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A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (*Bodhisattvacaryāvatara*)

We are presently engaged in placement or fixative meditation and do this we need to focus on an object of observation. Since we are beginners, if we do this with our eyes closed there is a risk that the object of observation will not be clear and we might even fall asleep, so it is better to keep our eyes half-open. Now, therefore our goal is to have a relaxed mind so that we are able to listen to these teachings on the precepts of the Bodhisattva. For this we need a clear and a pure mind, an uncluttered mind, and we should generate the resolve to benefit others, to help others in an unbiased, impartial fashion without differentiating between those who are close and those who are far away from us.

Geshe-la will at present take your questions. He would appreciate questions on the topics covered last week during the Wednesday class. Questions are very important.

It's the gateway to something very major for us because we have received many teachings on the *Lamrim*, on the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*. In other words, the thought of Definite Emergence, Bodhichitta, and the correct view of emptiness. But actually, teachings we can get on the Internet, we can get from all sorts of sources. It is the questions which lead to the deepening of our understanding.

Q: Geshe-la previously mentioned that probably all Bodhichitta is generated by the equalisation and interchange of self and others. Does that mean that the sevenfold cause and effect method cannot quite lead to the generation of Bodhichitta?

A: Yes. Generally speaking, there are two instructions to generate Bodhichitta. The sevenfold causal instruction and the instruction of the equalisation and interchange of self and others. Now, regarding the instruction of the equalisation and interchange of self and others, *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand* states that this instruction cannot be put in practice before the three first steps of the sevenfold instruction have been trained in. In other words, recognizing all sentient beings as one's mothers of yore, recollecting their kindness and repaying their kindness.

Therefore one must train initially in the three first stages of the sevenfold cause and effect instructions, and then one trains in the equalisation and interchange of self and others. So apart from these three first stages of the sevenfold causal instruction there is no difference between the equalisation and interchange of self and others and the sevenfold causal instruction. Now on the basis of these three first stages of the sevenfold causal instruction one gives rise to affectionate love, the Great Love which beholds sentient beings. What would this correspond to in the equalisation and interchange of self and others? It would correspond to the generation of cherishing others or altruism; they are quite similar.

So the uncontrived Bodhichitta generated in dependence on the equalisation and interchange of self and others does encounter or connect if you wish with that generated by the sevenfold causal instruction. The reciprocal is not true as is stated

in *Liberation the Palm of your Hand*. In other words, the Bodhicitta generated by the sevenfold causal instruction does not connect or link to that generated by the equalisation and interchange of self and others but that is something that we will look into later.

Q: Geshela also said in the past that equalisation and interchange of self and others is superior in that is very difficult to realise and accept that all sentient beings have been our mothers?

A: So, regarding the mode of generation of the equalisation Bodhicitta by the equalisation and interchange of self and others and bodhicitta by the sevenfold causal instruction, the mode of generation by the equalisation and interchange of self and others is somewhat faster. It is somewhat faster because it is more difficult to generate the experience of all sentient beings as having been one's mothers of yore. For this reason, Śantideva states in stanza 120 in chapter 8 **Thus whomsoever wishes to quickly afford protection To both self and other beings should practice that [this] holy secret The [equalization of an interchange of self and others] exchanging of self for others.** This suggests that this approach is swift, doesn't it?

Q: Can a superior being actually take on the sufferings of others?

A: No, there's no relation with being a particularly superior or exalted being. You're referring to Ayra beings actually and actually there is a verse in the *Seven Stanzas of Mind Training* which says, meditate on the kindness of all. So this refers to meditating on the kindness of all sentient beings towards us and when we do this, then we generate naturally this strong wish to give them our happiness and for their suffering to mature on us. But neither of these is in actuality possible.

In the mode of generation of Bodhicitta, the sevenfold causal instruction, the crux is this realisation that all sentient beings have been our mothers of yore and as a result of this, the deep wish to benefit them arises. Whereas in the equalisation and interchange of self and others, we generate the realisation that others help us or benefit us directly or indirectly and as a result of this, we wish to benefit them in return.

When Atisha came to Tibet, he commented, until I had come to Tibet, I had never encountered so-called Bodhisattvas who did not meditate on love and compassion and at the period in Tibet, many practitioners who identified themselves as Bodhisattvas but did not know how to meditate on love or compassion. So, if we do not know how to meditate on love and compassion, we are in that league ourselves. Then we risk to be in that very situation, or most of us can enumerate quite easily the sequences in which one trains in the equalisation of self and others. First one trains in equalities and reflects through numerous doors on the force of self-cherishing, the advantage of self-cherishing others and so forth. Likewise, most can recite quite easily the sequence of the sevenfold casual generation of bodhicitta, realising that all sentient beings are once mothers of yore, recollecting their

kindness, repaying their kindness and so forth. But when it comes to actually generating these states or experiences, then there is nothing really. Then we are in the situation Atīśa mentioned in which he said, I came to Tibet and I encountered bodhisattvas who don't know how to meditate on love and compassion.

This statement is quoted by Je Tsong kha pa in *Lamrim Chenmo*. Atīśa stated one must train in Bodhicitta gradually. In other words, one must generate Bodhicitta gradually progressing through the stages, for instance giving rise to affectionate love, great love and so forth. Then in our own cases we know the sequence of generation of for instance the sevenfold casual instruction or the equalisation and interchange of self and others but when we actually observe our minds to see what has been generated then we are in the very similar situation to that of those Bodhisattvas of Tibet. There is nothing really. So, we have to train our mind gradually because right now it's only verbal. Then in the *Lamrim* this is presented in terms of a threefold outline.

- 1 Generating the mind which strives for the welfare of others
- 2 Generating the mind that strives for enlightenment and
- 3 The effects or the result of training.

This threefold outline is presented in the *Lamrim Chenmo* in the context of generating Bodhicitta. The two first outlines of this threefold outline, the stages of giving rise to trying to benefit others and the stages of giving rise to the wish for Full Enlightenment are both contained implicitly within the definition of Bodhicitta which Geshela has given many times; A special mind endowed with the two wishes. Then to this we add the final outline, the result of this training. The first outline, the stages in training the mind and striving for the welfare of others includes, first, the presentation of the Great Love, which wishes to give rise to happiness within others, and secondly, the presentation of the Great Compassion, which wishes to free all sentient beings from suffering. To give rise to both Great Love and Great Compassion a preliminary foundation is indispensable, just like a foundation of a building and this is the equanimity which does not differentiate between those who are close and those who are distant.

Then in the stanza we actually saw last time in *Bodhisattvacaryāvatara*, stanza 113, you have a verse which refers precisely to this. **Having seen the mistakes in (cherishing) myself** [self-cherishing]. This refers to understanding the forms of self-cherishing through numerous lines of reasoning. Now please reflect carefully on the fact that all the stanzas from stanza 113 back to stanza 90 refer to reflecting on the equality of self and others. Stanza 90 follows stanza 89 as you remember which praises the **excellences** of living as a hermit. These twenty-three stanzas have already been explained. These twenty-three or so stanzas all refer or teach how to meditate on the equality of self and others.

So the equanimity which is referred to here is the equanimity which views all sentient beings as equally wishing for happiness and equally not wishing for suffering. There are two equanimities actually, which are presented here. The other one is the equanimity which does not differentiate between those who are close to us and those who are far away or

distant. Now here, the equanimity which does not differentiate between certain beings which are close and towards whom we feel affection, and those which are distant and to whom we feel animosity or anger is particularly important because without such an equanimity it is not possible to generate great compassion or love. This is therefore an indispensable preliminary. Without this equanimity which does not differentiate between certain beings to whom we feel close and towards whom we have attachment, and those to whom we feel distant and towards whom we have animosity, it is not possible to create or to generate affection and love.

So without that, one is in the situation we are in at present in which the empathy which we have is biased, prejudiced, slanted empathy. It's an empathy towards those towards whom we feel close, our relatives, friends, boyfriends, girlfriends, and so forth, and it is an empathy which is absent with respect to those towards whom we feel animosity or hatred. So, such an empathy is an empathy which reacts immediately with strong emotions when those to whom we feel close, the friends, partners, and relatives of this life are hurt, and it's totally indifferent when those to whom we feel distant are hurt. If we are able to reduce the factor of desire, of attachment, which is present in this empathy, we can then move towards something close to equanimity.

Now the Great Compassion within the mind stream of the Buddhas, for instance, within the mind stream of Buddha Śākyamūni is a Great Compassion which engages equally with respect to all sentient beings without discriminating between the close and the distant. It is an equanimous Great Compassion, an equal Great Compassion to the difference of our compassion, which is heavily prejudiced, biased towards those towards whom we feel close and not towards the others. Likewise, the Great Compassion within the mind stream of Bodhisattvas, on the various Paths of Accumulation, Preparation, Seeing, and so forth, is a Great Compassion which engages all sentient beings without any distinction or differentiation between the close and the distant. It is as a result of the perfect practice of equanimity that their compassion is able to engage all sentient beings without differentiation between the close and the distant. It is as a result of the perfect practice of equanimity that compassion is able to engage all sentient beings without differentiation between the close and the distant. Therefore, equanimity is extremely important. This capacity to view all sentient beings, all people, in an equal fashion without this differentiating.

So therefore the indispensable preliminary to training in the equalisation and interchange of self and others is the practice of equanimity and the foundation of this equanimity is the equanimity which does not discriminate between those who are close to us and to whom we feel affection and those who are distant from us and to whom we feel animosity or anger. Without this, the compassion which we create is biased compassion, prejudiced or slanted compassion. It's a compassion that reacts emotionally and intensely to the suffering of those who are close to us and does not react at all to the suffering of those we feel animosity towards. This biased prejudiced compassion must be countered. The antidotes must be applied to it and the way to do so is to reflect on roots of the affection we feel towards those we are close to, relatives, friends, boyfriends, girlfriends and so forth and to reduce this attachment and eventually eliminate it because it is an obstruction.

So, to give rise to this equanimity which views all sentient beings equally which does not discriminate between sentient beings, we have to eliminate this attachment to those who we are close to us and this animosity towards those who are distant from us and to eliminate the attachment towards those who are close to us, how can we proceed? This is after all an obstacle. We can do this really through thinking about equanimity, how else? So let us take four minutes to reflect on how we can counter the attachment we feel towards our relatives and friends of this life. What can we do to counter this attachment?

Let's take an example. Let's imagine for instance, it happens actually, that there's just been a great earthquake in Tibet in an area. Then what happens? If we have a relative in that area, we immediately think of that relative, don't we? We just engaged in some analytical meditation on how to reduce attachments to our friends and relatives. What solutions did you come up with? Please explain in a few words, please.

Student response

- Reflecting on impermanence would help as our attachment is predicated on the erroneous assumption that we will be able to remain attached to this person as though by an unbreakable umbilical cord. Of course, this is not true, and so soon we must separate anyhow. Why then cling in the present?

That's very good and there's actually a verse which Geshela had already presented in the eighth chapter of Śantideva's *Bodhisattvacaryāvatara* which reads, in an instant, an enemy can become a friend. This is something we have direct experience of. Enemies can become friends, and friends can become enemies¹.

As you remember, in the presentation of how to generate calm abiding in the eighth chapter, Śantideva points out that first we have to abandon attachment to the exterior environment. In other words, the world we live in, houses, buildings, and so forth and after this, we abandon attachment to the essence. In other words, the living beings, relatives, and so forth and on this basis, we give rise to an experience of Definite Emergence.

As you remember, in the *Seven Points of Mind Training*, Geshe Chekawa states first train in the preliminaries, and the preliminaries refer to the Path shared with the Being of the Small and the Middling Scope, and specifically to giving rise to the thought of Definite Emergence. Now, once we have given rise to the thought of Definite Emergence, then it is probably easier to give rise to an equanimity which does not discriminate between those who are close to us and those who are distant from us. At present, since we have not generated such a thought of Definite Emergence, for us this is difficult. So, the first question we have to ask is how precisely can we counter attachment and affection towards friends and relatives?

We therefore have to try to give rise to a stable experience of the thought of Definite Emergence. Without such a stable experience of the thought of Definite Emergence, it is difficult to generate an equanimity which does not discriminate between those who are

¹ One moment they are friends, And in the next instant they become enemies. Chapter 8 verse 10 [added by transcriber]

close to us and those who are distant from us. So, we have to put effort in generating this stable thought of definite emergence. To give rise to a love which is focused on all sentient beings equally, and to a compassion which is focused on all sentient beings equally, we need as a preliminary foundation an equanimity which does not differentiate between them. Without that, it is very difficult to give rise to these states of mind.

An example will make this clear. The relation between equanimity, love and compassion is compared in Kamalashila's *Middling Stages of Meditation, Bhāvanākrama* to a field. This passage is quoted in *Lamrim Chemo* in the context of the presentation of training in Bodhicitta. The example of the field actually can be transformed or transferred to buildings, perhaps it will be easier to understand. In Australia people typically will erect two- or three-story buildings. Before they erect such a building, what precisely do they do? Well, they have to lay the foundation and to do this they will level the soil and they will let it rest for a while, a couple of months or something. Then they will systematically let the ground, the soil, rest for a couple of months. No one builds at once. Why do they do this? Well, they do this to allow the soil to become equal in level. Geshe-la has never seen anyone build at once. Then, once the soil is level, they will lay down the steel armature, the rebar, I believe it's called, pour the concrete, and then on the spaces put the pillars and erect the various stories. So, this really compares point by point with first training in equanimity, then on that basis, training in affectionate love, then on that basis, training in compassion. Think about it.

So, the most important thing is first for the foundation to be perfectly level and this is very similar to the notion that first equanimity must be generated as a foundation for the other states of mind. Now, in Kamalashila's *Bhāvanākrama*, the *Middling Stages of Meditation*, the example given is obviously not building a house, but how a peasant prepares a field for sowing. So, have a look in *Lamrim Chemo*, it's in the section on how to train in Bodhicitta, it will be volume two of the English translation. So, Geshela will stop here for today, and we have definitely accumulated roots of virtue. We should dedicate them from the depths of our hearts to peace and happiness in this world of ours.