanimity, seeing all sentient beings as equal, one develops an unbiased and equal love and compassion for all sentient beings.

We can also then see the significance of these points in the six-session guru yoga practice, where equanimity comes first in the verse on the four immeasurables. Those of you who regularly practise the six-session guru yoga will be aware that it begins with taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, which is followed by the four immeasurables. This is in line with what has been presented here. We can see here how the six-session yoga practice is meticulously tailored to implement the teachings presented here.

The four immeasurable thoughts are then followed by generating aspirational bodhicitta. Following that, the practice goes over the bodhisattva vows of engaging bodhicitta. So we can see how this is in line with the presentation of the *Lamp on the Path*. We can see how they complement and enhance each other. When reciting the six-session yoga, one can see how the other commitments and vows that one has taken can be subsumed into that practice, which is based on bodhicitta.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen is used with the kind permission of Samdup Tsering.

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Edited Version*

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