

Ornament for Clear Realisation

༄༅། །བསྟན་བཅོས་མངོན་པར་རྟོགས་པའི་བྱན།

Commentary by Venerable Geshe Lobsang Dorje

Translated by Sandup Tsering

15 October 2015

We are currently discussing bodhicitta and our discussion comes under five main headings:

- I.1.1. The meaning of bodhicitta or mind generation
- I.1.2. The causes for generating bodhicitta
- I.1.3. The divisions of bodhicitta
- I.1.4. The benefits of generating bodhicitta
- I.1.5. How to generate bodhicitta.

Of these five main headings for the presentation of bodhicitta we are currently on the fifth – how to generate bodhicitta – which we started last week.

I.1.5. HOW TO GENERATE BODHICITTA

There are two methods: one, the sevenfold cause and effect method, which came from Atisha, and then there is the method of exchanging self with others, which came from Shantideva. As to the method of the sevenfold cause and effect, I am sure many of you have received many teachings on that. If you want more details, you should refer to Tsongkhapa's *Great Expositions on the Stages of the Path*.

I.1.5.2. Method of equalising and exchanging self with others

Meaning of equalising

Tonight, we will continue with the second method of exchanging self with others. This is literally called 'equalising and exchanging self with others'. The meaning of 'equalising' here refers mainly to how you and all other sentient beings are equal or the same in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. On a coarse level, it means that, just as you don't want to be abused, criticised or hit, you should understand that others also do not want to receive such harms. So, others and you are equal in that way. On a more subtle level, it means that you and all sentient beings are equal in being subject to all-pervasive suffering nature. On an even more subtle level, it means understanding that you and all sentient beings are equal in possessing the obstructions, such as the obstructions to omniscient mind.

Meaning of exchanging

Now we move on to the meaning of 'exchanging' in the context of the method of exchanging self with others. Here 'exchanging' refers to exchanging or replacing the object of the two kinds of mental attitudes we possess. We have the self-cherishing mind – the observed object which is the **self** – and the mind of disregarding or forsaking other beings – the observed object which is **other sentient beings**. Therefore, here 'exchange' means exchanging the two observed objects of these two mental attitudes, the outcome being that we will have the mind of cherishing other sentient beings and the mind of forsaking the self.

Why do we need to cherish other beings?

The next question is: why do we need to practise this method of exchanging self with others? To understand this we need

to understand the root cause or the main source of all our problems, and our inability to accomplish what we want to accomplish or to find happiness, even though that is something we have been looking for since beginningless time.

In our current life, the reason we go to school, get an education, a job and so forth, is to find happiness; that's the main aim. Likewise, since beginningless time we have always been looking for happiness; not only looking but we have been putting in a lot of effort. Despite that, we have not found even short-term happiness, let alone the long-term supreme happiness of liberation or enlightenment. So, in order to find happiness and end suffering we need to investigate and recognise their causes and conditions. We will find that the main cause is very much related to our mental attitude of cherishing oneself and forsaking other beings as the source of suffering, while cherishing others and forsaking the self or overcoming self-cherishing is the source of happiness. We therefore must apply the method of exchanging self with others to accomplish what we want to accomplish and get rid of what we want to get rid of. As much as possible, we must develop an understanding of the disadvantages of the self-cherishing mind and the advantages of cherishing others.

As part of this practice, we can engage in the give and take meditation by imagining giving our happiness to others and taking their suffering upon ourselves. Shantideva's text, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* says, 'Those who wish to quickly free both self and other beings should practise this noble secret – the exchanging of self for others.' In this quote, the method of exchanging self for others is called the 'noble secret', implying that it is specifically relevant only for those with a sharp mind.

Furthermore, Shantideva also says, 'Whatever happiness there is in the world, all comes from wishing happiness for others, and whatever suffering there is in the world, all comes from wishing oneself to be happy'. Again, this line points to how all the suffering and miseries, all the unwanted things in our life, result from our self-cherishing mind and attitude. Whereas all the happiness and goodness we are looking for in our lives results from the mind of cherishing other beings. If we think about it, we can understand how even the things that we normally pursue in life – wealth, reputation and so forth – can't be accomplished without depending on others.

Kindness of other beings

To cultivate the mind of cherishing other beings we need to acknowledge their kindness and cultivate a sense of gratitude through various ways and reasonings. Every goodness we have and thing we have achieved is dependent on others, and all because of their kindness and support. Recognising the kindness of other beings helps us to cultivate compassion for them and to apply this method of exchanging self with others. You may think, 'Why do I have to be nice to others? Whatever I receive from them or accomplish through them is not because they care about me or intend to help me'. In other words, 'Why do I care about others? They do not care about me or have a thought of helping me'.

We should, however, cherish and value other beings and remember their kindness. An inanimate object is of value and beneficial to us and is cherished as a special or valuable thing, even if the object doesn't hold any caring thought of benefitting us. The fact of the matter is that everything we have is dependent on others and dependent on the effort of

other beings. Speaking from the point of view of the Dharma teachings, the precious human life of leisure and endowments, and all the suitable resources we currently have are the result of our Dharma practice, such as the moral ethics of refraining from harmful actions, generosity, patience etc. We need to understand and recognise that it is because of other beings that we are able to perform those Dharma practices.

Life is too short

We can also motivate ourselves to make the best use of our life by reminding ourselves of how our life is subject to impermanence; that sooner or later we must all die. The time of death can be at any time. Therefore, from the point of view of impermanence, between now and when death comes, when we think about it in terms of a timeframe it really is very short, even if we live a long life. We must think that during that short period, for both ourselves and others to have a happy life we must share love and be kind and goodhearted towards each other. On the other hand, if we hold hatred and animosity towards others, always arguing with them, then the outcome in that short lifetime will be full of suffering for ourselves and will cause suffering for others.

Our situation is likened to prisoners who haven't got much time left before their execution. If, during the short period of time they have left we see them always fighting and hating each other, we would feel very sorry and wonder why they are being nasty to each other as they have such a short time left to live. In fact, our own life situation is no different from theirs in that we too have only a short time left to live.

The more reasons and benefits we see in applying this method of exchanging self with others - developing loving kindness and so forth - the more we will be motivated to apply this method. To find out more about the advantages of cherishing other beings and the disadvantages of self-cherishing we should study Shantideva's text, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

Regarding the heading How to Generate Bodhicitta or Mind Generation, there are three subheadings: method of generating bodhicitta, measurement of mind generation and ritual of maintaining mind generation.

1.1.5.2. Measurement of mind generation

Having finished the first, we now move to the next, which is the measurement of mind generation or bodhicitta: how do we determine that the bodhicitta we generate within us is genuine or uncontrived? Following the training in bodhicitta as guided in the instructional scripture, we gain a special experience which has an overwhelming effect on our mind, to the point where bodhicitta arises spontaneously and effortlessly; this is a true and uncontrived mind generation. Uncontrived means not dependent on your effort; it arises naturally, instinctively or spontaneously. The moment a person generates such bodhicitta, he or she enters the Mahayana path and is called a bodhisattva.

In relation to the difference between contrived bodhicitta and uncontrived bodhicitta, an example is given using the sweetness inside sugarcane. A sutra called *Requested by One with Superior Intentions*, says, 'the bark of sugarcane has no essence but the taste to be desired is inside it - the core'.

Questions about mind generation

The causes for generating bodhicitta generally fall under the two methods: the sevenfold cause and effect, and the method

of exchanging self for others. However, in addition to these two methods we have also found some other causes, such as four circumstantial conditions to arouse bodhicitta: simply seeing the magnificent body of a buddha, witnessing the inconceivable power of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, compassion towards suffering sentient beings and finding the decline of Buddhadharma unbearable. Another cause to cultivate bodhicitta is by just knowing that the Buddha's teaching is quickly declining, and by seeing that, you are motivated, and have an urge to do something for the Buddhadharma. These four can serve as a condition to activate or intensify the bodhicitta which you have already generated. It is, however, not necessary that you meet those causes to generate bodhicitta as you can generate it just by depending on either the sevenfold cause and effect method or the exchanging self with others method.

Then this question arises: if it is not necessary to depend on those four conditions or causes to arouse bodhicitta, then why are these four conditions mentioned? What is the point of mentioning these four as causes for the arising of bodhicitta? There is a good reason or explanation for that, which is that these four conditions can serve as circumstances to arouse or remind us of bodhicitta. For example, if you begin each day with the practice of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta with either of the methods, then as you get on with your daily chores, seeing an image of Buddha can remind you of your practice, particularly bodhicitta, and as a result you generate bodhicitta again. Likewise, if you observe any sentient beings who are afflicted with great suffering, you generate compassion and bodhicitta.

What we should notice here is that the main cause for generating bodhicitta is your previous habituation with it but seeing the holy images or the suffering of other sentient beings acts as a condition to activate the bodhicitta that you have trained yourself in previously.

We have said here that when we generate bodhicitta we enter the path. So, bodhicitta is a spiritual path.

However, we can say we can meditate on bodhicitta before entering the path. So, the question arises: how can someone who has not entered the path meditate on the path? What does that actually mean? In monastic debate we maintain that a person who has not entered into the path can't meditate on the path. However, a person who has not generated bodhicitta can meditate on bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the path, but just because someone meditates on bodhicitta doesn't necessarily mean that they meditate on the path. For someone who has not generated bodhicitta we say this: you can meditate on bodhicitta, then what does that mean? What it means is that you are taking into your mind the similar aspect of the bodhicitta mind.

Another question I raised in the last session is: what is the difference between the two methods of generating bodhicitta? Is it necessary to apply the method of exchanging self with others to cultivate bodhicitta through the sevenfold cause and effect method? Likewise, is it necessary to apply the sevenfold cause and effect method to generate bodhicitta through the method of exchanging self with others? Regarding this, we find in Pabongka's *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* that it is not necessary to apply the method of exchanging self for others to generate bodhicitta through the sevenfold cause and effect method. However, it says it is necessary to apply the sevenfold cause and effect method in

order to generate bodhicitta through the method of exchanging self with others. In other words, to generate bodhicitta through the method of exchanging self with others you also need to apply or include the sevenfold cause and effect. Pabongka's lamrim simply says the method of exchanging self with others should be completed with or include the sevenfold cause and effect but doesn't specify any of the seven causes.

You can discuss what is said in the *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* and whether the method of exchanging self for others is completed with the sevenfold cause and effect. What is the meaning of 'completed'? Should it include recognising all beings as one's mother? If not, then why and how do you generate bodhicitta? It is important to raise any doubts or questions in the discussion. Even if you don't have any doubts or questions, it is still worthwhile sharing your view with others. Everybody may have different views, so your view may not accord with the view of others.

I.1.5.1. Ritual of maintaining bodhicitta

I am going to go through this very briefly. Essentially, the ritual is about taking the bodhisattva vows. There are a few things we need to consider here. First, if we are taking the vow directly from someone then we need to know a suitable or qualified person from whom to receive it. In short, a qualified preceptor must possess the vows. Instead of depending on an actual person or preceptor, we can also mentally visualise an assembly of buddhas, bodhisattvas and so forth and take the vow from them as well.

The next is to know who can take the bodhisattva vows or precepts. As we learnt, bodhicitta can newly arise in the continuum of all six migrating beings. The six levels or types of sentient beings are all suitable life bases to receive the bodhisattva vows. Then, as part of the ritual of maintaining bodhicitta, there is a section on the procedure of taking the precepts or vows. I won't go into the details here because many of you would have taken the precepts from His Holiness the Dalai Lama and should be familiar with it. There is a standard ritual formula which you must recite to take the vow; I suggest you read that.

With this we have now completed the teaching on bodhicitta. I thought that before we move on to the next major topic that we have a week's teaching break; so, there won't be a teaching next week. Instead, there will be an online discussion, to be organised by Jeremy.

Because you have limited discussion time, you won't be able to cover everything we have studied so far. My suggestion is that you primarily focus on bodhicitta, and then whatever other areas of interest, depending on your time. If you have any unresolved questions, you are welcome to bring them to me at the next teaching session. As part of the discussion, it is also good for people to use the opportunity to share their views about the topic.

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Llysse Velez
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute