

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

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Before tonight's lam rim teaching, please set up a state of mind where you want to bring peace and kindness to all living beings.

## The Benefits of Bodhicitta

We are at the point where we have finished the teachings on bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment, and the benefits of generating this thought by it bringing happiness to both your own mind and to the minds of others.

There are a number of analogies that have been used in the teachings to describe the importance of this thought of bodhicitta, and how it can be best expressed in our behaviour. One of these is that once upon a time there was a family who lived in an area which was stricken with drought and famine. It eventually came to the point where only one piece of roast meat remained: if it were to be distributed equally amongst all the family members, then there would not be enough for each to survive. Therefore, the father of the family decided to eat the lot in order to make himself strong enough to go and seek more food for the family.

Perhaps the father was very clever in justifying his decision not to share with his family! Never mind, the point of the story is that out of his compassionate thought for his family the father ate the food, and by making himself strong he went out, and found enough food so that all of his family were able to survive. This form of bodhicitta is one that helps others by helping yourself first.

What makes the thought of caring for others a *bona fide* state of bodhicitta or enlightenment? It is not necessarily determined by outward behaviour which could seem highly selfish on the surface, but which is, in fact, an immense act of compassionate bodhicitta practice. As a matter of fact if one fails to love oneself first, or fails to put one's own house properly in order, then the notion of achieving things for the group is very, very unlikely and probably impossible. Therefore, when we are talking about the benefits of bodhicitta, or the thought of enlightenment, our reasoning must not be restrictive and we must always check the motivation. If the motivation is to look after oneself in order to become strong and fit enough to help others, then even though it might look selfish it is not. It is also an act of bodhicitta. In other words it comes back to generating a very warm caring heart in which one feels a sense of love for oneself, and for others. This can only lead to the generation of the grander state of mind, that of achieving full enlightenment.

Therefore, achieving full enlightenment does not depend upon outwardly strict interpretations of what we should do. It all comes down to the state of mind which propels certain actions: they may look like achieving grander things for others, or they may look self serving. As in the analogy used earlier, even though the father looks highly selfish in eating all the meat, it is the act of an enormously caring mind, because he has done it to care for his family. So we have to interpret the teachings in ways which really help us

to clarify our motivation, then everything we do becomes an act of compassion.

## The Quality of Bodhicitta

The quality of bodhicitta, or the thought of enlightenment has a strict definition: it is a thought which seeks to achieve enlightenment. However achieving that kind of *bona fide* or fully qualified state of mind might be very difficult for all of us. Even though this is a very, very precious mind, if we are not careful about it we may become overly focussed on the quality or the definition, and fail to pay attention to the sporadic sense of compassion that we do experience. Caring for others, or feeling good about them, may not necessarily qualify as the thought of enlightenment, but while we are on the path these thoughts are much more important for us. They are the breeding ground upon which the genuine thought of enlightenment will later develop.

Whether our action is for ourself or for others, if we could somehow develop the presiding thought, “Whatever I do is in order to bring happiness or benefit to others”, then that state of mind becomes highly precious, and will only lead to the kind of achievement for which we are looking – the state of full enlightenment.

We need therefore to learn to pay attention to these small thoughts that we generate. At least we can say a prayer or try to have some kind of semblance of motivation of doing things to bring happiness for others and free them from their suffering through our actions. This gives us the opportunity for our day-to-day life to become a practice of spirituality.

## Two Types of Presentation of the Bodhicitta Mind

*Jang chub sem* (Tib), or the thought of enlightenment is presented in two possible ways.

1. The generation of bodhicitta through effort. In other words, experiencing a state of passionately wanting to achieve enlightenment for others as a consequence of applying specific meditative techniques: the mental exercise through logic and reasoning which begins by considering and recognising all living beings as being kind as our mothers, then thinking about their kindness, and then to repay that kindness, leading to feeling a sense of love, and feeling a sense of compassion and a strong determination to do something about it which leads you to feel that the only way you can do that is to achieve your own enlightenment. So that is what we call bodhicitta experienced through effort.
2. The natural experience of bodhicitta which is when you naturally experience the tremendous sense of wanting to achieve enlightenment for others without having to rely on meditative technique or mental exercises, or having to go through logical reasons. Instead, the mere sight of a sentient being naturally and effortlessly makes you feel you want to achieve enlightenment, so that you can bring happiness and peace to them, and

free them from their suffering. When you do find yourself so hopelessly feeling such love and bodhicitta then you have become a bodhisattva: you have become the son or daughter of the buddhas, and you have entered the first path of accumulation from the Mahayana point of view. You have become a *bona fide* Mahayana practitioner. When you have that kind of feeling happening naturally to you, do not have any doubts – you are a bodhisattva.

Your job now becomes to reflect on the qualities and characteristics of bodhicitta to somehow bring them closer to your consciousness or mind, which becomes the practice of Dharma.

Having reached this point of the Mahayana path of accumulation through directly experiencing bodhicitta, or the thought of enlightenment out of compassion, one can make it even faster, closer, more real and more practical, through the esoteric practice of Buddhism or Tantra.

### **Bodhicitta Classified According to Nature of the Mind**

The development of bodhicitta can be classified according to the viewpoint of the nature of the mind. It is often described using the analogy of a traveller who is thinking about travelling, as opposed to one who is actually getting on with the job, or who is actually on the path.

1. The first is called desire, aspiration or wishing bodhicitta, which is achieved through such meditative practices as recognising all living beings as one's kind mother and so on, then thinking that "I would really like to achieve enlightenment so that I can bring happiness to all others". Now that state of mind of bodhicitta, or the thought of enlightenment is called wishing bodhicitta.
2. The second is engaging bodhicitta which is obviously a bodhisattva who is no longer thinking about it, but who is actually practising it, such as with the practice of the six perfections and so on. This person is actually in the thick of the action of practising it, and that is what we call entering bodhicitta, or practical bodhicitta.

### **Bodhicitta According to One's Location Upon the Path**

We can recognise the state of bodhicitta through the stage of the development of your bodhicitta.

1. Wishing mind generation of bodhicitta. When you are experiencing wishing bodhicitta you are either on the path of accumulation, or the path of preparation.
2. Pure bodhicitta. This evolves from the first *bhumi* (or level of bodhisattva) to the seventh *bhumi*.
3. Ripening bodhicitta. This is experienced during the paths of eighth, ninth and tenth *bhumis*.
4. The bodhicitta that is completely free of obscuration. Needless to say, this is found at the stage of complete or full enlightenment.

### **Bodhicitta According to the Mode of Development**

Bodhicitta is described in three ways from the point of view of how one approaches its development. There are three analogies used:

1. Like an oarsman
2. Like a shepherd
3. Like a king

These are three possible angles that can be used to develop the true sense of caring which is bodhicitta.

In the first case achieving enlightenment for the sake of all other living beings is approached in a simultaneous fashion, that is, like the oarsman who rows the boat and arrives at the same time as the passengers. The analogy makes clear that one wants to become enlightened along with all other

living beings.

The second approach is as a shepherd would do. First the animals are driven to their destination, and the shepherd then follows them. Similarly the approach to enlightenment is to first of all put all other living beings in the state of enlightenment.

A monarch has first to be enthroned, and then he or she is able to look after his or her subjects. With this third approach one first achieves enlightenment so as to then be able to benefit others.

So there are these three approaches with which one can pursue the development of bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta is also often described by using twenty two examples or models. Geshe-la is not going to go into the twenty two. You can do that for your homework. This pretty much takes care of the generation of bodhicitta through the technique of six causes and one result.

At this point you should reflect that you have the opportunity to talk about such a precious state of mind, one that brings happiness not only to yourself but also to all other living beings. We all seek that state of happiness. So if you do have a reasonable experience of bodhicitta, that is fantastic. If you do not yet have that type of bodhicitta, at least make a mental effort to think that you will do so at some time in your lives.

The next topic in the text is the generation of bodhicitta through exchanging self with others, which we shall begin next week.

To summarise I would like all of you to feel a degree of satisfaction, and to rejoice in the fact that you had the opportunity to listen about something so precious, and so beautiful, as bodhicitta – a state of mind that passionately seeks enlightenment to bring happiness to others.

I received the oral transmission of this particular teaching in Tibet, from the late junior tutor to H.H. the Dalai Lama, Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche. It was very hard work, because every day in the morning I had to walk eight kilometres from Sera Monastery to where this teaching was given, and then come back the same distance without having a decent pair of shoes to wear. So it seems to me now that all that hard work has paid off, in that I have the opportunity and the privilege to be able to bestow this teaching upon you. This teaching thinks of bringing about happiness to others and through it we are all able to develop a certain sense of loving kindness and compassion, and this is the basis from which bodhicitta will grow.

Now the benefits of these qualities of loving kindness and compassion is something that I do not really have to describe to you. You know it yourself. How wonderful it is to feel the sense of caring for others, to have a compassionate mind for others which only thinks about bringing happiness. Happiness is what all living beings are seeking, and this particular teaching is only extolling the virtue of that. That makes me very happy and I hope that it makes you all happy too.

Question: Which of these three approaches to the development of the mind of bodhicitta is best?

Geshe-la: There is not much intrinsic difference to those three approaches, and perhaps it has more to do with what has personal appeal. For Geshe-la perhaps the second one seems like the way to do it: like Chenrezig, to first put all sentient beings in a nice comfortable position, then think about yourself. This seems somehow more to Geshe-la's liking.