

Study Group - “Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*”

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ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྣམས་གྲོ་ལ་ལག་བཅུང་ས།



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As usual first try to set the right motivation.

422.3: The Stages of the Path of Persons of Great Scope

སྐྱེས་བུ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་བར་སློབ་བྱུང་བ།

We are now up to the lam rim teachings on the stages of the path of a person of great scope, and this has three headings.

422.31: Showing Bodhicitta as the only Entrance Door to the Mahayana Path, and an Explanation of the Benefits of Bodhicitta

ཐེག་ཆེན་གྱི་འཇུག་སློབ་སྐྱོང་སྐྱེས་བུ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་བར་སློབ་བྱུང་བ།

422.32: How to Generate Bodhicitta

བྱང་ཆུབ་ཏུ་སྐྱེས་བུ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་བར་སློབ་བྱུང་བ།

422.33: Engaging in the Deeds of a Bodhisattva after the Development of Bodhicitta

སྐྱེས་བུ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་བར་སློབ་བྱུང་བ།

422.31: Showing Bodhicitta as the Only Entrance Door to the Mahayana Path and an Explanation of the Benefits of Bodhicitta

ཐེག་ཆེན་གྱི་འཇུག་སློབ་སྐྱོང་སྐྱེས་བུ་ཆེན་པོའི་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་བར་སློབ་བྱུང་བ།

Since bodhicitta is said to be the entrance door to the mahayana path, then anyone who wants to follow that path must generate bodhicitta. Having this bodhicitta mind also determines whether someone is a mahayanist or not. In other words, if you generate this bodhicitta mind, you are joining the members of the mahayana without needing any other qualification. In general, we say that taking refuge is the entrance door to buddhism. Thus, whether someone is a buddhist or not is a matter of whether they have taken refuge in the three jewels. Likewise if someone has generated bodhicitta, then they are a true mahayanist.

Bodhicitta is a quality to be generated within our mind, and since we have obtained this wonderful human life of leisure and endowment, we have a wonderful opportunity to actually develop this bodhicitta mind. So we should make an effort to study, and if possible generate genuine bodhicitta. However if this is not possible, then you should try to generate an artificial, or fabricated, bodhicitta. If that is not possible, then with a sincere interest one can learn about bodhicitta, praying to generate bodhicitta one day. In this way the effort we put in can at least leave some impressions, or plant some seed in our mind, so that one day we can actually produce this bodhicitta mind.

For us, the expression of bodhicitta is cultivating a good

heart towards others, and the whole teaching on bodhicitta inspires us to develop this good heart.

Distinction between Vehicles and Schools of Tenets.

Bodhicitta is the entrance door to the mahayana, because bodhicitta is the defining quality of a mahayanist. However there are a few general points to mention at this stage.

We hear of two vehicles, or “yanas”, in buddhism. These are:

1. Hinayana, which is the lesser vehicle
2. Mahayana, which is the greater vehicle.

We also hear of the various buddhist schools of tenets or philosophy. We need to know the basis of distinction between the two vehicles, and between the various schools of buddhist tenets.

The main basis for making this division into two yanas is the deed, or act. On this basis of different deeds, the follower of hinayana is someone who has generated true renunciation, which is a strong wish of seeking liberation from cyclic existence for one’s own sake. Motivated by this renunciation, the training the hinayanist undertakes is the three fold training. Whereas the follower of the mahayana has the motivation of bodhicitta, and out of this motivation the deeds that they engage in are mainly the six perfections.

The division into two vehicles (or yanas) is made on the basis of deeds, whereas the division into schools of tenets is made on the basis of different philosophical view. For example, in the mahayana there is sutrayana (or the perfection of wisdom vehicle) and the tantrayana (or the secret mantra vehicle). However these two divisions of mahayana are not regarded as schools of buddhist tenets.

We also have to realise that simply engaging in the stages of the small and medium scopes is not enough. We must engage in the mahayana (or great scope) in order to reach complete enlightenment, or buddhahood, as quickly as possible. Contemplating middle scope teachings helps us to generate renunciation - the strong wish to achieve liberation and to leave cyclic existence. Out of this strong motivation of renunciation, following the middle scope path will yield the result of liberation, or nirvana. That goal of nirvana does not mean that we have successfully helped all other living beings to achieved their goals - it does not even mean that one has perfected one’s own self. Nor does achieving nirvana mean that one has got rid of all that needs to be removed, or has achieved all that needs to be achieved. Indeed it is said that achieving this state of nirvana can even delay the achievement of the state of buddhahood or complete enlightenment.

Therefore, we have to realise that in order to achieve full enlightenment quickly, it is essential to enter the mahayana path right from the beginning. Compare the person who engages in the path of the lesser vehicle and achieves liberation, with another person who engages in the

mahayana path, but due to strong obstacles falls into a lower rebirth. Of these two who would achieve full enlightenment or buddhahood first? It is said that it is possible for the person who followed mahayana vehicle from the outset to attain enlightenment first, despite falling into lower rebirth.

The follower of the path of great scope should see that the lower and middle scopes are the preliminaries, and that bodhicitta is the actual path, and that all the training in the mahayana deeds is a training to fully develop bodhicitta.

Benefits of Bodhicitta

Traditionally the benefits of bodhicitta are taught first, and we shall follow this tradition. The reason is to develop joyful interest in the minds of those who are intent on following the mahayana path. As mentioned in the text, the benefits of bodhicitta are:

- Bodhicitta is the only entrance door to the mahayana path
- You receive the title of “Buddha’s child”
- You outshine hearers and solitary realisers by virtue of race or nature
- You become an excellent object to be venerated
- You quickly and easily amass enormous merit
- You quickly purify your negativities
- You fulfil all that you wish
- You are protected from harm
- You quickly complete all grounds and paths
- You become a source of joy and happiness for all living beings

We have now finished the topic of bodhicitta being an entrance door to the mahayana path. Regarding this Lama Tsong Khapa instructed:

“It is more important for a person to qualify as a mahayanist, than to check whether or not the dharma that you study is mahayanist.”

This means that you automatically become a part of the mahayana family when bodhicitta is generated.

What is more important for us is to incorporate this bodhicitta into any practice that we do, because we have learnt here that bodhicitta is the main element which determines whether or not the practice we are doing is a mahayana practice. Bodhicitta determines whether any practice is following the example of the deeds of a bodhisattva. It is bodhicitta mind which determines how quickly we can reach the state of buddhahood. The secret mantra vehicle is generally regarded as the quick way to achieve the state of buddhahood. Without the mind of bodhicitta, then it is doubtful that sacred mantra practices such as doing the sadhanas of tantric deities are a cause to achieve buddhahood, let alone being a path to buddhahood. Without bodhicitta, this secret mantra practice is not a cause to be called a mahayanist, let alone attain buddhahood.

On the other hand if we always integrate bodhicitta with what we do, then even if we simply recite just one round of “OM MANI PADME HUM”, this becomes a perfect cause to quickly achieve buddhahood.

In the commentary text there is more detail on this topic, but for our practice the essential thing to take from the text is that we must integrate the bodhicitta mind into the motivation for our practice.

Receiving the title “Buddha’s Child”

The second benefit is to be called a buddha’s child.

To quote Shantideva’s *Bodhisattva Charyavatara*,

“The very moment even a very pitiful being, who is bound in the prison of samsara, generates bodhicitta, then all the

tathagatas, or the buddhas, call that being ‘our child’.”

This shows how the bodhicitta mind is highly regarded as a spiritual quality or realisation. Once this bodhicitta mind is born within you, regardless of what form of life you are in, even if you are born as a dog or pig, then you become a very special being and one who is greatly respected, admired and even a source of joy for all the buddhas.

With regard to the term “Buddha’s child”, in Tibetan terminology the term literally means “Buddha’s son.” There are many other terms beside this one, where one or other gender is used. Unfortunately some people take issue with this, claiming sexual discrimination or bias in the Buddha’s teaching without checking the root of these terms, and thoroughly checking the Buddha’s teachings. Upon this basis one can become very doubtful and suspicious of the Buddha’s teachings.

It is important to properly check whether any of these terms are discriminatory. The origins of this Tibetan term “Buddha’s son” is derived from the story of the universal chakravartin king who, in order to continue the lineage of his kingdom, required a son and heir. For the king nothing could bring him greater joy than to hear of the birth of a son. It is said that far greater than this joy is that joy in the mind of the buddha when the bodhicitta mind is born in the mind of any being. So this term “Buddha’s son” was used as an analogy to the sense of the joy that the chakravartin king would feel when presented with his heir. Anyone who generates the mind of bodhicitta is respected, and pleases all the buddhas.

In Tibetan “gyal-sas”¹ is synonymous with bodhisattva, and literally “sas” equals son or male. But it does not mean son born of the buddha. Being a “gyal-sas”, or Buddha’s child, does not mean you are born of the buddha, or that the buddha is your father.

Another explanation of using the term “Buddha’s child” or “Buddha’s son” is that you are the child of the one upon whom you have relied to learn how to cultivate bodhicitta.

Some of you might remember the line from Chandrakirti’s text the *madhyamika-avatara*, or *Supplement to the Middle Way* where it says that “all the buddha’s are born from bodhisattvas”. However we shall not continue with this since it may cause confusion.

Is it clear why someone who has generated bodhicitta is called a buddha’s son? It is important to realise that there is no gender bias in the attitude of the buddha since it says in the Heart Sutra “both son and daughter of the race”.

Q: (from a student) I understand that the Buddha is not biased but what about the assumptions of gender throughout the sutras.

A: (Geshela) When we doubt the usage of the terminology, then you must find out how and when that particular term was first used. For example in Tibetan we use the term “Lotus flower”. So if you take this term literally it means “born from the lake.” But in fact this is not the case but beyond that there is no other reason. So there is no point in having any doubt in the mind because of the use of some terms.

In the Tibetan culture sometimes boys names are deliberately given to girls, and vice versa.

If you generate bodhicitta in Tibet you are “Buddha’s son” - “gyal-sas”. That is the literal translation but it does not mean you are male, as this term has no connotation of male or female.

¹ Editor: “gyal” = conqueror and “sas” = son.

