

Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

ཅུ་ལམ་རིམ་རྣམས་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



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Please establish the right motivation, which is to think that by receiving these lam rim teachings you will achieve the full state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. For the same goal, generate the strong thought of putting all these teachings into practice.

422.321.2 Training the Mind through Exchanging Self with Others

བདག་གཞན་མཉམ་བཞེད་སློབ་སྦྱོང་བ།

What we have so far covered is deciding to cultivate bodhicitta through the technique of exchanging self with others. The source for our study is *Seven-Point Thought Transformation*, the lineage of which came originally from Lord Buddha. We have also learnt of the special qualities of this thought transformation technique. What follows next is the actual teaching on exchanging self with others, which is presented under seven main headings. [These are:

1. Preliminary teachings
2. Actual teaching on bodhicitta
3. Transforming adverse or unfavourable conditions into favourable ones
4. Explaining how to integrate the practice into one's mind and life
5. Measurement of having trained the mind
6. Pledges of thought transformation
7. Instructions of thought transformation.]

422.321.2 Train in All the Preliminaries

སློབ་འགོ་རྟོག་གྱི་ཚེས་འཇུག་བཞེས།

The root text says 'First train in all preliminary practices'. These preliminary practices are all covered in the stages of the path common to the persons of small and medium scope, so refer to those teachings in the lam rim text.

422.321.22 Actual Teaching on Bodhicitta

བྱང་ཆུབ་གྱི་སེམས་བཞིན་སྦྱང།

This has two sub-headings:

1. 422.321.221 Teaching on Ultimate Bodhicitta Mind

དོན་དམ་སེམས་བསྐྱེད།

2. 422.321 .222 Teaching on Conventional Bodhicitta

ཀུན་རྗེས་སེམས་བསྐྱེད།

For those bodhisattvas with a very sharp mind ultimate bodhicitta is best taught first. If we follow the root text, the order in which these two bodhicittas are taught depends on whether the followers are classified as having a sharp or dull mental capacity. According to the

traditional system of teaching thought transformation, conventional bodhicitta is taught first and this is the order followed in giving this commentary.

422.321.221 Teaching on Ultimate Bodhicitta Mind

Ultimate bodhicitta just refers to a realization of emptiness, which is gained when one enters into first level of bodhisattvas ground¹. A sharp minded bodhisattva will not vow to undertake this practice to achieve full enlightenment, unless they first see that this goal is definitely attainable. So they need to have gained a realization of emptiness before generating conventional bodhicitta mind, because without first understanding emptiness they cannot be sure of the possibility of attaining the state of buddhahood. To see this possibility it is necessary to realise that self-grasping, or the conception that grasps at self can be extinguished from the root, together with its seeds or latencies. Meditation on emptiness is a remedy to remove this conception of self. So it is only with the ascertainment of emptiness that one can see the attainment of the state of buddhahood, or the end of this conception together with its latencies. Therefore it is necessary to teach emptiness to Mahayana bodhisattvas or trainees of sharp mind before teaching conventional bodhicitta.

Of course having a dull or sharp mental capacity is a very relative term. We only say someone's mind is sharp or dull in comparison with other beings. In general when we talk of the mental capacity of all those beings on the path, we categorise bodhisattvas as having a very sharp mind, whilst solitary realisers have a medium sharpness, and hearers are duller. When we refer to sharp minded bodhisattvas as in the preceding paragraphs, they are sharp-minded when compared to other bodhisattvas.

422.321.222 Training in Conventional Bodhicitta

The source of the teaching on conventional bodhicitta is a story of a woman called Maitrakanyaka².

¹ Editor: There are ten bodhisattva grounds or bhumis. One achieves the first bodhisattva ground when one realises emptiness directly. The attainment of this first ground is also simultaneous with that bodhisattva attaining the path of seeing. The next nine bodhisattva grounds occur on the path of meditation.

² Editor: Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey from his *Lama Chopa Commentary* page 174, explains about these sutras that are the source for this teaching on exchanging self for others; "This second approach is taught in the *Do de pal po che (the Buddhavamsaka Sutra)*. There are six volumes of this Sutra and they are quite detailed in the bodhisattva practices... Following these six volumes of *Do de pal po che* Shantideva wrote two brilliant works *The Guide To The Bodhisattva's Way Of Life* and *Compendium of Instruction*."

For the generation of conventional bodhicitta there are two methods:

Seven-Fold Cause and Effect
Exchanging Self with Other

Here the focus is upon the method of exchanging self with other which has five headings:

422.321.222.1 Equalising Self with Others

བདག་གཞན་མཉམ་པར་བསྐྱོམས་པ།

The meditation on equalising oneself with others begins with the steps in the seven-fold cause and effect meditation from equanimity up to loving kindness. Then the meditation on equalising self with other begins by considering the ways in which we are all the same or equal.

The one fundamental way in which all beings are equal is in wanting happiness. One innately wants happiness no matter how small it may be. Likewise one does not want suffering, even the slightest form of suffering. All other beings have this same innate wish for happiness, and to avoid suffering. It is important to understand this from the depths of one's heart: it is not enough to know it theoretically, or to just say it. We must feel from the depths of our heart, that just as deep down in our own heart we want personal happiness and to avoid personal suffering, so do all other beings. We are all equal in having this heartfelt wish for happiness and to avoid suffering.

As you engage in this meditation you must keep in mind that its purpose is to generate the genuine thought of wishing to benefit others. It is said that because we are all equal in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering, there is nothing else that needs to be considered when engaged in the meditation of equalising self with others. In other words, we must realise that the reason we do not have much consideration for the needs of others is because we do not cherish them as we cherish ourselves, and the reason we lack this thought for others is because we have not equalised our self with others.

Not only do we cherish our self, but we always try to live in comfort and happiness while trying to rid ourselves of all unhappiness. We do this for our self but not for all others, because we have not equalised self with others. We must also realise that we are all the same in that, although we desire happiness and we believe that we are creating the causes for this happiness, we are in fact actually destroy these causes for happiness. Conversely, while we do not desire any suffering, we keep creating the causes of that suffering. So in this respect as well, we can see equality of self and others.

In practice, this means that when we see someone experiencing great misery or suffering, we should be able to show them genuine sympathy by understanding that what they are experiencing is totally unwanted, and think 'What a pity they do not have the happiness they wish for, and yet do have the suffering they wish to avoid!'

The focus of this meditation on equality of self with all other beings is the fact of wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. It is said that there is no difference between the methods of exchanging self with others, and

seven-fold cause and effect with respect to the first three causes, which are:

1. Recognising all sentient beings as one's mother
2. Remembering their kindness
3. Repaying their kindness

as well as the last two,

6. Superior intention
7. Bodhicitta

Both methods contain these five elements. What is special in this method of exchanging self with others is that the levels of loving kindness and compassion which it generates are said to be far stronger than the loving kindness and compassion generated using the seven-fold cause and effect method. The main reason that loving kindness and compassion are so strong and intense using the exchange self with others method, is because in it we not only remember the kindness of all other beings when they were our mother, but also when they were not our mother. Therefore this way of remembering kindness is much stronger, and so the love and compassion generated is much stronger. If we consider the way in which we remember the kindness of our mother in this current life, then it is obvious that the more of her kindness that we remember, then the more gratitude we generate.

The *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*, says 'All other beings are more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel. May I cherish all these living beings to achieve the ultimate great purpose.' It is said that as precepts, the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation* and the *Seven Point Thought Transformation* are the same, because they have the same lineage. So if you receive commentary or transmission of one, it is same as receiving a transmission of the other.

422.321.222.2 Disadvantages of Self-Cherishing

བདག་གཅེས་འཛིན་གྱི་སྐྱོན་སྐོར་མ་ནས་བསམ་པ།

Having finished the stage of equalising self with others, when it comes to actually doing this one must face two factors: favourable and unfavourable ones. Unfavourable factors are the faults of a self-cherishing attitude, and favourable factors are the qualities of cherishing others. This heading introduces the topic of thinking about the faults of self-cherishing by every possible means. Prior to next week's teaching you should read the text on the disadvantages of self-cherishing mind.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

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Note on authentication

The original typescript is prepared by Kathi Melnic from Alan Molloy's original transcript, which has been checked against Damien Busby's notes. Adair Bunnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.