

English Dharma talk  
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## **A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Bodhicaryavatara) – Class 6**

By Shantideva

Why do we have to recite prayers before we begin class?

We usually begin by reciting the Praise to Shakyamuni Buddha, and Heart Sutra, and Three Principal Aspects of the Path.

Why don't we just begin class directly?

Praise to Shakyamuni Buddha because Buddha is source of Buddhist teachings. In order to reconnect to Buddha's kindness, to praise him, we recite this in the beginning.

Heart Sutra: to dispel obstacles that can possibly arise. What kind of obstacles can arise? Outer and inner obstacles. Outer obstacles refer to hindrances that are caused by humans and non-humans. Inner obstacles refer to the mind being very scattered when listening to teachings. Mind can't focus on the meaning of the teachings. Mind's distracted. To prevent these obstacles, we recite the Heart Sutra.

Why do we recite the Three Principles of the Path? To remind ourselves: renunciation, bodhicitta, and the correct view. Without renunciation, then, our practice will not become true Dharma. It will not become genuine spiritual practice, because renunciation involves aspiring for liberation based on wanting to get out of cyclic existence, contaminated existence. If we don't have renunciation, then whatever we do will not become genuine Dharma practice.

The next is mind of enlightenment. If we don't have this mind, even though the teaching is a Mahayana teaching, we may listen with a lesser motivation. We may listen so we just help ourselves. We have a selfish motivation. We just want to attain something for this life, or a good rebirth next life. To be Mahayana teaching, needs bodhicitta motivation.

Correct view: without it, we won't be able to make much progress on the path. Gate gate paragate parasamgate Bodhi svaha. You need to progress from path to path. Such progression is contingent on you being able to eliminate the obscurations of the lower levels progressively. So without the correct view, we won't be able to abandon the obscurations and as a result of that, we won't be able to move from a path to a higher path.

After that, we recite the prayer of refuge and bodhicitta. By going for refuge to the three jewels and generating bodhicitta, we allow the Dharma we practice to become pure Dharma practice, both from the side of the teacher and from that of the student. By generating this pure motivation, we make the Dharma a pure Dharma practice.

So the practice of refuge and bodhicitta has 2 parts. First is identification of who the objects of refuge are: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. We generate this mind wanting to go to refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha until we attain enlightenment. Second part of the prayer is generating the mind of enlightenment. In past classes, we went through the definition of bodhicitta, but let us review it to refresh our memories.

In the past, there was a question related to bodhicitta, so in the explanation of what bodhicitta is, perhaps I can answer it also by the way.

After class one time I asked the students what they understood from my explanation of bodhicitta and I wasn't sure if they clearly grasped this concept of the mind of enlightenment and so I thought I should do another explanation.

Full definition of bodhicitta can be quite technical. Let me posit a more concise definition that nevertheless contains the full meaning of bodhicitta. The definition of bodhicitta is: the wish to attain enlightenment so one can place all sentient beings in the state of nirvana.

This wish is in the last 2 lines of refuge prayer  
Dag gi jin sog gyi bay tsog nam kyi  
Dro la phen chir sang gye chub par shog

By the merit of practicing the 6 perfections,  
May I attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings

One understands if one brings about the ultimate benefit of all living beings, one needs to be fully enlightened.

Two weeks ago, there was this question regarding the attainment of enlightenment being quite difficult, so it is difficult to attain full enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Would it not be easier if we just attain our own liberation from suffering instead of aiming for Buddhahood for all sentient beings? Why not just aim to get out samsara?

If we examine the Buddha's teachings, we'll see Buddha gave teachings with 3 kinds of trainees in mind. Trainees with 3 kinds of dispositions, mentalities, and faculties. Correspondingly, he taught 3 kinds of paths. Those kinds of paths can lead accordingly to 3 kinds of results.

We can say the Buddha's teachings fall into 2 broad categories: Hinayana (individual vehicle), and Mahayana (universal vehicle) teachings. The difference arose because not

everyone was able to follow just one type of teachings. For those for whom one type of teachings are not suitable then another type of teachings was given to cater to their needs.

There are these practitioners called shravakas and Pratyeka Buddhas, hearers, and solitary realizers. They aim for their own liberation. By listening to the Buddha's teachings, they become Arhats / Foe Destroyers. But after that, the Buddha gave them more teachings. They understand there can be a greater goal that can be attained. Thus, they generate aspirations to practice the Mahayana Vehicle and to attain full enlightenment. Their path then consists of first becoming an Arhat before moving on to practice Mahayana, Buddhahood. From the point of view of Mahayana, Universal vehicle, this is a very long path.

It is possible to just aim for highest enlightenment and proceed to that goal without first trying to attain the goal of an Arhat where you liberate just yourself. The path that is direct is actually a much faster path. For those of a definite Mahayana lineage, they'd proceed to Buddhahood instead of attaining Arhatship and then Buddhahood.

If you compare these two routes, you'll see both of them lead to the state of full enlightenment. You might then think it would make sense to take the faster route in that one attains Buddhahood directly without aiming for an intermediate goal.

What is the rationale for aiming for Buddhahood from the outset? Without thinking let me just attain the easier goal first? Kamalashila in Stages of Meditation explains if there's one quality that enables you to have all the qualities of the Buddha in the palm of your hand, that is compassion. If you can generate compassion, then easily you'll attain the qualities of the Buddha one after another in quick succession.

If we generate Bodhicitta and aim for enlightenment, that's a faster route. Great Compassion enables us to have all the qualities of the Buddha in one time in a quick way. So in 37 practices of Bodhisattvas, it talks about this quality. So if we are able to generate this quality of compassion, then we'll be able to help all sentient beings who have been our mothers. It says if I don't help my mother sentient beings, then how can happiness be found?

In our infinite lives, we've had infinite mothers. Everyone's been our mothers. No one has not been our mother.

While they were our mothers, they showed infinite kindness to us. So we've received infinite kindness from each and every being. Just as mothers would sacrifice their lives to protect their children, we've received such kindness from all living beings.

Let me share a story I got via we-chat. There's this photograph of a deer and a leopard. This is some kind of incident that occurred in African country.

Someone observing this deer and two babies and looming leopard that's trying to hunt down the deer. What happened was these animals have been moving around. Then at one point, they got quite tired and the mother deer lost track of the baby deer.

This mother deer sacrificed her life to protect the baby deer. But the babies could not realize what was happening. What I'm trying to illustrate is mothers often sacrifice themselves for their children, even to the extent of giving up their lives. It is the case that we have experienced tremendous kindness from our mothers, not just in this life but in previous lives. In many cases, our mothers would even create negative karma for our sake in order to protect us, benefit us. And as a result of their negative karma, they could be suffering in the lower realms now. They may be reborn in the hell realms, and experiencing horrendous sufferings now. As their children, if we don't have the slightest concern for them, don't even pray for them, generate some thought for them, this is something really quite regrettable. This stanza from the 37 practices of bodhisattvas:

Stanza 10:

The practice of all the bodhisattvas is to arouse bodhicitta,  
So as to bring freedom to all sentient beings, infinite in number.  
For how can true happiness ever be found while our mothers,  
Who have cared for us throughout the ages, endure such pain?

Minimum we can do is wish them well, concern for their wellbeing. If we can generate this great compassion, thinking may they be free from suffering. That kind of altruistic mind will be able to induce mind of enlightenment: thought wanting to benefit all sentient beings then can bring very positive effects for our minds.

We should give the Mahayana teachings a chance. We should study the Mahayana teachings of the Buddha to see what they teach. What's the purpose of obtaining Buddhahood? Having scrutinized the Mahayana teachings, if we decide it's beyond me, it's too difficult, I don't feel inclined, then that's fine. Don't feel bad about it. Because different people have different dispositions. Buddha never said everyone needs to be a Mahayana practitioner.

Furthermore, we can see Buddha taught Tantra. He had Tantra and Sutra. In Tantra teachings of Buddha, it's taught that through the techniques of Tantra, one can attain enlightenment in 1 life. For those with great capacity, they can attain enlightenment in several years. In comparison, the sutra path can be long. In particular, the indirect path (becoming liberated oneself to become an Arhat before becoming Buddha for all sentient beings) is longer.

To practice Tantra successfully, you need bodhicitta. If you don't have the mind of enlightenment, the Tantra practice won't be successful. If you want to practice this supreme path, you also need to have more qualifications.

There is no need for you to decide right away I want to go for Mahayana or not. Here, we study this text, which explains the mind of enlightenment, what full enlightenment is

all about. By studying this text, I hope your understanding of what Mahayana will increase and I hope then you'll be able to come to a clear decision as regards to whether Mahayana is for you or not.

In terms of the happiness that one experiences, the happiness of generating bodhicitta is greater than the happiness experienced by the Arhats who've attained self-liberation.

To give you an example, in Chandrakirti's Supplement to the Middle Way, when a Bodhisattva thinks of "give", happiness arises; the subduers abiding in peace have no such happiness, what need is there to mention the joy of giving? There are these Arhats who are abiding in physical and mental bliss. That kind of bliss is not as great as the happiness experienced by a bodhisattva who thinks of "give". So what need is there to mention the joy of giving? This means happiness experienced in the Mahayana is hundreds and thousands of times greater than the happiness experienced by Hinayana Arhats, those belonging to the individual liberation vehicle.

Root text:

Stanza 15:

It talks about divisions of Bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta, the awakening mind,  
In brief is said to have two aspects:  
First, aspiring, *bodhicitta in intention*;  
Then, *active bodhicitta*, practical engagement.

Bodhicitta can be divided in many ways. We can have many categories of Bodhicitta. The brief way is it has 2 aspects: one aspect called the aspiring bodhicitta. The other: engaging bodhicitta.

What other ways are there to divide bodhicitta? 22 divisions that is from the point of view of the accompanying mental factor. 22 types of bodhicitta. Another way is categorizing bodhicitta into four types, from the point of the boundaries. In terms of the way bodhicitta is generated, there are 3 divisions. It would take a lot of time.

If you generate bodhicitta, then you will generate all these forms of bodhicitta. It's not the case you have to generate each of the 22 types. If you generate bodhicitta, then you'll have all 22 types. So it's not important for us to list all these divisions.

Next we'll explain these 2 types of bodhicitta using an analogy. In stanza 16, it's said:

Wishing to depart and setting out upon the road,  
This is how the difference is conceived.  
The wise and learned thus should understand  
This difference, which is ordered and progressive.

How do we understand the difference between aspiring bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta?

Wishing to depart and setting out upon the road,  
This is how the difference is conceived.

If someone in Canada wants to go to the US. First they think about it. That is one part of the example. Second part of the example is this person decides to actually do it. They get out of the house and gets into this journey that will bring him into the US. These two parts of the example explain the two types of bodhicitta.

What this example illustrates is the difference between the two bodhicittas. The second bodhicitta (engaged bodhicitta) is conjoined with the activity of going.

If one simply thinks I'm going to attain enlightenment without explicitly doing something about it, without explicitly engaging in Bodhisattva deeds, generosity, and so on, then that's aspiring bodhicitta. If one generates engaging bodhicitta, then one's actively doing something to attain enlightenment. E.g. one takes the Bodhisattva vows. One explicitly engages in generosity, ethics and so forth for the sake of attaining enlightenment. You see there's mixing of the thought of enlightenment and activity to attain that enlightenment. This is what we mean. The mind of enlightenment is conjoined with the practice of Bodhisattva deeds.

Stanza 17:  
Benefits of bodhicitta explained

If you have a diamond, and it's broken, it still outshines other ornaments: gold, etc.  
That fragment of diamond outshines that complete gold ornament.

What this illustrates is the power of the mind of enlightenment. Whether it's conjoined with Bodhisattva deeds is still bodhicitta. It still outshines other qualities, other minds that don't involve thinking about enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Such a mind has the way to overcome samsara.

What are the benefits of engaging bodhicitta, since aspiring bodhicitta already generates so much merit?

17 & 18 tells re stream of merit.

17  
Bodhicitta in intention bears rich fruit  
For those still wandering in samsara  
And yet a ceaseless stream of merit does not flow from it;  
For this will rise alone from active bodhicitta.

18

For when, with irreversible intent,  
The mind embraces bodhicitta,  
Willing to set free the endless multitudes of beings,  
At that instant, from that moment on,

Engaging bodhicitta: one doesn't merely stop at generating the wish for enlightenment. I need to do whatever it takes to attain enlightenment. If I need to practice generosity, let me do it. If ethics, let me do it. Commitment to engage in bodhicitta deeds.

In stanza 18, the Bodhisattva's determination is indicated. The Bodhisattva who takes the Bodhisattva vows. He makes this commitment to practice as Bodhisattvas of past have done so. He or she thinks: I will do whatever it takes to attain enlightenment to benefit sentient beings. I will do generosity, ethics and so on. With such a determination, a Bodhisattva will not have a discouraged mind. What's the result of that? Stanza 19.

19:

A great and unremitting stream,  
A strength of wholesome merit,  
Even during sleep and inattention,  
Rises equal to the vastness of the sky.

Through the force that engaging bodhicitta, boundless merit is generated.

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Vajrasattva Ngondro

This practice occurs in the context of the four preliminary practices. This practice of vajrasattva recitation and meditation is done to purify obscurations.

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Sadhana

For a confession to be effective you need to have the four opponent powers complete. First, we have the power of the support, this refers to the practice of refuge and bodhicitta.

As you practice the sadhana, you have to ensure the 4 powers are complete in order for confession to be truly effective.

It is important in the beginning you do this refuge and bodhicitta well. If that's done well, everything afterwards will become Dharma. However, if your refuge and bodhicitta is done in a half-hearted, wishy-washy way, then the rest of the practice will not go well.

In order for the practice of refuge to go well, you need to ensure all the conditions for you to take refuge are present.

What are the 2 causes for refuge to be effective?

First is based on the reflection that you have taken many rebirths in the past. Despite having taken so many rebirths, you haven't been able to make good use of them, generate happiness, attain liberation and so on. You should generate a sense of regret that those past lifetimes have been wasted.

Second cause of refuge is based on reflection: you'll still have to take rebirth in samsara for many life times. If I'm not careful, I can fall into a lower rebirth in the future. In a lower rebirth, I will have to experience terrible suffering. I won't have the opportunity to create virtue and remain there for many years.

You need to reflect on these two causes well. The fact of that reflection is you generate a sense of regret. So by reflecting on these two points well, you generate the sense I shall go for refuge to the 3 jewels. With this sense wanting to seek refuge, then you go for refuge. Say I go for refuge to the three jewels.

In the same stanza, second half, we generate bodhicitta. To liberate all living beings, I shall attain enlightenment. You need to generate this thought sincerely. To benefit all living beings, I HAVE TO attain enlightenment.

That is the way you should generate refuge and bodhicitta in the beginning. Don't just open the sadhana and start reciting. Think about the 2 reasons: present state and past lives wasted all that time and future lives you may fall into a lower realm. You generate the sense of sincere refuge and generate bodhicitta sincerely. Then you recite that stanza 3 times. If you have time and you feel you haven't generated refuge and bodhicitta in the correct manner, you can recite it again and again until you've felt you've done it correctly.

What comes next is this visualization. I'm not sure anyone can just do this visualization. It's only for people with the initiation.

I shall explain how to generate the deity from the sadhana.

In the beginning, visualize PAM on the Crown. This syllable then becomes a white lotus. On this is a white-coloured syllable AH. This AH becomes a moon disc. A full moon like on the 15<sup>th</sup>: full circle. This moon disc is like a cushion resting on this lotus flower.

Then on this is HUNG, which is white in colour. This white HUNG transforms into a white five-spoked Vajra. The one you usually see with a bell. The Vajra is on the moon disc.

This white five-spoked Vajra is marked at the centre by a white-syllable HUNG.

Light rays radiate upwards going to the 10 directions and these light rays bring offerings to all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the 10 directions and they receive offerings. Light rays also radiate in a downward direction to all sentient beings. At the tip of these light rays is Vajrasattva – goes to their crown. Then Vajrasattva purifies all living beings and all living beings become Vajrasattva themselves. They are placed in the state of Vajrasattva.

These light rays then are drawn back together with all these sentient beings who have become Vajrasattva and absorb into this five-spoked Vajra.

Then after these light rays absorb back into the Vajra, the Vajra transforms into Vajrasattva, the deity. Perform the visualization as in the sadhana. Offerings. The initiation deities grant initiation. Wisdom beings absorb. All of that you should perform according to what's stated in the sadhana.

At this point, you should have already visualized there's a Vajrasattva above your Crown. At his heart you should visualize there's a moon disc and upon this moon disc is the syllable HUNG. HUNG's encircled by the 100 syllable mantra of vajrasattva.

Reflect on fact you may have many causes of suffering because in your many past lives since beginning-less time you've created negative karma and also in this very life, because of the force of afflictions, you've created negative karma. If you don't confess these negativities, there will be no doubt you'll suffer in the future. Fall into lower realms and experience terrible suffering and so on. So need to engage in purification. This reflection is similar to what was explained earlier on: dread for mistakes in past.

Having generated this sense of dread, you focus on Vajrasattva on your crown and fervently make request as it's stated in sadhana: please purify negativities of me and all living beings.

Fervently you request Vajrasattva for help. As a result of this request, infinite light rays make offerings to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in 10 directions and purify negative karma of all sentient beings and light rays are drawn back into the HUNG in the heart of Vajrasattva and makes Vajrasattva magnificent.

At the heart of Vajrasattva is HUNG encircled by 100-syllable mantra. You make request to Vajrasattva: please purify negativities of all living beings – father, mother and so on. As a result, nectar descends and enters through Crown of my head and goes to my heart. Think all my negativities, obscurations have been washed away.

When you shower, you wash the outside of your body. Here, you are taking an inner shower. b/c this nectar from Vajrasattva enters your body through your Crown and flushes out all impurities and negativities. So this is an inner shower. So all the negativities are flushed from your body through the openings of your body, through your pores and so on. Think all those negativities have been eliminated.

Think your body is clear and transparent, like glass or crystal. It's been completely cleaned. Think I've received all the blessings of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind.

Recite the mantra and generate the thought I've purified all my negativities and I've attained the state of Vajrasattva and need to generate this in a stable way.

Recite a few stanzas: whatever mistakes I've made, may you excuse them and please protect me and so on. So basically there's this request that you need to make to Vajrasattva: out of ignorance, I've made many misdeeds. Please help me. Visualize Vajrasattva accepts your request and says child of the family, child of the lineage, your negativities have been purified. So you have to visualize that Vajrasattva says that.

I've explained the procedure but not the other powers. There's a power of REMEDY. You have to keep your mind single-pointed when you are doing the practice. You don't allow the afflictions to arise b/c your mind is completely focused on the practice. It can be the case after you've visualized the mantra and recite it auto-cruise but your mind is thinking about other things. So that is not the right way to do it b/c if your mind is distracted / not focused, then the power of the antidote, power of remedy will not be complete.

Next power: REPUDIATION / REGRET. Think about possible consequences of your unskill actions. Through past actions, I may be reborn into lower realm. Heavy negative karma will cause me to go into hell realm. Hungry ghost realm. Light negative karma to animal realm. I have to experience pain. Generate remorse for negative actions.

Last power is RESOLUTION. You think negativities cause suffering so I'm not going to create any more negativities, even at the cost of a life, I will not create nonvirtue. You generate this very strong determination not to repeat your mistakes. If we do some practice we usually create merit. But to have it do completely effective purification, we need to ensure four powers are present.

It's hard for all 4 powers to be complete. E.g. hard for resolution to be there. E.g. in a situation where we may be killed, we may think let me kill him first to not be killed. To protect us, we may create these thoughts. So this means our resolution is not completely strong. And since the four powers are not complete, our purification is not completely effective.

Question 1: can I replace refuge prayer with sang gye cho dang ...?

Answer: yes, same meaning, [another Dharma sister says best do the new one]

Question 2: can I just visualize and not recite the words?

Answer: yes, in fact good for concentration etc.

So you don't need to verbally describe words provided you are able to recall the instructions in the right sequence, b/c if you haven't reached that level and then you don't recite the words and the visualization is incomplete and you miss out details and you get the sequence wrong, and you fail to recite the words of the sadhana, then your practice becomes very incomplete.