

English Dharma talk
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By Geshe Pema Tshering
Land of Compassion Buddha Edmonton
<http://compassionbuddha.ca>

A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Bodhicaryavatara) – Class 4

By Shantideva

In tantra taught by the Buddha, he says that no one is able to control the state of enlightenment and keep it for himself. No one can grant you the state of enlightenment. Here, we talk about a state of full enlightenment, Buddhahood, when every form of suffering is eliminated. It's not the case this state is the possession of privileged person and he can keep it for himself and not make it available to others. Similarly, the state of enlightenment is not a state that can be granted by someone who has attained it. It's not something that can be bestowed upon others.

This state of enlightenment is not like a physical object that you can give to others. Neither is it a physical object that you can keep for yourself and deny others access to. What do we do if we want this state of ultimate happiness? It's said that we have to know the final nature of the mind. By developing this exalted wisdom that realizes the reality of the mind, then we can obtain this state of full enlightenment. So it's not a physical object that can be given and so on. It needs to be obtained by realizing the nature of the mind.

Since this state of ultimate wellbeing isn't something others can give us, something we can get, then how will we actually get it? On what basis do we say we are capable of achieving full enlightenment? If such a state is possible, what's the method for obtaining it?

Foundation for achieving the state of full enlightenment lies within us. It's not something we need to seek from outside. We are able to employ a method that leads us to full enlightenment. We can use methods that reduce our suffering and increase our wellbeing and happiness.

We have this foundation for achieving enlightenment but what is it? It's our own mind. Our own mind is by its nature unstained. It has a capability of acquiring new qualities through training. Therefore, there is no need for us to look outside for this basis that will enable us to obtain full enlightenment.

If we already have the basis for achieving highest enlightenment, why is it that we are still unhappy and have problems and not achieved it? The reason why we are not completely happy or well is there are hindrances that prevent us from being completely happy. These hindrances are mixed with our mind. Not in the sense that they are in the nature of the mind, but our mind is affected by this polluting hindrances in the way that a piece of clothing may be stained with dirt.

There are these hindrances that prevent us from achieving happiness. We need to troubleshoot, identify these trouble-makers and work on them. If you are able to identify what troublemaker and get rid of it, then that means there's one less source of problems and suffering. The more we can do this, the less difficulties and problems we'll experience. What this means is we need to accurately identify the negative aspects causing us unhappiness, work on them, so we are able to reduce the sources of happiness one by one and increase our happiness and wellbeing correspondingly. Eventually we'll be able to get rid of these troublemakers from our mind such that the clarity of our mind becomes completely manifest. So that's the state of full enlightenment or Buddhahood.

So let's consider the example of a young kid. In the beginning, the kid doesn't know anything. At the age of 3 or 4, the child begins to learn the alphabet. Before this child learns any alphabet, there's no such knowledge in the child's mind. It's as though there's this darkness in the area of knowledge. From the first day of learning the alphabet, this darkness of ignorance is gradually dispelled. As soon as the child learns some new letter, then that very moment the child has gained new knowledge. It'll help new words and so on. This transformation occurs in a way we can witness. From not knowing to knowing there's a verifiable process. Imagine this process going on day after day. In years, the child will have learned a lot. After decades, the child becomes someone who's very knowledgeable, e.g. grow up to be a doctor or other professional. This process of dispelling ignorance and acquiring knowledge and skills takes place gradually. It can definitely be done. Attainment of Buddhahood is exactly the same. Takes place gradually and is a goal that is achievable.

We have to do something about the hindrances that prevent us from developing our minds. What are these hindrances? They are the negative emotions, afflictive, disturbing emotions, such as attachment, anger, ignorance, jealousy, pride, and competitiveness. We need to understand what they are and learn how to counteract these negative factors. By working on these disturbing emotions bit by bit, we can get rid of them totally eventually.

That's the purpose for us coming together for class, for us to learn how to deal with negative emotions, how to achieve enlightenment eventually. This text we are studying has many mind-training techniques. These techniques aren't something we can learn in just a single session. Don't expect to be able to know everything just by being present for 1 class. We need to get information and to study in a consistent manner. E.g. I've been here about 2 years and teaching various kinds of courses here. If you've been coming consistently, then you'd have become quite familiar with Dharma terms and points that are explained. So sometimes a certain technique is that a lot can be said about it. It's not the case that just by listening to 1 explanation that you know all about the technique. You come once and you hear about a certain technique. But it can be the case you leave and forget what's been explained. But if you attend class consistently, then you'll hear the technique mentioned again and that might trigger your memory and oh yes, I've learned that before. But no guarantee you'll retain everything. When you attend another class that explains it again, then you become more and more familiar with what's taught.

Let me give you an example. Let's say you go to a certain store and meet a person there for the first time. When you meet this person for the first time you may not have a very deep impression but let's say you go a second time and meet them. Deeper impression and that person may start to recognize you. Go to the store a third time, so on. Eventually you become familiar with them so that you know this mutual recognition then can foster a sense of closeness. So perhaps then you start to smile at each other, say a few words, become more and more friendly. Eventually that person becomes your friend. This is a gradual process. It occurs through the power of familiarization. Mind is like that. When mind encounters a mind-training technique, it may not register much. But if the mind is exposed a second, third time, and so on, then eventually it gains a certain familiarity with this technique so eventually the mind can employ this technique in a way that is efficacious.

When you see this person in the store for a first time, there's some kind of impression left on your mind such that you are able to recognize this person the second time you go to the store. You think that person exists – I saw them the last time I was here. This is what we mean by latency that is deposited on the mind when we discuss mind-training. There's some potential or imprint on your mind such that it reminds you of the object later on. As we deposit more and more latencies on our mind, then our mind becomes more and more capable of positive transformation. So one day our mind is able to completely actualize its potential and one is able to achieve wonderful, excellent qualities. These qualities become an indivisible part of one's mind and one's being so one becomes transformed to enlightenment.

Nature of our mind is there's always potential for improvement. We should never say I don't know this and I'll never know. It's beyond me and I shouldn't learn it – we should never entertain this thought. b/c nature of our mind is through familiarization, training. Not matter if we are old or young, genius or just ordinary IQ. It's just a matter of training the mind so these methods for eliminating suffering and creating happiness exist. If we familiarize our minds with these techniques, then it's definite we'll be able to achieve our goal, b/c nature of our mind is that it can improve.

When I was in a monastery and we attended classes, the teacher told us, in this class, there are many of you and you have different levels of intelligence. It doesn't matter how intelligent or unintelligent you are b/c you need to learn as much as you can. Your intelligence level is not important b/c even if you are very intelligent / unintelligent, you need to learn according to your capacity. He gave this example. Consider an elephant, tiger and a mouse. Of course, they have different sizes. If the mouse were to think I have such a small belly, I can't eat as much as the elephant / tiger, in that case, I shall not eat. It doesn't make sense. It would go hungry. Regardless of the capacities of their stomachs, they should eat what they can according to their capacities. Not make sense to think I'm not clever and so not learn anything. That attitude is self-defeating. We should strive to learn as much as we can regardless of where we are.

Text:

Before, we completed section on small scope in the section of the path of beings of small capacity. There, it's said there's nothing that can dispel suffering, unhappiness and sorrow better than the mind of enlightenment.

We've completed stanza 1.7:

The might buddhas, pondering for many ages,
Have seen that this, and only this, will save
The boundless multitudes,
And bring them easily to supreme joy.

This text explains bodhicitta, mind of enlightenment in great detail. The mind of enlightenment according to Maitreya's ([Abhisamayalankara](#)), The Ornament of/for Clear Realization is a mind that is associated with two aspirations. The aspiration for enlightenment and that for others' welfare.

The mind of enlightenment involves understanding that all sentient beings want happiness. All do not want suffering. Just like me: want happiness, not suffering. However, I encounter problems and not happiness I want. All sentient beings are in same boat. It would be wonderful if they find happiness, and highest enlightenment.

Other aspiration is how are they going to achieve this happiness, state of highest enlightenment? If I want to help them, I need to teach them the methods. It's necessary for us to explain to them method for achieving enlightenment. There's no other method for achieving highest happiness. So ask self: am I in a position to show them how to do that? If I want to teach them the methods for spiritual development, I need to understand their dispositions, their faculties, and their mentalities but I'm not at that level. I don't know their minds to teach them in the most appropriate way. Who has that ability? A fully enlightened being. Therefore, to help all sentient beings, I need to achieve that state. So that's the second aspect of the mind of enlightenment.

In stanza 1.7, it's pointed out these holy beings, Buddhas, have pondered for many eons this state of enlightenment. What can be most beneficial to most living beings? They've seen through their investigation, this and only this mind of enlightenment will bring immeasurable benefit to living beings. For that reason, they cultivated this mind of enlightenment for a long time. The bodhisattvas trained in this mind as well b/c they understand training in enlightenment will be to offer immeasurable benefit for living beings. So they strive to cultivate this mind, so living beings will be benefited and be led to this highest state of enlightenment easily.

Fourth line of this stanza is significant. It says how living beings can be brought easily to supreme joy. There are many methods for spiritual practice. E.g. one can make prostrations and the thing is this: one can do prostrations for one's entire life but the benefit of meditating on the mind of enlightenment for a few seconds will exceed the benefit from prostrating your entire life. Similarly, if you perform recitations or prayers, perhaps you recite mantras, hundreds, thousands, millions, but the benefit of cultivating

bodhicitta for a few seconds will exceed merit from reciting millions of mantras. For that reason, it's said this method of bodhicitta will bring sentient beings easily to supreme joy.

So what I'm saying here is not something that I made up. It's actually taught in the sutras by the Buddha. It's said there are these Hinayana practitioners such as the Shravakas or Pratyeka Buddhas or Individual Vehicle. They can spend eons meditating on emptiness. The merit from cultivating bodhicitta for a short period of time (something bouncing on the ground) is greater than merit of meditating on emptiness for eons without mind of enlightenment. If one can meditate on emptiness conjoined with mind of enlightenment, then one can create far more virtue.

Next section: belong to medium scope. 1.8.

Explains ability of mind of enlightenment to accomplish desired aims.

1.8

Those who wish to overcome the sorrows of their lives,
And put to flight the pain and suffering of beings,
Those who wish to win such great beatitude,
Should never turn their back on bodhicitta

In this stanza, first, we see someone who's the medium scope attitude. This person wants to become free of the suffering of cyclic existence. We ourselves wish the same. We want to overcome sorrows of cyclic existence. What kinds of sufferings do we experience? Birth, aging, sickness and death. Suffering of not finding what we want. Suffering of meeting with what we don't want. Those who wish to overcome these sorrows of cyclic life, samsara, should develop this mind of enlightenment. In the next line, it's said those who wish to eliminate the suffering of others should also train in this attitude. We see people who are not concerned only with self, but care about others, such as parents, friends, people in their country and so on. How can they help these other beings become free from suffering? They should also train in bodhicitta. Those who wish to win this attitude, enlightenment, happiness, wellbeing, they should never turn their mind on bodhicitta; never give it up.

This seems like a hard sell – this one mind of enlightenment can accomplish everything – rid all your problems, suffering, suffering of others and lead you and others to highest happiness. You may wonder is this mind of enlightenment really able to achieve all these goals?

When we analyze the circumstances that cause us problems and cause us suffering, we can identify 2 levels. Superficial and deep level. On superficial level, we can meet with conditions in our lives that give us problems. Make things difficult for us. But in deep level, we experience sufferings b/c we committed karma before to experience sufferings. That's the deep cause.

When we cultivate bodhicitta, it purifies our negativities or misdeeds we've created in past. It enables us to accumulate a lot of merit. Creates powerful positive energy. As a result, we are able to not encounter problems and we are able to experience happiness. That's the basis for saying bodhicitta can achieve one of these goals of getting rid of all sorrows, suffering and leading to happiness.

If we are concerned with helping others, we need a lot of merit (positive energy). Just having the thought to benefit others will not result in benefiting them. We may have good thought but we have all sorts of problems. To remove such hindrances and be successful in helping others, we need a lot of merit. Bodhicitta helps us accumulate that merit so we don't have obstacles and have all conducive conditions to help others.

Indeed, the Buddha said if you have a lot of merit, accumulate vast collection of merit, then that merit will purify your sufferings and lead you to happiness. On top of that, your desire to benefit others will be fulfilled.

The next stanza explains how one gets a special name and its significance when one generates bodhicitta.

1.9

Should bodhicitta come to birth
In one who suffers in the dungeons of samsara,
In that instant he is called the buddhas' heir,
Worshipful alike to gods and men.

Before going into the actual words the stanza, let me explain the difference between contrived and uncontrived bodhicitta. Contrived bodhicitta is mind of enlightenment you generate through a process of reflection. You think about the reasons for wanting to help all living beings and eventually you arrive at this thought. You arrive at this thought: I want to become enlightened to benefit all sentient beings. Through training in this thought again and again, one will eventually become so accustomed to this mind that this mind can arise spontaneously. When one thinks of others, this thought spontaneously arises. That's uncontrived bodhicitta. This uncontrived realization comes through familiarization. In the past, when we discussed the Three Principles of the Path, there's a line, by training in this mind of renunciation day and night, may renunciation arise in my mind. It's like that.

In this stanza, it says should bodhicitta come to birth in one who suffers in the dungeons of samsara, in that instant he is called the buddhas' heir. When we say bodhicitta comes to birth, we are talking about **uncontrived** bodhicitta. Once that happens, then that person becomes a Buddha's child. Here, we are talking about someone suffering in the dungeons of samsara, but just in that instant, that person begins the process of becoming free from this prison of samsara. He's taking the first step to leave samsara and transcend this ocean of cyclic existence. Buddhas say this person and call them child. Also, this person becomes worshipful alike to gods and men. This being may be plain before in

their body, but as soon as they generate bodhicitta, they become an object of worship. Gods and men pay homage to such a being with a mind of enlightenment.

There's a story related to the power of generating bodhicitta. The Buddha in one of his previous lives, long long ago, well before he entered the path had created some negative actions. As a result, he fell into a hell realm. In this hell realm, he was doing this work of pulling a cart. There was another fellow hell being who was pulling the cart along with him. While he was very strong, and could pull the cart well, his companion was very weak and could hardly muster any strength to drag this cart. This hell guardian then saw that this hell being is not pulling the cart properly and punished this weak hell being. So the other hell being, the strong one, who was Buddha in a previous life before he became Buddha, then was very affected by how this guardian was mistreating his companion. So he generated very powerful compassion and said my companion can't do it, so let me do it all by myself. His compassion was so powerful that it purified huge amounts of negativities. It's said at this point, he generated this mind of enlightenment. He then passed away from the hell rebirth and was reborn in an upper realm. That's the power of the mind of enlightenment.

In the last line of 1.9, it says this person who's generated uncontrived bodhicitta is worthy of worship from gods and men. There are many qualities that are revered in our world. E.g. if you are very good looking or have a special raise / from a certain caste in certain countries, then you're respected. But here, what it's saying is regardless of your physical qualities, if you have a mind of enlightenment, you become worthy of being revered by gods and humans.

1.10 analogy given. Benefits of bodhicitta through analogies.

Analogy of something inferior transforming into something supreme.

1.10:

For like the supreme substance of the alchemists,
It takes the impure form of human flesh
And makes of it the priceless body of a Buddha.
Such is bodhicitta: we should grasp it firmly!

In this analogy, there's this supreme substance of the alchemists and it's able to transform iron into gold. If you have a lot of iron, by adding this gold making substance to this iron, you can transform iron into gold. Iron plate is cheap, for a few dollars. But if add gold-making elixir to iron plate, it transforms into gold plate. Then it becomes more valuable than an iron plate.

What is this analogy supposed to illustrate? We have an impure physical form: body of flesh and blood. Unclean. Applies to other samsaric bodies: animals. Unclean nature. When we generate this mind of enlightenment, then our body becomes transformed. Becomes priceless body of Buddha. Becomes very valuable, like diamond. We should try to generate bodhicitta. It's the supreme substance of the alchemists. If we haven't

generate bodhicitta, we should try to generate it. If we have generated, we should maintain it and ensure it becomes stronger and stronger.

Maybe we can review some stanzas b/c this material is very important. It talks about the importance of bodhicitta. Benefits and so on.

We want to have a good life. We want to make sure in our future life we don't fall into a suffering realm. How do we ensure we don't fall into a lower realm? Cause of rebirth in lower realm is negative karma. If we have some misdeed, then that can ripen into a lower rebirth. We need to check – do we have the causes of lower rebirth in our mind? Let's talk about our previous lives. How likely is it in previous lives we didn't commit any negative karma? Unlikely. What about this life? Not likely. So to be honest, not likely we don't create any negativity this life. Let's say we create one negative action per day, then over a month, created 30 negative actions. Over a year, 365 negative actions. That's a modest estimate. It's likely we've created a huge store of misdeeds. These are a cause of lower rebirth. It's possible we hold within ourselves taking a suffering rebirth in our next life.

We want to avoid suffering in the future. Understanding negativities we've created are causes of suffering for future, we naturally want to purify. How? E.g. can prostrate. But that would take a lot of time. Hard to take a month off from usual lives to do prostrations. What about mantras? Go for retreat. But these practices take time. Take a lot of time if you want to do a lot of these practices. We want to use the most efficient way to purify our negativities so as to ensure we will not fall into an unfortunate rebirth in the future.

If you want to use this method of bodhicitta to purify your negativities, what you can do in the morning is to reflect upon your state of existence. You're not free from problems. You're vulnerable to suffering. All other living beings are in the same boat. How do you free yourself from suffering and others too? You think about the possibility of enlightenment. And you generate this wish – I want to achieve this state of highest enlightenment so I can help more living beings to be free from suffering. b/c we haven't achieved that spontaneous realization yet, this kind of contemplation leads to contrived bodhicitta. This is precisely the kind of meditation if we want to achieve bodhicitta in the future. It constitutes meditation, Dharma practice, purification of negativities. All elements you want in spiritual practice are contained.

Let's say you have a headache and in order to cure it, you eat a certain type of medicine. Then you also have a stomachache. To cure it, you eat another type of medicine. Also back pain – need another medicine type for it. b/c you have various ailment types and different ones need different medicines, having to eat a huge amount of medicines, but let's say there's something that can cure all of these ailments, then you can just eat one kind of medicine. If you try to counteract each negativity one by one, it'll take us ages to purify them. Let's say if we have to do prostrations for this and some other practice for this, then we have many practices. But mind of enlightenment is a cure-all, meaning all negativities can be purified through this cultivation.

Not only can the mind of enlightenment purify the causes of lower rebirth in the next life, it can liberate us from samsara / cyclic existence. On top of that, it can lead us to the state of full enlightenment, so we are in the best position to help other living beings from suffering. This mind of enlightenment is an all-powerful practice that can achieve every level of goal. This practice is such that you can do it any time, anywhere. E.g. if you do recitations and they take a certain amount of time, and you are rushing in the morning e.g., and even before you start your recitations, you are planning when I finish, I need to do this, etc. Your recitations are distracted and you think I'll need to do this quickly b/c else I'll miss this appointment. And interruption and you can't finish and you need to save the other half for the evening. You're exhausted and try to do these recitations. It's not so easy to maintain lengthy amount of recitations. However, if you meditate on the mind of enlightenment, then there's lots of flexibility. There's no limit to how much you can do. You can do 1 second, 2 seconds of meditation on bodhicitta. Lots of time – 1 hour. It's completely flexible that you need to spend when meditating on bodhicitta.

Question: Do our tantric vows say to meditate on emptiness or bodhicitta 3 times each day and 3 times each night?

Answer: Not sure if 3 each day and 3 each night. It's built into 6 session guru yoga.

When you do refuge prayers, you generate bodhicitta first.

Then when it says "I" for when I go for refuge, etc. – can meditate on selflessness & emptiness. What's the nature of this I that wants to benefit all living beings? If you're able to really think about the meaning of bodhicitta and emptiness when you recite refuge of bodhicitta, then automatically you've performed 3 cultivations of bodhicitta, enlightenment.

Question: How do we meditate on bodhicitta and emptiness together?

Answer: no fixed sequence. Can do it in any sequence. E.g. when teaching last course, 2 ways to meditate on those minds.

You can meditate on bodhicitta thinking all living beings are suffering. I want to help them. Attain enlightenment. Greatest benefit to them. Then you reflect on emptiness. b/c you previously cultivated mind of enlightenment, when you meditate on emptiness, your cultivation of emptiness is conjoined with that of enlightenment.

But you can also make this contemplation of emptiness the first practice. Start by sending how when you meditate on bodhicitta, there's a meditator, there's a meditation, bodhicitta, sentient beings who need to be free from suffering and you want to become enlightened for their sake. You think of how these 3 aspects are dependently arisen. You have a practice of bodhicitta that's conjoined with emptiness. You see those two ways. You can do it either way.

When you meditate on mind of enlightenment or emptiness, don't do them in isolation. You try to conjoin one or the other. Meditate on one and conjoin it with the other. This makes a huge difference to the power of your practice.

Question: Has Geshela ever experienced bliss before?

Clarification: physical or mental bliss?

Asker: B/c it seems like more than happiness. Is that so?

Answer: if you're talking about bliss in tantra – I haven't experienced it. That kind of bliss is very profound. I haven't experienced it.

There are many levels of consciousnesses. Here, we are talking about subtle stages of consciousness. To experience that, you need to have realized emptiness. Since I haven't realized emptiness, I haven't experienced that kind of bliss.

This very subtle state of mind can arise when .g. a person is dying. When one goes through the stages of death, the coarse consciousnesses will shut down. Mind becomes more subtle. Eye consciousness, ear consciousness ... will shut down. Mind becomes very subtle. Allows this bliss to manifest. The state of bliss is very similar to this state of great bliss that's achieved through tantric practice. That bliss can ascertain emptiness. I haven't attained that realization, so I haven't experienced that bliss.

Question: should we just focus on individual liberation or should we always think about cultivating bodhicitta – enlightenment for all sentient beings? b/c there's a fear the latter's hard – isn't it hard to think of others?

Answer: we can't say b/c it's hard to become Buddha for all others and it's easier for us to individually liberated that there's a problem with this type of thinking. We are of different dispositions. Not everyone can fit into Mahayana basket / Universal vehicle. OK to focus on individual liberation.

For Mahayana: you can use the technique – 7fold cause and effect instruction – to generate this very vast thought – enlightenment for all beings – you need to first meditate on compassion. And in order for compassion to be generated properly, you need to meditate on affectionate love. You need to go through a series of steps before you can generate this thought – enlightenment for all sentient beings.

Your question calls for extensive answer – I'll keep addressing it in beginning of class next week. Your question is very important and relevant.