

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

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In the meditation you have just finished you cultivated the bodhicitta motivation. Try to make it stronger by thinking “I shall attain full enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, and for this purpose I shall receive these teachings and then put them into practice.”

Generating Bodhicitta by Seven-Fold Cause and Effect

We have been discussing the seven-fold instructions or precepts to cultivate bodhicitta. They are:

1. Recognising all beings as one’s mother
2. Remembering the kindness of all beings
3. Repaying their kindness
4. Loving kindness
5. Great compassion
6. Superior intention
7. Bodhicitta

We shall begin the sixth, Superior intention, tonight.

Cultivating Un-Biased Love and Compassion

As a result of your meditations on the first three causes or stages of the seven-fold cause and effect meditation, there is some transformation of your mind, and you make some progress mentally. This mental development takes the form of loving kindness and compassion for all beings.

The cause of this loving kindness and compassion is a very stable genuine and unselfish feeling towards others. You would have a similar feeling of love and compassion for your boyfriend or girlfriend, but the cause for having such close loving feelings includes an element of attachment, as well as genuine love.

The kind of loving kindness for others which we generate in the seven-fold cause and effect meditation is the result of seeing them as very close friends. This close feeling arises on the basis of the understanding that just like ourselves, all other beings also wish for happiness and to avoid unhappiness. It is on this understanding that you cultivate loving kindness by wishing them to have happiness, and you generate compassion by wishing them to be free from unhappiness or suffering.

So the love and compassion you generate is not conditional upon some specific relationship. When it is conditional on a specific relationship, for example with one’s partner, then as the relationship changes, so do your feelings of love and compassion for that person. Even our enemies qualify as suitable objects for the love and compassion we generate in the seven fold cause and effect meditation, because they fit the criteria.

Our reason for cultivating the form of loving kindness and compassion which we are discussing here must be that the other person wishes for happiness and does not want unhappiness, and we genuinely wish them to have happiness, and we genuinely wish them to be free from suffering. Therefore it is very important that we examine our reasons for showing love and compassion. For example the reason might be that he or she is a relative or partner, but such a love is imperfect; it is tainted and impure. To cultivate universal love and compassion the reason must be applicable to all beings in that everyone wishes for happiness and to avoid suffering.

Sixth Cause: Superior Intention:

Through generating strong love and compassion, one would

generally feel “How wonderful it would be if all beings have happiness. May they have happiness. May I be able to cause happiness”, and then be able to show this kind of loving kindness. Likewise when you feel “How wonderful if all beings were free of suffering. May they be free of suffering. May I be able to free them from suffering”, this gives rise to a very genuine compassion. Such true love and compassion can arise from our meditation practice.

After this we have to realise that although we have generated thoughts of love (wishing other beings to have happiness) and of compassion (wishing them to be free of suffering), no matter how genuine and strong your wish it remains just a wish. In actuality it brings neither happiness nor decreases the suffering of other beings, and their situation remains the same. All that changes is something within yourself - you have sympathy for them, and you have a genuine wish for all beings to have happiness and be free of suffering. Therefore, to further develop this love and compassion you must take the responsibility for the welfare of other beings. For this you must have such a sense of responsibility that you think “I alone shall lead all beings to happiness, and I alone shall release them from suffering.” In this way you vow to yourself that you will lead all beings to happiness and free them from suffering.

This taking of personal responsibility is called superior intention. It is superior in the sense that it makes the love and compassion you generate superior to the love and compassion possessed by practitioners of the lower vehicles, the Hearers and Solitary Realisers. In other words the lower vehicle practitioners also have love and compassion: they too wish for others to be happy, and cannot bear to see others suffering. However their love and compassion is not superior because they do not personally vow to shoulder the responsibility for bringing happiness to all beings, and freeing them all from suffering. Therefore in order to cultivate this superior intention you must see that after generating love and compassion, the task of leading others to happiness and releasing them from suffering falls entirely upon oneself, just as children feel they have the entire responsibility for looking after their parents.

In the seven-fold cause and effect meditation the stages of loving kindness, compassion and superior intention are mainly to cultivate the aspiration to benefit other sentient beings. What is this aspiration to benefit other beings? It is the wish to place all beings into the state of buddhahood. In the text it says that each of loving kindness, compassion and superior intention has a special role or function in cultivating the aspiration to benefit other beings. *Compassion* is like an eye through which to see other beings. *Love* is like the hand with which to hold other beings close to one. *Superior intention* is like the arm by which we take the responsibility for the well-being of others entirely upon oneself.

The Effect: Bodhicitta

With the cultivation of superior intention you generate an aspiration to benefit all beings thinking, “I shall place all beings into the state of full enlightenment, and free them all from suffering.” There is a strong intention as well as a strong resolution to benefit others. From this you generate the

bodhicitta mind by thinking that, despite your sense of responsibility for placing all beings into full enlightenment and freeing them all from suffering, you do not have the capacity or power to fulfil that responsibility.

If you do not have such capacity, then who does have such powers? Only a fully enlightened being or Buddha has the capacity to place all beings into full enlightenment. In this way you understand that in order to fulfil your aspiration to benefit all beings and lead them all to the state of full enlightenment, you have to achieve full enlightenment first.

So having cultivated superior intention, in which you generate the aspiration to benefit others, you then generate the aspiration to achieve your own enlightenment, in order to benefit all other beings. In this way, after superior intention the bodhicitta mind arises: it arises simultaneously with the aspiration to achieve your own enlightenment.

Therefore, there are two types of aspiration:

1. The aspiration to benefit others
2. The aspiration to achieve one's own enlightenment

The first aspiration is the cause for the second. In other words the aspiration to achieve one's own enlightenment is generated after the aspiration to benefit other beings. However it is said that in terms of the fulfilment of these two aspirations, the order is reversed. The goal of one's own enlightenment is accomplished before achieving the goal of benefiting all other beings by placing them in the state of full enlightenment.

In generating bodhicitta or the aspiration to achieve one's own enlightenment, one needs to take into account all of the qualities of a Buddha which are discussed under the topic of 'Taking Refuge'. The Buddha's qualities include those of holy body, speech and mind, and the Buddha's enlightened activities. You have to consider these qualities in order to know the power and qualifications of a Buddha, and the qualities you will have when you achieve buddhahood. The more you contemplate these qualities of a Buddha the stronger your faith in Buddha. The stronger this faith, the stronger will be the aspiration to become Buddha, and so the stronger our effort will be in our practice.

Blessing Food

As we enjoy our tea, always remember whenever we take any food or drink that we you bless it with the mantra OM AH HUM, and at the same time remember its meaning.

When these three syllables are repeated three times:

1. The first repetition purifies all faults – eg unpleasant colour or taste
2. The second repetition transforms the offering into uncontaminated nectar
3. The third repetition makes the offering inexhaustible and everlasting

Sometimes we say OM AH HUM only once, in which case the meaning of each syllable is:

HUM is the seed syllable of the exalted wisdom of the omniscient mind or enlightened wisdom. There is no phenomena that cannot be purified by this. So HUM is to purify.

AH is seed syllable of the vajra speech of Amitabha Buddha which transforms everything into uncontaminated nectar.

OM is seed syllable of Vairochana Buddha which increases and becomes inexhaustible.

Do not feel that all you offer is only a small cup, which is not enough for all the refuge objects. Rather you have to think that your offerings are inexhaustible, no matter how many holy beings there are.

In short you can think of the qualities of Buddha's body, speech and mind when you think of the three syllables OM AH HUM. Therefore, when you make an offering, if you think of the meaning of just these three syllables, there is a lot to

meditate upon, and to keep the mind busy. After saying the offering prayer it is good to sit quietly for a while, and to think of the meaning of the offering.

In the next few days it would be good if everyone could make some effort to remember the main practices of each of the three scopes of stages of the path:

1. In the lower scope the main practice is abandoning the ten non-virtues, so remember each of these ten non-virtues to be abandoned
2. In the medium scope the main practice is the three-fold training, and knowing its meaning
3. In the great scope there is bodhicitta and generating bodhicitta by the seven-fold cause and effect, and the deeds of bodhisattvas - the six perfections, and the four means of gathering disciples

If you do this as much as possible, and become familiar with practices of the three scopes of the teachings, then even if we do not achieve full enlightenment or the state of buddhahood in this life, (which for most of us is impossible), then by making some effort to focus on these topics of the spiritual path, at least we plant the seeds in our mindstream. Then in future lives we can be very sure of being born as spiritual practitioners of a very high class, ie as learned and highly realised practitioners.

Of course it is not completely impossible for us to achieve full enlightenment in this lifetime: in fact it is very possible. Everybody has the choice and ability to become whatever we want to become. If we have the strong will to become a very knowledgeable and learned person in this life, we can achieve success by making an effort. Similarly, by making an effort we can transform our mind into a very calm happy one in this lifetime: we can fully transform ourselves so everyone will see us as a very kind-hearted, soft person with a very calm and happy mind. Just as we can achieve much in our material pursuits, with strong aspirations in our spiritual pursuits we can also achieve our goal.

In seeking happiness and security in our life we do not just need outer support. Most importantly, we need inner support for life's happiness. The way to achieve this inner support is by engaging in such spiritual practices as the practice of moral ethics, the three-fold training, the six perfections, developing concentration and intelligent wisdom. We must be self-sufficient and able to direct our own life and make our own decisions. This self-sufficiency is important since outer conditions are unreliable and can deceive us at any moment. Outer supports have some advantages, but without inner support, then no matter how much outer support we surround ourselves with, we are very confused and unhappy about our own life. So by filling ourselves, as much as possible with inner qualities, wealth and knowledge, then even if there is not enough outer support it does not matter too much. If there is some outer obstacle or problem we can work ourselves out of that problem.

We have to realise that for our life to be very secure and happy we have to enrich ourselves by increasing our inner qualities, through seeing that outer support is unreliable, and by knowing that we cannot find what we want outside. For example, outside people upon whom we think we can rely, can change any moment, and turn against one. Their relationship with us changes so quickly. If you have wealth and reputation then they come to you, but if you have no wealth and reputation and need their support they turn away from you. Geshe-la often jokingly says to people "You should be fully independent and self reliant, and not rely upon other outside people".