

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual we should try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation, thinking that we shall practise these lam rim teachings after receiving them. The aim of our practice is to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings.

422.322 The Ritual Ceremony of Taking Vows (cont)

There are two main parts of the ritual ceremony to generate bodhicitta, the preliminary and the actual. We have finished describing the preliminary part, and now turn to the actual ceremony. The entire ritual ceremony is carried out over two days. The first day covers all the preliminary activities. The second day is the actual ceremony.

The Actual Ceremony of Taking Vows

Just as on the preliminary day, on the second day the ceremony is done in two sessions. In the first session you recite the sutras and make tormas offerings and so on. You begin the second session when the lama is invited to it. After he or she takes the throne the gathering does an extensive practice of making offerings, prostrations and so on. Then the gathering makes a grand mandala offering to the lama as a request for bestowing the bodhisattva's vow, and leading this ritual ceremony to generate bodhicitta mind.

Traditionally as part of this offering mandala you are required to have some object of offering as a substance to generate this bodhicitta mind. While making this mandala offering you hold this object in your hand. Then at the last line of the mandala offering, which says, “Lama, I offer this mandala to you”, you offer this object, and all these offerings are traditionally piled together.

When His Holiness the Dalai Lama conducts this ceremony he usually advises everyone to keep their offerings as a souvenir in remembrance of this occasion. This is so that afterwards you will always remember the occasion, and in particular generating the bodhicitta mind.

Following the mandala offerings the lama then teaches about the benefit of generating bodhicitta mind. This was summed up by Lama Tsong Khapa¹ when he described the bodhicitta mind as being like the trunk (or body) of the supreme path, and the basis for engaging in all the extensive deeds of bodhisattvas; as being like an alchemic liquid which transforms any action that you do into the means of gathering enormous accumulations of merit and wisdom; and as like a treasure which gathers the virtuous merit of all actions. Recognising all the benefits of the bodhicitta mind, all bodhisattva practitioners generate this bodhicitta mind as the essential core of their practice.

As Lama Tsong Khapa said, we should try to remember and review all the benefits of bodhicitta mind at this point. We are

also advised to engage in a reflecting meditation on the entire stages of the path. This important lam rim meditation begins with contemplating the preciousness and the rarity of human life. It proceeds through every stage of the path in such a way that it becomes deeply embedded as a core element in your mind.

The next thing is to establish a visualisation of all sentient beings in the aspect of human beings surrounding oneself, imagining all male beings as one's father and all the females as one's mother. Try to generate this visualisation as clearly as possible.

If you are receiving this vow directly from your spiritual Guru, then of course here you have to visualise your spiritual Guru in the aspect of Shakyamuni Buddha. Surrounding the Guru-Buddha visualise the 1000 buddhas of this fortunate aeon as well as all the objects of refuge. Imagine the entire space filled with infinite numbers of refuge objects.

Next, one has to kneel on one's right knee and place both hands in a prayer gesture at heart. Kneeling on one's right knee in this way adopts the posture used by one of the principal disciples of the Lord Buddha, Rabjor, who always knelt this way when receiving discourses.

The first prayer which one recites is the prayer of taking refuge and generating the bodhicitta mind. This is the prayer which we normally say beginning:

I go for refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha,
Until I achieve complete enlightenment.

The first line shows the three objects of refuge, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Of course it goes without saying that we have to recognise these three objects of refuge in the context of the uncommon Mahayana objects of refuge.

This first line also indicates the manner of taking refuge. As we discussed not long ago in another session the three objects of refuge can be identified in terms of the resultant three objects of refuge and the causal three objects of refuge. Accordingly when you take refuge in these three resultant objects of refuge you have to recognise those three as your future spiritual attainment with wholehearted faith in that as your future attainment. The causal three objects of refuge are recognised as a perfect means to achieve that future attainment, of actualising the resultant objects of refuge within oneself.

The second line of the refuge prayer says, “until I achieve complete enlightenment”. This indicates the length of time of taking refuge. That is, you take refuge in the three objects of refuge until you achieve the omniscient mind of a Buddha, until you manifest the Dharmakaya or the Truth Body of a Buddha.

In the first line, the “I” indicates the person who takes refuge in the Three Jewels, and “go for refuge” indicates the actual nature of taking refuge in the Three Jewels as a result of generating the two causes for taking refuge. The main significance of taking refuge in the Three Jewels is to distinguish one's path from the perverted or wrong path.

The last two lines of prayer of going for refuge and generating bodhicitta are:

¹ Editor: *Concise Meaning of the Stages of the Path* by Lama Tsong Khapa: “Producing bodhi mind is the king post of the Mahayana path, the base and support of Bodhisattvas' great deeds, a philosopher's stone transmuting all into merit and wisdom, at reasure of merit assembling glorious virtue. Understanding this, the heroic offspring of Buddha hold the precious bodhi-mind as their central meditation. The reverend lama practised like this; those desiring liberation should do likewise.”

Through the virtuous merit that I gather by practising giving and so forth,
May I achieve the state of enlightenment for the sake of all beings.

These two lines are mainly to generate the bodhicitta mind. They also show that the person who is generating this bodhicitta mind is oneself. "Through the virtuous merit that I collect by practising giving and so forth" indicates all the virtuous actions that you create, including all the perfections of giving and the morality and so on, and the merit one creates by engaging in such deeds of morality and so on.

These virtuous actions are a cause to be dedicated to generating this bodhicitta mind to benefit all other beings. This shows the purpose for which the bodhicitta mind is generated. In other words, it indicates the aspiration to benefit other beings.

The final line says, "May I achieve the complete enlightenment or the state of Buddhahood". This shows the ultimate goal that you seek with this bodhicitta mind; what you are aspiring to achieve is this state of Buddhahood. The "May I" in this line implies that you are praying. It is said that the term praying further implies the actual bodhicitta mind.

This prayer of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta should be said three times. The two lines generating bodhicitta mind are to distinguish the path that one is following from the inferior path of the lesser scope. It is very beneficial even to recite this prayer of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta as our regular daily prayer.

Then aspiring or wishing bodhicitta is generated, and one vows to maintain this bodhicitta mind. To generate this mind in the ritual ceremony we use this verse from the Six-Session Yoga:

I generate the bodhicitta mind
Even at the risk of my life
I shall maintain this until I reach the state of Buddhahood
In order to liberate all migrating beings
From the fear of samsara and nirvana

This is to generate the aspiring bodhicitta mind.

Next both the aspiring and the engaging bodhicitta mind are generated at the same time. The ritual prayer for generating both the aspiring and the engaging bodhicitta mind is also in the Six-Session Yoga. Most of you are familiar with the two verses beginning with, "Oh Gurus and the Bodhisattvas, please pay attention to me"². If you want an explanation of these two verses you can refer to any commentary on the Six Session Yoga, and also to the commentary which Geshe Doga gave on a weekend course not long ago.

These verses are said three times and at the end of this one has taken the vow.

After taking this vow you recite a verse, the original source of which is Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. The words are also in the Six-Session Yoga.³ Just to briefly mention the meaning of the lines "Now my life is made meaningful since I have become a bodhisattva". This is a

statement rejoicing in the act of generating bodhicitta mind and taking the bodhisattva's vow.

Then one repeats after the Guru a verse that concerns maintaining all the bodhisattva's deeds and practices, and safeguarding all the bodhisattva's vows. This verse is also found in the Six-Session Yoga. It clearly says that what you have to think is, "Since I have now taken this bodhisattva vow, I shall safeguard this without bringing any corruption, or stain to the best of my capacity"⁴. This verse is also repeated.

The lam rim commentary text says that the power of giving rise to such a bodhicitta mind is so great that that it can cause the earth to shake in the infinite land, the field of the buddhas in the ten directions. It can even cause the throne of the Buddha to shake. It is said that when such a sign occurs in the pure land of the buddhas the retinue of the Buddha will ask Him, "What was the cause of this movement?" Then the Buddha will reply, "This is a sign that indicates that in a solitary place called Chusang Ritro (which Geshe-la says is not far from Sera Monastery) under the guidance of a lama called Jampa Tenzin Trinlay Gyatso, a great number of followers have generated bodhicitta mind. The force of generating that bodhicitta mind causes this movement to happen here."

After this some prayers are recited as a cause to safeguard this bodhicitta mind and the vow that has been taken.

Finally comes the dedication of the merit. For dedicating the merits, the prayer of the Maitreya Buddha is recited. When reciting that dedication prayer of Maitreya Buddha the Guru holds a portion of the students' offering in his hand, and the attendants hold the rest of what the students offered.

During these dedication prayers you pray that whatever virtuous merit you have accumulated by generating bodhicitta mind, or taking bodhisattva vows, or creating virtuous actions is not lost. You entrust this merit with Maitreya Buddha asking him to always take care of the root virtues you have accumulated in the past, present and future.

You pray that, "When Maitreya Buddha appears in the world as a supreme manifestation performing the supreme deeds of such a manifestation, may I be amongst the forefront of his disciples and be included in the prophesy of achieving Buddhahood".

While reciting the dedication prayer the Guru throws rice or flowers into the air. What is thrown represents the substance you have offered to the Buddha. Imagine that the offerings thrown in the air go to Maitreya in the pure land, and fall there as the eight auspicious symbols or seven royal offerings. Maitreya Buddha accepts those offerings with delight and on your behalf makes prayers and so forth. The prayer is two verses from Maitreya's Prayer, which are recited three times. The first verse begins, "Maitreya Buddha when you come to Bodhgaya, open my mind just like the rays of the sun can open the lotus flower". The next line asks to be included among all the fortunate beings who are within the circle of the Maitreya Buddha.

The next verse says:

May the Maitreya Buddha with great delight place his right hand on my head, and predict when I shall achieve Buddhahood.

I pray that I achieve the state of Buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings.

² O Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Gurus please listen
To what I now say from the depths of my heart.
Just as all Buddhas of the past have developed
The thought of enlightenment, true bodhicitta,
Then practised its stages of graded development
Following the trainings for all Buddhas' sons.
May I too, for the sake of all beings,
Develop bodhicitta and follow the trainings
Exactly as all bodhisattvas have done

³ At this moment my life has become truly fruitful,
For, having attained an endowed human body
Today I have developed the true Buddha essence –
Bodhicitta and thus have become Buddha's son

⁴ Applying now any skilled means whatsoever
May I always accord what I do with this essence
(And follow the actions of the Buddhas' sons).
May I never confuse with this faultless essence
(Any teachings that lack this Enlightening Thought).

We finish here. Next week we shall continue with how to safeguard the bodhisattva vows, which we have already received.

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