

THE THREE PRINCIPAL ASPECTS OF THE PATH



Venerable Geshe Doga

*Transcript of a teaching on The Three
Principles of the Path given by Ven. Geshe
Doga during Easter 2003*

Translated by Ven. Fedor Stracke



Tara Institute Publishing Group, Melbourne

Dedication

We dedicate the merit from compiling and publishing these teachings to the long life of the Venerable Geshe Doga, Tara Institute's resident teacher since 1984.

We also dedicate the merit to the flourishing of the Buddha's teachings, to bring happiness to all sentient beings, and for all suffering to end.

Publisher:

Tara Institute Publishing Group
3 Mavis Avenue
Brighton East 3187
Victoria, Australia
www.tarainstitute.org.au

Copyright © Tara Institute 2017

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Please direct any enquiries to the publisher.

Contents

Introduction	1
The Preliminaries	7
Prologue	10
Expressing homage.....	10
The promise to compose.....	11
Persuading to listen	12
Renunciation	14
The purpose of generating renunciation.....	14
How to generate renunciation	17
The definition of having generated renunciation.....	29
Bodhicitta	31
Why we must generate this mind.....	31
Generating the mind of enlightenment	32
The definition of having generated the mind of enlightenment.....	40
Correct View.....	42
The reason to meditate on the right view.....	42
Showing the right view.....	45
The definition of not having completed the analysis of the right view	48
The definition of having completed the analysis of right view.....	49
Uncommon characteristics of the Prasangika.....	51
Having Gained Definite Ascertainment, Advice on Pursuing the Practice.....	53

Introduction

Everyone wants to be happy and to avoid suffering. So, from that point of view, we are all exactly the same, even though some might be more vocal about their situation than others. Regardless of whether we are Dharma practitioners or not, attaining happiness and avoiding suffering is what governs our actions.

We need to create the conditions for happiness and accumulate sufficient material resources to sustain our bodies, at the very least. But we also work hard to provide for more than these basic needs. So we need to check whether these efforts have brought us happiness.

The fact is that, although our material conditions are excellent, we are still unhappy and dissatisfied. We can see that, despite our accumulation of a wealth of material things, we can't really be happy unless we generate some mental peace.

We need to generate the motivation of definitely wanting to attain inner happiness. If we have mental happiness and peace, we won't be overwhelmed by physical suffering. Through recognising the importance of having a happy and clear mind, we can see the necessity of attaining it.

In Australia, there is an abundance of material resources. Even those who say they don't have any money in most cases have enough to eat. There are those who always say, 'I don't have enough money', but when they take out their wallet it is filled with money!

Having a relationship with another person also won't lessen our suffering or increase our inner happiness. You might want a good partner, but that person is not going to turn up at the door saying, 'Hello, I am the good partner you have been looking for'! Finding a good partner depends upon your own efforts.

Whether it is for a worldly purpose or for a Dharma purpose, success always depends on our own efforts. Others can't give us happiness; it is something we have to generate for ourselves, using appropriate ways and means.

Many people say, 'Although I have material possessions and a good worldly life, I feel that my life is empty'. They feel desperate because they don't know how to change that feeling of emptiness. How can they achieve the happiness and peace they are looking for?

There are many different ways of thinking about how to find inner happiness. Some feel that if they go to a remote and isolated place where there is no television, no washing machine, and so forth, and where they are completely isolated from modern life, they will achieve happiness and peace. They feel that the source of their mental disturbance lies in their environment, or in troubles and tensions within the family, and that if they escape that by isolating themselves, they will be happy.

Some feel they will be able to attain true happiness by practising meditation, and others feel they will be able to attain true happiness by becoming a monk or nun.

Then there are those, including Dharma practitioners, who throw away all their possessions, which they feel are a distraction and a burden. Non-Dharma practitioners can even discard their wife or their husband for this reason!

The basic problem for all of these people is that they lack a subdued mind, and they won't be able to solve their problems until they subdue their mind. Subduing the mind and gaining control over it is the only solution. We are controlled by our mind, and if it is under the control of the afflictions, then we, too, are under the control of the afflictions.

So the task is to take control of our mind, because if we leave our mind under the control of the afflictions, our quality of life will be harmed. To see the importance of this, we just have to analyse the kind of life created by a mind controlled by the afflictions.

When the mind is controlled by the affliction of attachment to another, for example, there is a lot of confusion. We are unhappy when we can't obtain the object of our attachment, and even if we do obtain it, the relationship is a fickle, unstable and unsatisfactory one.

Likewise, if our mind is under the control of jealousy or pride, we engage in a range of actions that only create confusion. Of course, there's no need to mention the problems anger brings.

Next, we need to look at the positive aspects of the mind. Do we have the ability to oppose and overcome these different harmful mental attitudes? Could we overcome pride, for example, and all the other afflictions? Through this analysis, we will come to appreciate the potential of meditation.

The mind might initially be attracted to an object's beautiful or pleasant aspects. Then, attachment exaggerates these qualities, making the object seem even more attractive, so the attachment becomes even stronger.

We can counteract this attachment by generating a mind that apprehends exactly the opposite: the object's unpleasant aspects. By focusing on these unpleasant aspects, we can overcome the mind that is attracted to the object's exaggerated pleasantness.

Anger, on the other hand, is a mind generated by focusing on something that appears unpleasant. Here, the antidote is to focus on the pleasant aspects of the object of anger.

Afflictions are always present in the mind, but generating the antidotes to these afflictions will oppose and lessen them. Just knowing the technique is not enough – you have to actually put it into practice. Then your experience will help you gain insight into how afflictions can be opposed by their antidotes.

Normally, when afflictions are generated, we just leave them in the mind, and don't attempt to lessen them by applying the different antidotes. That's when problems arise.

Instead, we should acquaint the mind, through meditation, with the different types of antidotes to the different types of afflictions.

The result of applying the different antidotes and lessening the afflictions is inner peace and happiness.

I often get asked, ‘What happens when anger, or attachment, or pride arise at my work place? Do I then have to sit down and meditate at work?’ That’s a legitimate question. We are supposed to oppose afflictions, and they can arise in the workplace.

But for obvious reasons, it is just not possible to get into a meditation posture and do half an hour of meditation. Rather, before going to work, you have to motivate your mind properly, and then try to maintain mindfulness of your motivation and meditation practice while you are at work.

We can recognise the significance of a having a happy and peaceful mind, and the impact this has on our lives and on the lives of those around us. For example, if one member of a family has a happy and peaceful mind, that can also influence the other members of the family to generate a similar attitude. Conversely, if one family member feels empty, unhappy and dissatisfied, those around them will feel the same.

When people feel unhappy, nothing they do will make them happy. Drinking tea won’t lead to happiness; eating good food won’t lead to happiness; and travelling to other countries won’t lead happiness. Without inner happiness, none of those activities will provide much joy. But with inner happiness, drinking tea will be enjoyable, good food will be enjoyable, and travelling will be enjoyable. So a having a happy and peaceful mind is important for both ourselves and others.

In summary, there are three major factors preventing the attainment of inner peace and happiness: craving for the happiness of this life; craving for the perfect samsaric perfection¹ of future lifetimes; and self-cherishing, which is attachment to our own happiness.

¹ The Tibetan term translated here as samsaric perfections, or splendours of samsara, has no direct equivalent in English. It refers to all the things that beings in the three higher realms view as sources of happiness, such as good food, lovely possessions, perfect friends, and so forth. Seeing these as perfections and clinging to them with exaggerated desire is a major source of suffering.

The lam-rim teachings explain that there are three types of mental capacity:

- Beings of **small capacity** overcome craving for this life. For these people, there are the teachings on refuge and cause and effect, and on the purification of non-virtuous karmas through the four powers. These will lessen the craving for happiness in this life, and direct the mind towards the happiness of future lives.
- Beings of **medium capacity** practise renunciation in order to overcome craving for samsaric happiness and happiness in future lifetimes. Here, there is the practice of the three higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom, through which these practitioners can free themselves from cyclic existence. By engaging in these practices, attachment to samsara will decrease and the wish to attain enlightenment will be strengthened.
- Beings of **great capacity** engage in the practices of generating bodhicitta and the six perfections in order to lessen and overcome self-cherishing.

Generating these different types of virtuous attitudes is the practice of Dharma, and it has to happen on the basis of our own mind, which is the cause of a vast number of problems and sufferings.

Generating the antidote to attachment with one simple meditation on impurity can counteract that attachment, and through this Dharma practice, you can free your mind from this type of suffering.

By making use of the antidotes, we can get rid of all of the afflictions, which cause all of our problems. Just as we clear out possessions that are useless and keep those that benefit us, we should do the same with our mind. By putting the Dharma into practice, we can rid ourselves of all the mental attitudes that cause us suffering, and develop those that benefit us, which include the three principal aspects of the path that we are about to study.

The Buddha said, 'We are our own enemy, and we are our own protector', meaning that we can only find happiness by starting to

take of care of our mind. It is important to think about this point. We are all too aware of the harms created by others, while being quite unaware of our own mental attitudes that cause harm not only to others, but also to ourselves.

The Preliminaries

The text we are about to study, *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, was composed by Lama Tsongkhapa in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha.

All of the Buddha's teachings are subsumed into these three principles of the path, so if we practise them, we are practising the essence of all of the Buddha's teachings.

Renunciation is the wish to attain liberation from cyclic existence, which counteracts grasping at samsaric perfections. If the practice of virtue, which is the cause for ethical actions, is not held with renunciation it will not be the cause for liberation.

The greater the renunciation, the more our Dharma practice will develop. Renunciation acts as an antidote to our craving for the samsaric perfections of this life and of future lives, which inflict so much harm on us. While samsaric perfections may be beneficial, it is the grasping at them that causes harm. Of course, we need to eat and drink, and so forth, but when we grasp at them, they became the cause of suffering.

Renunciation counteracts the craving for samsaric perfections. While it is not necessary to give up samsaric perfections, it is essential to counteract our craving for them. Understanding that we can develop renunciation without giving up samsaric perfections enriches our renunciation.

Throwing dry wood on a fire reinforces the flames of the fire. Likewise, if we try to satisfy our cravings for samsaric perfections, those cravings will just be reinforced. We can observe this directly for ourselves. The happiness that we all want is achieved by giving up this craving for samsaric perfections.

Bodhicitta is the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, which counteracts self-cherishing thoughts. If your practice is not held by the thought of bodhicitta, it won't be the cause of the omniscient state of enlightenment.

In order to counteract self-cherishing, we need to generate bodhicitta, because without it, we won't be able to benefit others. We need to value the happiness of others at least as much as we value our own. If we cherish our own happiness, we should also cherish the happiness of others. Likewise, if we have an aversion to our own suffering, we should have an aversion to the suffering of others.

Without generating the altruistic attitude of bodhicitta, we won't be able to accomplish the welfare of others, so we need to counteract self-cherishing thoughts with renunciation. When Dharma practice is held with both renunciation and bodhicitta, it becomes the cause for liberation and enlightenment.

Correct view is the view that realises emptiness. Although you might have perfected renunciation and bodhicitta, it is impossible to achieve enlightenment without meditating on emptiness. The correct view of emptiness counteracts self-grasping.

For as long as we don't have the correct view of emptiness, we will always grasp at an inherently existing self. Regardless of whether that grasping is strong or weak, it leads to confusion. By analysing the nature of the self, we find that that it does not exist in the way it is apprehended. That is the understanding of emptiness, which is a very precious piece of wisdom.

These three principles of the path have to be integrated into our own Dharma practice. If Dharma practice is combined with the thought of renunciation, it will become the cause for liberation. If Dharma practice is done on the basis of bodhicitta motivation, it will become the cause for enlightenment. If Dharma practice is combined with the view of emptiness – the view that the virtuous practice lacks inherent existence – it will counteract true grasping.

The Buddha taught for the purpose of leading his disciples to liberation and enlightenment. He taught that we need to build up the two accumulations in order to attain enlightenment – the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom.

The accumulation of merit primarily consists of great compassion and the practice of bodhicitta, while the accumulation of wisdom primarily consists of the wisdom realising the mode of abiding or emptiness. Both bodhicitta and the correct view of emptiness depend upon the cause of renunciation: without renunciation bodhicitta won't arise, and without renunciation one will not be able to build up the two accumulations.

These two accumulations are the causes for the different aspects of an enlightened being: the accumulation of merit acts as the cause for the form body of a buddha or the *rupakaya*; and the accumulation of wisdom acts as the cause for the truth body of a buddha or the *dharmakaya*, which is the omniscient mind of a buddha. To attain both the mind and physical body of a buddha, we need to build up these two accumulations of merit and wisdom, and that depends upon renunciation.

Prologue

We might wish to practise the three principal aspects of the path, but this is impossible without the advice of a qualified teacher. Thus, the text commences by paying homage to the venerable lamas or gurus.

Expressing homage

I bow down to my perfect gurus.

Unlike the homage to Manjushri in other texts, here, homage is paid to the lineage lamas of the profound tradition, and the lineage lamas of the extensive tradition. As Lama Tsongkhapa practised on the basis of strong guru devotion, we should do likewise if we want to have success in following the path.

QUALITIES OF THE TEACHER

Just as we need someone to teach us how to engage in ordinary activities, it is the same with the practice of Dharma. If we are about to enter the road to the lower realms, we need to have someone who will guide us the opposite direction. That teacher or lama should have experience on the path, and if he doesn't have that experience, he should at least have a good, pure understanding of the teachings.

Now I don't have any experience on the path, but I have studied a bit. I didn't study for the purpose of becoming a scholar, or for material wealth, and so forth; my sole purpose was, and is, the thought of being able to practise the pure Dharma before I die.

The qualities a lama should possess can be related to three stages of the lam-rim.

Firstly, the lama should have little attachment to the samsaric perfections of this life, and a strong interest in the Dharma. Having those qualities elevates such a person above ordinary people, who are primarily interested in what they see as the perfections of this life.

Secondly, the lama should be experienced with the pure thought of renunciation, having completely given up any attachment to the perfections of cyclic existence in order to attain complete liberation from samsara. The Tibetan word *jetsun* is often translated as 'venerable'. It has the connotation of someone who turns their three doors of body, speech and mind towards Dharma.

Thirdly, the lama should generate the thought of making the happiness of other sentient beings more important than their own happiness, and consider the welfare of others as far more important than their own. A lama is someone who has overcome self-cherishing thoughts and cherishes others, and then engages in accomplishing the welfare of others.

In Tibetan the *la* means high and the *ma* is a term of negation. Together, they mean 'there is nothing higher'; thus the literal meaning of the term lama is 'the highest'.

So the teacher, or lama, should view the next life as more important than this one, and consider others as more important than themselves. They should have more qualities than faults, and more qualities than the students.

It is important that the lama has more qualities than faults, because any faults will be transmitted to the students, who usually follow the advice of the lama. They will like what he regards as good, and dislike what he regards as bad. If the lama holds a mistaken view, for example, that mistaken view will be transmitted to the students.

The promise to compose

*1. The essential meaning of the Victorious One's teachings,
The path praised by all the holy victors and their children,
The gateway of the fortunate ones desiring liberation –
This I shall try to explain as much as I can.*

We can relate the essence of all the teachings of the Conqueror or the Victorious One to renunciation – it is the essence of the teachings of the Conqueror.

The path praised by the conquerors' or victors' children is bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the life force of the buddhas and the bodhisattvas and the buddhas, and that is why the path is praised by the conquerors' or holy victors' children.

The gateway of the fortunate ones desiring liberation is the correct view of emptiness. As we said before, without the quality of emptiness, it is impossible to attain liberation.

Persuading to listen

Having covered the qualities of the lama or guru we now turn to the definition of a disciple.

*2. Those who are not attached to the pleasures of circling [samsara],
Who strive to make freedom and endowments meaningful,
Who entrust themselves to the path pleasing the Victorious Ones -
You fortunate ones: listen with a calm mind.*

Those who are not attached to the joys of samsara should make good use of this precious human rebirth with its freedom and endowments.

The way to make this leisure and freedom meaningful is by combining Dharma practice with renunciation and bodhicitta. This combination is the cause for liberation and enlightenment, and without both, this rebirth will merely be the cause for samsaric perfections.

The exhortation to listen with clear minds is directed at the fortunate ones who direct their minds towards the path pleasing to the Buddha.

'Freedom and endowments' refers to freedom from states that would prevent Dharma practice. Just having the freedom and leisure to practise the Dharma is not enough; this needs to be complemented by the opportunity you have to use your leisure for Dharma practice.

It would be a very sad state of affairs if you made no use of the opportunities provided by having the freedom and endowments of this precious human rebirth.

The explanation of the main body of the text has four parts: renunciation; bodhicitta; the correct view of emptiness; and having gained definite ascertainment, advice on pursuing the practice.

Renunciation

The purpose of generating renunciation

*3. Without the complete intention definitely to be free from circling,
There is no way to pacify attachment seeking pleasurable effects in
the ocean of circling.*

*Also, by craving for cyclic existence, embodied beings are
continuously bound.*

Therefore, at the very beginning seek renunciation.

Without wanting to attain liberation, we won't want to strive for it. So the first step is to want to be free from cyclic existence. It's like prisoners in gaol: if they don't have the motivation to escape, they won't want to escape.

What is liberation? It means freedom from the bonds of cyclic existence. Here, we can use the metaphor of being tied to a tree with a rope. The tree represents our five contaminated aggregates² and the rope represents karma and afflictions. The five contaminated aggregates are cyclic existence, and we are tied to it with the rope of karma and afflictions. Just as we have to untie the rope to free ourselves from the tree, we have to untie the rope of karma and afflictions to free ourselves from cyclic existence.

The aggregates are called contaminated aggregates because they are contaminated by karma and afflictions, and they are the source of all our suffering and problems. For as long as we have the aggregates, we will be exposed to further suffering. We might feel we have secured the conditions for samsaric happiness, but the unexpected always arises, with its problems and obstacles and suffering. That is the nature of the contaminated aggregates.

From the point of view of cause, the contaminated aggregates are generated by karma and afflictions, and from the point of view of result, the contaminated aggregates are the source of further

² The contaminated aggregates are form, feeling, recognition, compositional factors, and consciousness.

afflictions and karma. So the contaminated aggregates arise from suffering, and they also send us towards suffering.

You might question why the precious human body with its freedom and endowments is still in the nature of the five contaminated aggregates. Do we really want to be free from them, or do we want to attain a precious human rebirth?

Here, there is an immediate point of view, and an ultimate or final point of view. From an ultimate point of view, we want to be free from the contaminated aggregates, and from the immediate point of view, even a precious human body is an object of abandonment. Yet, in order to abandon the contaminated aggregates, we need to have the basis of a precious human body so that we can practice the path. So from an immediate point of view, the precious human body is the basis for Dharma practice and is therefore necessary. Later, we get to the point where we will be able to abandon the precious human body.

It is important to keep in mind that it is possible to free ourselves from this samsaric body that has been generated through the faults of karma and the afflictions. Of the two, the afflictions are more significant. Their root cause is the ignorance that grasps at 'I'. From that grasping, attachment to what pleases the 'I' arises, as well as aversion to what is unattractive and unpleasing to that 'I'. So first there is ignorance, and then attachment and aversion are generated from that ignorance.

On the basis of attachment to the pleasurable and aversion to what we dislike, we engage in activities to attain one and avoid the other, and in the process we create karma. This motivation – to achieve what gives us pleasure and happiness and eliminate and lessen our suffering – drives us to engage in activities that actually harm others. This is how we accumulate non-virtuous karma. Therefore, we need to try to avoid generating attachment and aversion.

It's even better to avoid the faults of karma and afflictions from the outset. Karma is generated by the faults of attachment and aversion, but if there is no ignorance, the sequence of ignorance,

attachment, aversion and karma is eliminated, even though the aggregates are contaminated. Because the afflictions have ceased, no new karma is accumulated, and the causes for suffering have been eliminated. That is how to break free from cyclic existence. When the aggregates are not contaminated, although we might take birth in cyclic existence, we won't experience any suffering or problems.

Of course, it is difficult to completely rid ourselves of the delusions, but by applying the antidotes, we can at least lessen them, and therefore lessen the accumulation of karma.

In order to generate renunciation, we need to reverse the craving for samsaric perfections and cyclic existence, and generate disgust for samsara and the contaminated suffering aggregates. It is important to view suffering with disgust, and we do this by understanding the nature of suffering. When we experience some intense problem or suffering, we should have the single-minded thought of being liberated from that suffering. Likewise, by reflecting on the suffering nature of samsara, we should think that nothing else is worthwhile, apart from becoming free from that suffering.

Without pure renunciation, there is still the thirst for the pleasures of samsara. So we need to develop pure renunciation in order to overcome that thirst. Otherwise, we won't be able to turn way from cyclic existence and work for liberation.

This covers the motivation of beings of both small and medium capacity. By reflecting upon the sufferings of the lower realms, we direct our minds towards the happiness of future lives, and give up grasping at the happiness of this life. By reflecting on the disadvantages of the samsaric perfections as a whole, we turn our minds towards liberation, and give up grasping at any type of samsaric happiness.

Therefore, in order to lessen attachment to our bodies, we should try to lessen grasping and attachment to samsaric perfections, samsaric places, samsaric vessels, and so forth. The greater the attachment to our body, the more problematic it becomes,

because there is always something wrong with it. Some might feel they have a nice face, but their hair is not perfect, or there is something wrong with their lips, or some other aspect of their body. There is always something to find fault with, so the body is a constant source of problems.

It is important to lessen attachment to our bodies and any type of samsaric perfection – a place, a vessel, or samsara itself – because the less craving and grasping we have, the more peaceful and content our mind will be.

It is grasping at our body, friends and material possessions that keeps us in cyclic existence. The time will always come when other people won't be able to help us out when we face a problem. So it is a good idea to make some effort now to give up that grasping.

How to generate renunciation

Liberation doesn't come about by itself, and in order to achieve liberation we first have to generate renunciation.

GIVING UP ATTACHMENT TO THE PERFECTIONS OF THIS LIFE

*4ab. Freedom and endowments are difficult to find
And life has no time to spare.*

If our mind is driven by attachment to this life and we fall under the control of various distractions, all of our actions will be directed at attaining this life's happiness.

We have to reverse this attraction to the happiness and comforts of this life – pleasant sounds, friends, fame, and so forth. The way to do this is by reflecting upon the precious human rebirth, the difficulty of finding another precious human rebirth, and death and impermanence.

Through meditation on these topics, we realise that the perfections of this life are without any essence, and we generate the wish to become free from these distractions and turn our minds towards the happiness of future lives.

The precious human rebirth

To reverse any attraction to the happiness of this life, we first have to reflect upon the nature of the precious human rebirth with its eight leasures and ten endowments, and realise that without those leasures and endowments, we would not be able to practise the Dharma purely. When we realise the difficulty of finding such an opportunity again, this will automatically counter the thought that there is no need for haste in using this precious human rebirth.

Having reflected on the great meaning of our precious human rebirth, we can take individual liberation vows, bodhisattva vows, and tantric vows. Furthermore, on the basis of this precious human rebirth, we can create the virtuous karma to attain higher rebirths in the next life, or liberation from cyclic existence, or even enlightenment. When we realise all the great things we can accomplish on the basis of this precious human rebirth, it will automatically lessen any grasping at the happiness of this life, which we will see as small and insignificant by comparison.

The way of giving up attachment to this life is to reverse our attraction to its samsaric perfections. This doesn't mean giving up our possessions, but refers to giving up grasping and attachment to our possessions. Those who are rich and have a lot of material possessions can still give up being attached to this life without giving up their possessions.

Even though the Seventh Dalai Lama, Kelsang Gyatso, lived in a palace, he didn't regard any of the objects, apart from his robes, as his own. So it is possible to give up attachment to material goods, while still maintaining ownership of them.

Reflecting on these points and giving up our attachment to the happiness of this life will contribute to our practice. When Atisha was requested to give teachings, he would always say, 'Renounce this life, and meditate on compassion and bodhicitta'. Indeed, the person who does not give up attachment and grasping at the perfections of this life is not regarded as a Dharma practitioner. Likewise, the person who hasn't given up grasping at the

perfections of samsara won't, in general, be able to generate liberation.

The Kadampa tradition says we need to give up attachment to this life. Having given up food, clothing, and worrying about our appearance, we can still be concerned about what others might think. Thoughts of whether others will regard us as a successful meditator or Dharma practitioner might arise. Giving up attachment to praise and fame is said to be the most difficult attachment to give up. It depends on the individual – some find attachment to food hard to give up, for example, while others can be attached to their clothing.

Desire for praise and fame are two of the eight worldly dharmas ³, which arise from attachment to the happiness of this life. If someone praises us or talks pleasantly to us, we are happy, but we are unhappy if that doesn't happen. Dislike is generated because of attachment towards the good things in life, and if we are attached to the good things in life, implicitly we feel aversion to the opposite. It is the same with being happy when praised and unhappy when not being praised. If we are not attached to the happiness of this life, we will be happy if we are praised, but there will be no aversion to not being praised.

When a person is attached to praise and fame, they are happy when someone praises them today, but unhappy when someone else is praised tomorrow. This sense of unhappiness arises because of attachment to praise.

While those not attached to praise will, of course, be happy when they are praised, when they see someone else being more highly praised, it isn't a problem for them. They are able to think, 'Oh they are being praised more than me. How nice for that other person', because they are not attached to praise.

³ The eight worldly dharmas are: being attached to pleasurable sensations and unhappy with suffering; being happy if one receives praise and being unhappy when one doesn't; being happy if one is famous and unhappy when one is not renowned; and being attached to material possessions and unhappy when we lose them or don't get them.

For the person attached to praise, hearing someone else being praised more than themselves is unbearable, resulting in jealousy and anger. So their attachment to praise has led to non-virtue. The person who is not attached to praise has a different point of view. Because of the way they view things, hearing someone else being praised more than themselves is an opportunity to rejoice and thus accumulate virtue.

THE IMPERMANENCE OF THIS PRECIOUS HUMAN REBIRTH

There is no definiteness about when this precious human rebirth will end. At the time of death, the happinesses of this life – such as material possessions, friends, relatives, even our body – aren't of the slightest use. Reflecting on how the things of this life are useless at the time of death automatically lessens our attraction towards them.

When we die, the mind leaves the body like a guest leaving a guesthouse. Just as a guest doesn't own any of the places where he stays, the mind can't claim ownership of any of the bodies it inhabits. At the time of death, the mind doesn't cease to exist, but continues. At that time, the mental continuum has only two possibilities: it can either take a happy rebirth, or it can take a suffering rebirth in the lower realms.

If we consider these two possibilities, we will quickly see that the possibility of taking rebirth in the lower realms is not one we would like to take – we would find the suffering that animals experience, for example, very difficult to bear. So, being fearful about suffering, we look for ways to avoid being reborn in the lower realms.

By taking wholehearted refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha based on that fear of the sufferings of lower realms, and developing faith in the ability of the Three Jewels to rescue us from those sufferings, we practise the law of cause and effect, thereby avoiding and purifying black karmas, while accumulating white karmas. If we put our minds to it, we will definitely be able to take another rebirth in a happy realm.

When we reflect on the importance of our future lives, our attraction to this life will automatically lessen. We will generate mental peace, and as the time of death approaches, we should be able to have a calm, peaceful mind, and be confident that the fruit of our practice will be rebirth in a happy realm.

As our future life draws closer, we move further and further away from the present life. This process of constantly moving further away from the present life while the future life comes closer and closer is ongoing. We should remember there are only two alternatives: either a happy rebirth or a suffering one. In order to avoid one and accomplish the other, we have to create the causes for a higher rebirth, and reverse any attraction to this life. The more we turn our attention towards our future life, the more our attraction to this life will automatically lessen. Our mind will become calmer and more peaceful and we will have a degree of certainty at the time of death.

We should remember that while we are definitely able to achieve a happy rebirth in the next life, there will still be some suffering and it won't be a perfect life. Even if we stop accumulating non-virtuous karma now, and start to purify the non-virtuous karmas we have created, we will still not be free from the many virtuous and non-virtuous karmas we have accumulated since beginningless time. As a human, we will still encounter the suffering of birth, sickness, aging, and death. And even in a happy human existence, we will still meet with what we don't want, and be separated from what we desire. By becoming aware of this, we realise that no future rebirth in cyclic existence can ever be satisfactory, as it is in the nature of suffering. From this, the wish to avoid rebirth in cyclic existence altogether arises.

GIVING UP ATTACHMENT TO THE PERFECTIONS OF FUTURE LIVES

As we work on reversing the craving for this life, we will naturally be concerned about the happiness of future lifetimes. We might think, 'How can I ensure that I have sufficient material wealth, a good body, a nice circle of friends and so forth in my next life?'

We have to realise that, even if we had a rebirth with perfect material conditions, enough to eat and drink, a perfect body, a perfect circle of friends, a perfect house – in fact, a perfect samsaric existence – it would be still be unsatisfactory, because we would still be within cyclic existence, and hence would encounter the general sufferings of cyclic existence.

The next two lines of the root text read:

4cd. By thinking over and over again that actions and their effects are infallible, and [contemplating] the miseries of cyclic existence, Attraction to the appearances of future lives is reversed.

We have to reverse any craving for the happiness of a future life in cyclic existence, and turn the mind towards liberation. The way to reverse any attraction of future lifetimes is to repeatedly think about the infallible effects of karma and the misery of this world.

Of course, there's no need to mention that if someone wants a rebirth with perfect material conditions and a perfect body in order to be able to benefit others, then this bodhicitta motivation should not be abandoned. Wanting better resources and a good body, and so forth, means that it will be easier to help others, so this altruistic motivation does not need to be reversed. In fact, it is good to have the altruistic motivation of accumulating the karma for a happy future life in order to be able to benefit sentient beings.

Within this life, we find people who are naturally inclined to help other sentient beings. That comes about because of their practices in their previous lives. If we make similar preparations by accumulating positive karma in this life, we will be naturally altruistic and compassionate in future lives. It's good to keep in mind that if we accomplish the purpose of others then, implicitly, we also accomplish our own purpose.

In order to renounce cyclic existence, we need to reverse our attraction to the happiness of future lives. We do this by contemplating the suffering of cyclic existence.

As stated in the lam-rim, the only possible effect of virtue is happiness, and the only possible effect of non-virtue is suffering.

Suffering can never occur as an effect of virtue, and happiness can never occur as an effect of non-virtue. The law of cause and effect is infallible: virtue creates happiness and non-virtue creates suffering. Over the course of time, we have accumulated innumerable virtuous and non-virtuous karmas, and the karmic potency of each of those karmas has been placed as a karmic seed on our mind stream. That accumulation of karmic seeds goes from one life to the next, until each of them meets the necessary causes and conditions to ripen.

Throughout various lifetimes, our virtuous and non-virtuous karmas will ripen, and we will experience happiness and suffering as a result. For as long as those karmas continue to ripen, we will circle in cyclic existence, taking happy and suffering rebirths as a result of the ripening of those karmas.

The general contemplation of karma

Karma has four aspects:

- Karma is **definite**. The result of karma is always definite – virtue can only lead to happiness and non-virtue can only lead to suffering.
- Karma **increases**. Even small karmas with a very light karmic potential will increase over time, so even a very small action can ultimately lead to a vast result.
- The **potential of karma doesn't dissipate over time**. It remains on the mental continuum from lifetime to lifetime, until it meets the causes and conditions to ripen. It doesn't dissipate by itself.
- You **don't experience karma if you have not personally created it**. What you experience is the ripening of karma that you have personally created. You cannot experience the ripening of karma that was created by others.

Specific aspects of karma

Each complete karmic action has three results: the ripened result; the effect similar to the cause; and the possessed effect.

Here, we have to reflect on the ten non-virtuous actions and the ten virtuous actions, and how each complete individual action brings about those three results, which will have a transforming effect. Conversely, if we don't reflect upon the three effects of each individual karma, then any meditation on karma won't have much effect.

For as long as we are in cyclic existence, those accumulated karmic imprints will remain, and we will continue to experience their results. We will also continue to accumulate further new karmas, because for as long as we are in cyclic existence, we will still be driven by the afflictions. It is this combination of karma and the afflictions that causes further rebirth in cyclic existence, where previously created karmas ripen, causing further afflictions to be generated, which again cause the accumulation of further karma, and so on. The process perpetuates itself continuously, for as long as we are in cyclic existence. By recognising that karmas are generated through the influence of the afflictions, we realise that, for as long as we are controlled by the afflictions, we will be bound to cyclic existence and continue to create karma.

By reflecting on this process, you will generate the wish to be free from that cycle of karma and afflictions. You will understand the necessity of becoming free from the afflictions, and the possibility of freeing the mind from them.

The moment you free your mind from the afflictions is the moment you attain liberation. It is important to understand that it is possible to free our minds from the afflictions, because this inspires us to strive for liberation.

Suffering

We need to reverse our attraction to worldly pleasures by reflecting upon their disadvantages. That then generates the wish of wanting to become free from cyclic existence, which is liberation.

As mentioned previously, reversing the craving for samsaric perfections doesn't mean having to give away all your possessions. Indeed, it is possible to give away your possessions

without giving up craving for the samsaric perfections. The way to achieve renunciation is to reflect upon the sufferings of cyclic existence.

In general, there are three types of suffering:

The suffering of suffering refers to the suffering of pain. An example is a headache, which we can counteract that with a painkiller.

The suffering of change is more subtle. For example, when we acquire a new possession, such as a car, we start out with a very happy state of mind. Then, as time progresses, that feeling of happiness dissipates. Finally, the object becomes more of a burden than a pleasure. What starts out as happiness changes to suffering.

Pervasive compounded suffering relates to the contaminated aggregates. Here, there are two points of view.

One point of view is that the contaminated aggregates are pervasive from the peak of cyclic existence down to the very depths of the hell realms. The other point of view relates to the current contaminated aggregates being pervaded by the suffering result of the previously accumulated non-virtuous karma and afflictions. This is compounded, because these current contaminated aggregates will cause future suffering in future lives.

So the current contaminated aggregates are pervaded by the suffering caused by previous karma and afflictions, and they are also the source of our future experiences of suffering.

We should remember that, even though we may take a happy rebirth in the human realm, we will still experience suffering, because it is a rebirth with contaminated aggregates, and we will still be exposed to the specific sufferings associated with a human rebirth – birth, aging, sickness and death, along with being separated from what we want, being too close to what we don't want, and not finding the things we desire.

Recognising this, we realise that, for as long we have contaminated aggregates, we cannot experience happiness. Then we develop the determination to become free from those contaminated aggregates.

The six sufferings of cyclic existence in general

We usually place great faith in what we view as the perfections of cyclic existence, seeing them as stable and reliable. But we must understand they are anything but that. By gradually reducing faith in these superficial perfections, our minds will turn to liberation.

1) The fault that nothing is definite: The fact that nothing is definite has to be contemplated seriously. Those whom we regard as friends won't be our friends forever; those who are our enemies won't be enemies all of the time; and those who are strangers won't be strangers all of the time. Being aware of that uncertainty about friends, enemies and strangers will prevent a lot of suffering.

If someone is our friend, we will place great faith in them and assume they will be our friend forever. If they turn away from us, that will cause us great suffering, because we will have lost what we have become attached to.

However, if, at the outset, we are aware that friends are not forever, this will lessen the opportunity for suffering. Similarly, if a person is our enemy and we feel aversion arising, if we remember that nothing is definite and that this person could easily turn into our friend, that can lessen our aversion. If someone is a stranger, our awareness that nothing is definite will help us not to be indifferent towards that person.

Shantideva said that friends and enemies change constantly. Our friends when we go to bed can be transformed into our enemies when the sun rises. This happens all the time, without any obvious cause. It could have been some action on our part, or something that other people have said about us. The point is that someone can change from being a friend to an enemy overnight.

Therefore, we shouldn't grasp tightly at the idea that friends and enemies are concrete realities.

Reversing this strong grasping at enemies, friends, and so forth will lessen our suffering. Lessening the grasping at someone as an enemy will lessen our own suffering; lessening the grasping at friends will also lessen our suffering. In general, realising this fault of samsara will reduce this kind of suffering.

2) The fault of dissatisfaction: No matter how much we enjoy what we see as the perfections of cyclic existence, there is no satisfaction to be found there. Rather, it is the opposite. The more we have, the more we want. We've all seen the person who, if they have ten, they want a hundred; if they have a hundred, they want a thousand; if they have a thousand, they want ten thousand; and so on. Rather than giving satisfaction, getting more only increases their thirst for more.

While it is difficult to exist without attachment, reflecting on the fault of dissatisfaction will help us better understand the nature of cyclic existence. Knowing that contentment is not to be found in cyclic existence will also help lessen attraction to the perfections of cyclic existence.

3) The fault of having to leave behind one's body: Normally, we grasp at our body as our greatest possession. In fact, we can't grasp at our body as a possession, because it doesn't belong us. Sooner or later, we will have to give it up without any choice about when or where. It can never be a possession, because we will definitely have to give it up.

If we did own our body, we could say things like, 'Oh the body that I have now is good enough for me'. But you know that is not the case, because sooner or later, each of us will have to leave our body behind.

4) The fault of having to take rebirth again and again: Without any choice, we will take further rebirth in cyclic existence, again and again, due to the force of karma and the afflictions. The direction of our rebirth is determined by the force of our karma. We can take rebirth from a higher realm to a lower

realm, or rebirth from a higher realm to an even higher realm, or from a lower realm in a higher realm, and so forth. We don't have any say in this. We can't say, 'Oh I don't want to go there, I want to take rebirth here' or 'I want a rebirth with an even better body'. We have no choice in the matter.

5) The fault of constantly going from high to low and low to high: You might think, 'Oh if I have a higher rebirth it might not be so bad', but that is not certain, as you can go from that higher rebirth to a lower rebirth. Even in one life, people can go from being a head of state to prison. We have also seen the opposite, where a prisoner becomes someone with immeasurable qualities. Nelson Mandela comes to mind.

Considering this point will help us maintain our equilibrium. When we experience fortunate situations, we will be aware that these conditions are not permanent. This will prevent us from becoming overexcited and proud. If we are in an unfortunate situation, remembering impermanence will prevent our mind from becoming too downcast and depressed, because we will be aware that in cyclic existence, nothing lasts forever. Sooner or later, what is down will go up, and what is up will go down. Having a good understanding of this point will help our mental stability.

6) The fault of loneliness: We wander around in cyclic existence alone and our only companions are our mind and the omnipresent mental factors. As we go from one life to the next, there will be nobody to accompany us. We travel around in cyclic existence by ourselves and experience our own suffering and happiness. When the effects of our karma ripen, no one else can experience them; we have to experience those ripening effects ourselves.

It is important to recognise that the source of refuge lies in the virtuous potential within our mind. Mental happiness and satisfaction are generated by our own mind. Even if it is difficult to do, try to turn your attention towards the happiness of future lives. You might not be able to achieve a 100% focus, but you

should have at least 40% or of your attention focused on the happiness of future lives.

The definition of having generated renunciation

*5. When, by having contemplated in that way,
There is no arising, even for a second,
Of attraction to the perfections of cyclic existence,
And all day and night the intention seeking liberation arises –
Then at that time the thought of renunciation has been generated.*

Here we need to contemplate the rarity, the great potential, and the transience of this precious human rebirth. Contemplating the general sufferings of cyclic existence and the sufferings of the lower realms will generate the wish for liberation and an aversion to cyclic existence. It is said that when you reach the point where there is not one atom of attraction to the perfections of cyclic existence, you will have attained renunciation.

When the thought of wanting to attain liberation arises naturally day and night, you are said to have produced renunciation. If someone is a worrier, worries arise without any effort, and the person worries about things all the time. Similarly, you are said to have generated renunciation when the thought of wanting to attain liberation from cyclic existence is generated day and night.

On the basis of having generated renunciation and the wish to attain liberation from cyclic existence, you engage in the practice of the three higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom. Practising the higher training of **morality** counteracts the physical distractions; the higher training of **concentration** counteracts mental distractions and the two obscurations (distraction and mental sinking); and the higher training of **wisdom** counteracts the ignorance that grasps at inherent existence.

Renunciation is generated by reflecting on our own suffering and the nature of our five contaminated aggregates, then realising that as long as one is within cyclic existence, there will be no long-lasting happiness.

There is a strong relationship between our own suffering and compassion, because we can't generate compassion for the suffering of others if we haven't comprehended the depth of our own suffering. When we understand that others also experience such suffering, we generate strong compassion and empathy for them.

That is why renunciation has to precede bodhicitta. Without renunciation, we can't generate compassion; without compassion we can't generate bodhicitta; and without bodhicitta we can't attain buddhahood. So accomplishing the welfare of others all depends on renunciation. At this point, then, we widen the scope of our motivation.

Bodhicitta

Why we must generate this mind

*6. Even if renunciation has been developed,
If it is not possessed by the mind of enlightenment
It does not become the cause of the perfect bliss of unsurpassed
enlightenment.
Therefore, the wise generate the supreme mind of enlightenment.*

Renunciation alone will not lead the perfect bliss of unsurpassed enlightenment; it has to be combined with bodhicitta. Therefore, bodhisattvas generate bodhicitta.

Renunciation is a practice common to both Hinayana and Mahayana practitioners. Practitioners on the hearer and solitary realiser paths also practise renunciation. What distinguishes a bodhisattva from a hearer or solitary realiser is the generation of bodhicitta.

Because of this, bodhisattvas outshine hearers and solitary realisers, and are the object of praise and offerings by the buddhas. With bodhicitta, every action one engages in becomes the cause for enlightenment.

Everyone has some concern for the welfare of others, and this concern can be developed until it becomes, at the very least, a generated form of bodhicitta. Although this bodhicitta does not arise spontaneously, we can at least make an effort to generate it.

When we develop bodhicitta, which arises out of a concern for the welfare of others and the wish to liberate all beings from all their suffering and give them happiness, we will come to understand that achieving these goals is only possible if we ourselves have attained the perfectly enlightened state of a buddha. Therefore, we will turn our mind towards enlightenment in order to accomplish the welfare of all sentient beings.

All of our actions, Dharma as well as worldly, should be based on making an effort to generate bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is based on

love and compassion; the stronger the love and compassion, the stronger will be our bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is essential, regardless of whether one practises the path of sutra or tantra.

Generating the mind of enlightenment

One of the two main methods for generating bodhicitta is the Sevenfold Cause and Effect meditation sequence.⁴

With this method, the generation of **bodhicitta** (7) is preceded by **superior intention** (6), which is the altruistic determination to personally liberate all sentient beings from their suffering and establish them in perfect happiness. Superior intention is preceded by **great compassion** (5), which is the non-discriminating compassion of wanting to liberate all sentient beings without distinction or discrimination. In turn, great compassion is preceded by the special kind of **love** (4) that is based on feeling concern for all other sentient beings, in the same way that a mother is concerned when one of her children is ill. That love based on dearness is preceded by the determination to **repay the kindness** of all mother sentient beings (3), which is preceded by **remembering the kindness** of your own mother (2). This in turn is preceded by recognising that **all sentient beings have been your mother** at some time in the past (1), which forms the basis of seeing all sentient beings as being near and dear.

The foundation is meditating on the **equanimity** that does not discriminate between sentient beings, through holding some close and some distant, and being indifferent to others.

*7. Constantly swept away by the current of the four powerful rivers,
Tied by the tight bonds of karma, so hard to undo,
Caught in the iron net of self-grasping,
Completely enveloped by the total darkness of ignorance,*

*8. Endlessly reborn in boundless cyclic existence,
Ceaselessly tormented by the three sufferings –
Thinking that all mothers are in such a condition
Generate the supreme mind of enlightenment.*

⁴ *Developing Bodhicitta Through the Sevenfold Cause and Effect Practice*, Ven. Geshe Doga, 2016. TI Publishing, <https://goo.gl/PmFroK>

There are different interpretations of what the four rivers mentioned in the first line represent. The easiest is that the four powerful rivers are birth, aging, sickness and death. In more elaborate explanations, the four rivers are attachment, view, existence and ignorance. But for our purposes, we'll use the first interpretation.

So the four powerful rivers represent the ocean of cyclic existence in which we experience birth, aging, sickness and death without respite. If we fall into a river, there is, of course, a chance of being able to swim to safety. However, as the next lines remind us, we are tied by the tight bonds of karma that bind us to cyclic existence.

Why are the bonds of karma so hard to undo? It is because we are caught in the iron net of self-cherishing. We create karma through the afflictions, and because we are caught up in the iron net of self-cherishing, it is very difficult to undo those bonds. We are constantly being swept along by the powerful combination of karma and self-cherishing, which are difficult to escape.

Continuing with the analogy, we might have some chance of being rescued from a raging river if someone saw us. However, as the next line of the verse says, sentient beings are completely enveloped by the darkness of ignorance. Just as being swept away by a river at night means we are unlikely to be seen and therefore rescued, we cannot escape the river of karma and self-cherishing, because we are all blinded by the darkness of ignorance. We are helplessly born and reborn over and over again in samsara, without respite, ceaselessly tormented by the three forms of suffering – the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and pervasive compounded suffering.

When everything seems to be going well and then suddenly problems and disturbances crop up, that's a sign our aggregates are contaminated and in the nature of pervasive compounded suffering.

Reflecting on the sufferings of sentient beings in this way brings about great compassion, which is the wish wanting to liberate all

sentient beings from their suffering. The corollary of this is boundless love, which is the wish of wanting all sentient beings to have happiness. So both love and compassion are concerned with the welfare of others.

Indeed, having already meditated on our own suffering, we can transfer that understanding to others. They are the same as us in that they want happiness just as much as we do, and they don't want suffering any more than we do. But, out of their ignorance of the causes of suffering, they engage in actions that bring about further suffering. Even though their actions are intended to bring about the happiness they desire, their actions are actually the cause for the opposite, which is more suffering.

THE FOUNDATION: DEVELOPING EQUANIMITY

Out of concern for the welfare of others, we turn our mind to enlightenment in order to accomplish their welfare. As we said before, accomplishing the welfare of others has to be preceded by a compassion and love that doesn't discriminate between people – that doesn't hold some sentient beings close and others distant, or feel indifferent to others.

In order to generate this non-discriminating compassion and love, the first step is to develop equanimity. The significance of meditating on equanimity is that it overcomes the mind that discriminates between friends and enemies, and which is indifferent to strangers.

Basically, you have to reflect on the uncertainty of cyclic existence, mentioned earlier. There is nothing certain about friends, enemies and strangers. Those who are friends now can easily become our enemies or strangers; those who are enemies now will easily become friends or strangers; and strangers can easily turn into friends or enemies. There is nothing definite about any of these three types of people.

We can take this further: those who we now regard as friends have been our enemies countless times in the past; those who are now our enemies have been our friends countless times in the

past; and those who are now strangers have been both enemies and friends countless times in the past.

The only reason we categorise people as friends or enemies is because of events in recent times. We regard those who have caused us some harm or discomfort as enemies; those who have given us pleasure and happiness as friends; and those who haven't caused us any pleasure or discomfort with indifference. Classifying people as friends, enemies and strangers is very much based on our immediate circumstances. From a broader perspective, there is nothing definite about those labels of friend, enemy and stranger, and understanding this can lessen attachment and aversion towards other sentient beings.

The perfectly prepared foundation for developing bodhicitta is equanimity viewing all beings without discrimination. This meditation on equanimity is like preparing a canvas before beginning to paint, because the quality of the final artwork depends upon a perfectly prepared canvas.

FIRST STEP: ESTABLISHING THAT OTHER SENTIENT BEINGS HAVE BEEN ONE'S MOTHER IN THE PAST

This step can only be done on the basis of past lives, because without past lives, it would not be possible for other sentient beings to have been our mother in the past. So initially, we have to establish the existence of past lives.

There are many who can actually remember their past lives. For example, Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey's reincarnation definitely recognised me when I first met him. He also recognised two of his disciples; he even remembered their names. That's a clear sign he remembers his past life and that he is a special reincarnation.

We can trace the stream of our present consciousness back to its beginning in this life. At the moment of conception, the consciousness entered the fertilised ovum. The fertilised ovum will not begin to divide until the consciousness enters it, even though consciousness is not physical and is intangible. So consciousness is essential to complete the process of conception,

and that's when the first moment of consciousness in this life is posited.

Since the consciousness is a continuum, it needs to come from somewhere. Where did the continuity of our consciousness come from? One possibility is that it may have come from our parents. However, if we look at the individual mental continuums of parents and their children, we find they are different. The mental continuum of each sentient being has its own individual characteristics. The way parents think is different from the way their children think, and the mental attributes of a child are different from the mental attributes of his or her parents.

So we can see that the child and the parents are not of the same mental continuum. It is, for example, possible that parents who do not have much attachment and desire will give birth to a child who turns out to have a strong disposition for attachment and desire. Likewise, parents who are quite peaceful can have a child who exhibits a lot of aggression and anger.

Where does the child's consciousness come from? It can only come from the preceding moment of the same continuum. The first moment of consciousness in this life can only come from the mental continuity of a previous life, which came from the consciousness of a preceding life, which had to come from another preceding life. If we trace the continuity of consciousness, we can go back through countless past lives. Then we arrive at the conclusion that we have had an infinite number of previous lives. As there is an infinite number of past lives, there has to have been an infinite number of previous mothers in one form or another.

Through this reasoning, we arrive at the conclusion that other sentient beings have been our mother countless times in past lives.

SECOND STEP: REFLECTING ON THE KINDNESS OF MOTHERS

As we have all had direct experience of the kindness of our mother of this life, we transfer that understanding to all sentient beings, who have all been our mothers at some time in the past.

They have been as kind to us in our past lives as our mothers have been to us in our present life.

There are some who have problems with the concept of the kindness of mothers, because they feel their mother wasn't particularly kind to them. These thoughts are based on times when their mother said something unpleasant, or criticised them, or whatever. But that's not considering the whole picture. It's easy to focus on one or two bad things and forget the many good things their mother did for them.

You only have to add up all the breakfasts, lunches and dinners that she prepared for you over so many years. When someone invites us to a meal or to a restaurant, we say, 'Oh that person has been really kind to me by inviting me to this meal', even if it is the only time they do it. By comparison, we can see how much kinder our mother has been. Many students have found this to be a useful way of overcoming their problem of appreciating the kindness of their mother.

THIRD STEP: REPAYING THE KINDNESS OF MOTHERS

Understanding that all sentient beings have been our mother in the past, we realise they have been just as kind to us in the past as our mother has been to us in this life.

Having received all this kindness from mother sentient beings in the past, not wanting to repay that kindness would, according to Lama Tsongkhapa, make us worse than an animal. Even animals have a limited capacity to repay the kindness shown to them. If an owner treats it kindly, a dog will zealously protect its owner's property, baring its teeth if someone tries to take that property. Even with its limited understanding, the dog tries to repay the kindness it receives from its owner.

We like it when other sentient beings smile at us and are kind to us – again, even animals can appreciate this when it is shown to them. When we smile at others or are kind to them, that generates happiness and comfort in the mind of the other. If sentient beings are kind to each other, they generate greater harmony and happiness. That's another aspect of our practice.

Of course, the obvious way to repay the kindness of all mother sentient beings is to give food to those who don't have food, money to those who don't have money, and so forth. But helping in this way is only giving sentient beings temporary happiness. If we want to repay them by giving them ultimate happiness and complete freedom from suffering, we need to help each of them reach the state of enlightenment. To be able to do that, we need to first attain enlightenment ourselves. We must realise that we need to attain enlightenment for ourselves first, so that we can lead all other sentient beings to enlightenment as well.

Thus, we need to develop superior intention, which is taking personal responsibility for freeing all sentient beings from suffering and leading them all to perfect happiness. While wanting to help sentient beings be happy and be free from suffering in repayment for their past kindness is a wonderful intention, superior intention is different. With superior intention, we resolve to personally lead others to ultimate happiness and free them of all suffering.

The difference is like the trader who thinks, 'I want to buy those goods. It would be really good to buy those goods', and then makes the decision 'I am now going to buy those goods'. That is similar to the difference between reaching the stage of wanting to repay the kindness of sentient beings, and superior intention.

This intention to help others can be reinforced by contemplating how sentient beings are like a blind person without a guide who wanders towards the edge of a cliff. Sentient beings are blind, in the sense that they are blinded by ignorance. They don't have the wisdom-eye seeing the nature of cause-and-effect and ultimate reality, and they are without a guide to tell them the causes of happiness and the causes of suffering. Because of this lack of knowledge, they generate more causes for suffering and walk straight towards the abyss of the lower realms.

Recognising the situation that sentient beings are in will strengthen our wish to repay their kindness and develop the genuinely altruistic attitude of the superior intention.

FOURTH STEP: GENERATING LOVE FOR ALL SENTIENT BEINGS

After the third step of repaying the kindness of sentient beings, the next step is to generate the love for all sentient beings that sees them as near and dear.

There's no need to undertake any additional meditation here, because we have already established sentient beings as being near and dear by remembering they have been our mothers in the past. Here, we want these near and dear sentient beings to have every possible type of happiness, and so the love for those who are near and dear is naturally generated.

FIFTH STEP: GENERATING GREAT COMPASSION

Here, we generate the non-discriminating great compassion that wants to liberate all sentient beings from every one of their sufferings. In general, love is the wish of wanting sentient beings to have happiness, while compassion is the wish of wanting sentient beings to be free from suffering.

The love arising from nearness and dearness, and the great compassion generated at this stage do not discriminate between friends, enemies and strangers. The love should arise naturally as a result of the third step. Here, we generate great compassion by reflecting on the suffering of all sentient beings.

SIXTH STEP: GENERATING SUPERIOR INTENTION

From the previous steps, we will have already developed the strong determination to lead all sentient beings to happiness, and free them from their suffering. In this next step, that mere wish is transformed into taking personal responsibility. We make a definite decision to personally bring all beings to happiness and remove their suffering. That doesn't mean asking others to do it, or sharing out the work; it means taking responsibility to personally bring about the happiness of all sentient beings, and free all sentient beings from suffering.

SEVENTH STEP: DEVELOPING THE WISH TO ATTAIN ENLIGHTENMENT

The goal established by our superior intention is an enormous task, well beyond us at this time. We realise that only an enlightened being could achieve this. So we generate the strong wish to attain the state of an enlightened being ourselves, in order to be able to accomplish that intention of bringing about the welfare of all sentient beings.

The definition of having generated the mind of enlightenment

[This is not part of Lama Tsongkhapa's original text, but has been added here following Pabongka Rinpoche's outline]

*If like the mother whose cherished son has fallen into a pit of fire
And who experiences even one second of his suffering as an
unbearable eternity,
Your reflection on the suffering of all mother sentient beings
Has made it impossible for you to bear their suffering for even one
second
And the wish seeking enlightenment for their sake arises without
effort,
Then you have realised the supreme precious mind of
enlightenment.*

In brief, the measure of having generated bodhicitta is when this thought of wanting to attain buddhahood in order to achieve the welfare of all sentient beings naturally arises, day and night.

That completes two of the three principal aspects of the path: generating renunciation and bodhicitta.

FOLLOWING UP WITH ACTIONS

Generating bodhicitta by itself will not suffice – it needs to be followed up with action.

This entails practising the **six perfections** to subdue your own continuum:

- The perfection of **generosity** accomplishes the happiness of other sentient beings.

- The practice of **morality** protects other sentient beings from harm.
- The practice of **patience** counteracts anger.
- The practice of **enthusiasm** develops joy in Dharma practice.
- The fifth perfection is **concentration**, which arises through the force of enthusiasm
- The sixth perfection is the **wisdom** that is built on the foundation of meditative concentration.

THE FOUR ACTIONS FOR GATHERING DISCIPLES

All the actions of a bodhisattva need to be practised in association with the four actions for gathering disciples, described here.

- **Pleasant speech:** When meeting people, greet them kindly with a smile and a gentle hello.
- **Meaningful teaching:** When explaining the Dharma, teach according to the needs and abilities of the listeners. Teach in a pleasant and gentle manner, and don't teach anything that would distress them or cause agitation.
- **Generosity:** People are attracted to those who are generous, so give them things like cups of tea, and so forth. If you lecture a child all the time, you know they won't listen, but if you give a child presents, they will listen to what you have to say. Through the motivation of wanting to benefit others, you practise generosity, with the result that you will gain the confidence of your disciples. Then, when you go on to explain the aspects of the Dharma in greater depth, they will be more willing to listen, which will be of benefit to them in this life and the next.
- **Concordant action:** Just as you encourage your students to practise in accordance with what they have learned, you must also practise what you have explained.

In general, any activity that we do with bodhicitta motivation is a bodhisattva practice. If, before eating or drinking, we generate the bodhicitta motivation, thinking, 'I am eating or drinking in order to be able to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings', then even these mundane actions will become bodhisattva actions. This is quite an important point, since we have to eat and drink on a regular basis.

Correct View

Having generated renunciation and bodhicitta, you also need to have the correct view in order to attain enlightenment.

The reason to meditate on the right view

*9. Without the wisdom realising ultimate reality,
Even though you have meditated on renunciation and the mind of
enlightenment
You cannot cut the root cause of cyclic existence.
Therefore, attempt the method to realise interdependent origination.*

With renunciation and bodhicitta, you enter the path of accumulation. However, you cannot progress to the next step, which is the path of preparation, without the realisation of emptiness. Of course, there's no need to mention that without progressing beyond the path of preparation, you can't become enlightened.

As it says in the verse, you cannot cut the root of cyclic existence without the wisdom that realises ultimate reality. The root of cyclic existence is self-grasping, and the only antidote that can uproot self-grasping is the realisation of emptiness. Renunciation and bodhicitta can, of course, lessen self-grasping, but by themselves, they cannot completely uproot it. To do that, you need to generate the wisdom realising emptiness. Therefore, you need to strive to understand interdependent origination.

Emptiness and interdependent origination come down to the same thing. If you have an understanding of emptiness, implicitly you also have an understanding of interdependent origination. And if you have an understanding of interdependent origination, implicitly you also have an understanding of emptiness. This point is unique to the Prasangika school of Buddhist tenets.

In order to progress to the state of enlightenment, we need to achieve the unification of method and wisdom. If a bird wants to fly, it needs a pair of wings, and those two wings need to work harmoniously for the bird to be able to soar high into the sky.

Likewise, attaining the state of enlightenment needs wisdom as well as method. With the single wing of method, we won't be able to fly into the sky of enlightenment. Both method and wisdom need to work in harmony in order for us to attain enlightenment.

In essence, this is the presentation of the basis, path and result: the basis is the two truths; the path is the union of method and wisdom; and the result is the two bodies of a buddha.

Without initially identifying this ignorance that is the root of cyclic existence, we won't be able to abandon that root. So, the first step is to identify this ignorance.

Initially, the thought at grasping at 'I' is generated. After that, we grasp at 'my body', 'my mind', 'my home', 'my possessions', and so forth. Then, from that grasping at 'I' and 'mine', attachment and aversion are generated, and out of that attachment and aversion, we engage in actions that accumulate different types of karma. So through that grasping at 'I', we create the cause to experience the samsaric sufferings explained earlier.

So we shouldn't point the finger at outside causes as being the root of all samsaric sufferings and problems. Rather, we have to point to the internal cause of ignorance as the source of our suffering. From this understanding arises the motivation, 'I will definitely have to abandon this self-grasping that is the cause of my suffering', which is essential for developing an understanding of emptiness.

This is an important point to contemplate. We need to view self-grasping as the enemy, which requires us to first see the faults of that self-grasping. Without the motivation of abandoning self-grasping, we won't be able to generate the wisdom realising emptiness. So it is important to begin by recognising the shortcomings of self-grasping, viewing self-grasping as the enemy, and then generate the wish to be rid of that self-grasping.

You can't get rid of self-grasping in the same way as you would pull out a thorn. It's not that easy. The way to abandon self-grasping is by analysing its mode of perception i.e. the way self-grasping apprehends its objects. We have to investigate whether

self-grasping is a mind that is concordant with reality, or whether it is a wrong mind. If self-grasping were an unmistakable mind, it would be impossible to abandon it, because it would be a mind concordant with reality.

When we investigate what a correct consciousness is, this analysis will only reinforce our conception of that consciousness, and make the objects of that consciousness clearer. For example, if we look at the consciousness that perceives the colour blue, and we see that blue really exists, then that will reinforce the perception of blue and make it clearer. If self-grasping were an unmistakable mind, that's how it would be.

If, on the other hand, self-grasping is a mistaken mind, it can be opposed. For example, if we look into the distance, we can mistake a rock for a human being. Then, as we get closer to the object and investigate it, we find that our original perception was mistaken, and that it is only a large rock and not a human being. It is the same with self-grasping. If self-grasping were an unmistakable mind, this would reinforce the perception of the object of self-grasping. However, self-grasping is a mistaken mind, because there is a difference between what self-grasping apprehends and reality.

When we investigate, we will see that what self-grasping apprehends doesn't exist in reality. For this investigation, we use the self-grasping within our own continuum as the object of analysis, rather than external objects. When we investigate the self-grasping in our mental continuum, we will find that the 'I' that appears to that self-grasping seems completely independent of anything else. So self-grasping is grasping at this appearance of an independently existing 'I'.

Then we investigate this apprehended object of self-grasping. Does this totally independent 'I' actually exist or not? In fact, when we look for it, we will not be able to find it. The apprehended object of self-grasping, this totally independent 'I', is the object of negation. Understanding the lack of such a totally independent 'I' is the understanding of emptiness. This understanding of emptiness is the complete opposite to the way self-

grasping apprehends its object. Self-grasping apprehends the existence of a totally independent 'I', while emptiness apprehends the lack of a totally independent 'I'.

The wisdom that realises the emptiness of a self doesn't just apprehend the lack of a totally independent 'I'; it actually realises the lack of the totally independent 'I', and in such a way it can prove that self-grasping is a mistaken consciousness that is not concordant with reality. The wisdom realising emptiness is the supporting valid cogniser that proves that self-grasping is a mistaken consciousness. Because it is the complete opposite to self-grasping in the way it apprehends its object, and because it directly contradicts mistaken self-grasping, it is the direct antidote to self-grasping.

This lack of true existence is emptiness, which is synonymous with that lack of inherent existence. The 'I' lacks true existence or inherent existence because it is generated in dependence upon causes and conditions and parts. If something were to exist inherently, it would have to exist in a manner totally independent of anything else. When we find that the 'I' doesn't exist in such a manner, and that it depends upon causes and conditions – such as the basis of the aggregates, and so forth – we arrive at the conclusion is that this totally independent 'I' does not exist.

Showing the right view

Now that you have understood the necessity for realising emptiness and generating the correct view of emptiness, you need to understand the right view.

*10. One who sees the cause and effect of all phenomena
Of both cyclic existence and the state beyond sorrow as forever
infallible,
And for whom all false perceptions are completely shattered,
Has at that time entered the path pleasing the buddhas.*

Seeing the infallibility of cause and effect with respect to both the phenomena of cyclic existence and the state beyond sorrow, or nirvana, shatters all false perceptions. Here, 'false perceptions' refers to the apprehended object of self-grasping and the totally

independent 'I'. By destroying those false perceptions, you enter the path that pleases the buddhas.

The verse can be recast as the following syllogism, 'Take the subject "the cause and effect of all phenomena": they don't exist in the nature of the false perceptions – because they are dependent arisings'.

Because they are dependent arisings, things cannot exist in a totally independent manner, i.e. they don't exist in the way self-grasping apprehends them. If something is totally independent, it does not depend on any causes and conditions, and is not dependent on its parts. If something is a dependent arising, it is either dependent on its causes and conditions, or it is dependent on its parts. Therefore, it cannot be a totally independent phenomenon, and hence it has to lack inherent existence.

This also means that the 'I' doesn't exist from its own side, and it lacks inherent existence because it is a dependent arising. If the 'I' were to exist inherently, the basis of imputation would also have to exist inherently. Here, the basis of imputation is the collection of the five aggregates. The 'I' that is merely imputed on this collection of the five aggregates doesn't exist from the side of the five aggregates, which it would have to do if the 'I' were to exist truly. However, the 'I' is merely labelled on the basis of the aggregates. If the basis of imputation exists from its own side then, on analysis, it would have to be findable. Here, the basis of imputation is unfindable after such an analysis.

If we analyse our perception of the 'self', it seems that the 'self' exists as part of the aggregates. On which one of the five aggregates is this 'I' or 'self' to be found? Is it the form aggregate? On analysis, we find that the form aggregate is not the 'I', because we think of ourselves as the owner of the form aggregate of our body. If the form aggregate is a possession of the 'I', the 'I' couldn't view itself as being different from the form aggregate. When we investigate each of other four aggregates of feeling, and so forth, to see whether they are the 'I', and then refute each one of them as being the 'I', then we will have refuted the object of negation. On the basis of this refutation, we generate the

understanding that the 'I' is a mere imputation, merely labelled in dependence on the basis of the aggregates.

The object of negation is the inherently existent 'I'. If the 'I' were to exist inherently, the aggregates, which are the basis of imputation, would also have to exist inherently. If that were the case, the basis of the aggregates should be findable at the time of analysis. However, since the 'I' is merely labelled on the collection of the aggregates, the 'I' cannot exist inherently, because being 'merely labelled' and 'existing inherently' are contradictory.

The syllogism above stated that the 'I' lacks inherent or true existence because it lacks the four extremes. That is because the aggregates are like a snake imputed on a rope – they are merely labelled by conception, just like a snake is imputed on a rope. At dawn or dusk when the light is dim, a coiled rope of a colour similar to a snake can be mistaken for a snake. At that point, the mind apprehending the rope as a snake is generated.

Here, the mistaken conception is thinking that the rope is the snake. If we investigate whether the snake actually exists, we will find that it is not to be found in any of the parts of the rope. Neither is the collection of the parts of the rope the snake. The snake that was initially apprehended was a mere imputation on the rope, as it could not be found in any part of the rope or the combination of the parts of the rope, or the rope as a whole. Thus, it lacks the four extremes.

Likewise, although the 'I' is labelled on the collection of the aggregates, we cannot find the 'I' in any of the parts of the aggregates. Just like the snake, the collection of the parts is not the 'I', and the 'I' is merely imputed on the collection of the aggregates.

Scientists seem to assert something very similar. They say that, although the existence of subtle particles can be asserted, these subtle particles cannot actually be found. In other words, although they exist at the time of analysis, these subtle particles cannot be found.

Because the 'I' thinks of itself as being the owner of the primary consciousness, we refer to 'my' consciousness. In other words, we

are viewing the 'I' as being different from the consciousness. The lower schools of Buddhist tenets assert that the mental consciousness is an example of the 'I'. They are asserting that the basis of imputation exists inherently. Bhavaviveka said that when you're looking for the 'I', you can only find the aggregates, and when you look at what is going from life to life, the only thing that you can point to is the mental consciousness. That's why Bhavaviveka asserts that the mental consciousness is the 'I'.

The definition of not having completed the analysis of the right view

*11. Appearances are infallible interdependent originations;
Voidness is free of assertions.
As long as these two understandings are seen as being separate,
One has not yet realised the intent of Buddha.*

It can happen that when you meditate on emptiness, the focus on interdependent origination fades. Likewise, when you meditate on interdependent origination, the focus on emptiness fades. For as long as you have not unified the ideas of interdependent origination and emptiness, you have not realised the intention of the Buddha.

While reflecting on how engaging in actions leads to results, and so forth, your understanding of emptiness begins to fade; and when you focus on the lack of inherent existence of a person, your understanding of cause-and-effect fades. For as long as these two understandings are seen as separate, you will not have realised the intention of the Buddha.

The totally independent person is the object of negation. By investigating this totally independent person – which is the object of self-grasping at a person – we realise that this object of self-grasping is non-existent. Then we arrive at the absence of a totally independent person, which is the absence of the object of the negation i.e. the absence of a totally independent person. This is the selflessness of a person.

When you arrive at that understanding, implicitly there is an understanding that the person is merely imputed by name.

However, when you meditate on the person's lack of inherent existence and arrive at the negation of a totally independent person, your understanding of the person as the creator of an action can fade into the background. For as long as that happens, you haven't understood the intent of the Buddha.

Likewise, if you think about the relationship between cause and effect and come to an understanding of how a cause produces a result, then somehow your understanding of the lack of inherent existence can fade. Again, for as long as that that happens, you haven't understood the intent of the Buddha.

What should happen is that when you arrive at the absence of the totally independent person, then, implicitly, you should generate the understanding that the person is merely imputed by name only. If that doesn't happen, you haven't understood the intent of Buddha.

The definition of having completed the analysis of right view

*12. When [these two understandings] are happening
simultaneously without alternation,
And from merely seeing interdependent origination as infallible,
The definite ascertainment comes that completely destroys
The way all objects are apprehended [as truly existent],
At that time the analysis of the ultimate view is complete.*

Phenomena being merely imputed on their parts is the meaning of interdependent origination. Interdependent origination refers to phenomena as dependent on being merely labelled on their parts. If phenomena didn't exist in such a way, they would be totally independent, which is the meaning of inherent existence.

If phenomena were inherently existent, they would not be merely labelled on their parts. When we negate inherent existence, we negate the total independence of the object. The absence of the independence of the object is the dependence of the object on its parts. So we arrive at the understanding that the object is merely labelled on its parts. The lack of total independence implicitly asserts that phenomena are merely labelled on their parts, or that

they are dependent arisings. In this way, the lack of inherent existence, or emptiness, and dependent arising go hand in hand.

When we say that something does not exist inherently, we shouldn't think it doesn't exist at all. What it does mean is that it exists in dependence on causes and conditions. The opposite of not existing inherently is existing inherently, and existing inherently means existing independently of causes and conditions. By negating an existence that is independent of causes and conditions, you are implicitly asserting an existence that depends on causes and conditions. In this way, emptiness and dependent arising complement each other.

If we have a good understanding of emptiness, it will reinforce our conviction in the law of cause-and-effect. Likewise, if we have a good understanding of emptiness and think about the law of cause-and-effect, that will reinforce our conviction in emptiness. The terms 'emptiness' and 'dependent arising' are complementary. If you hear 'emptiness', that should generate an understanding of 'dependent arising'; and if you hear 'dependent arising', that should generate an understanding of 'emptiness'.

Phenomena are merely labelled in dependence on their parts, and the lack of independence of phenomena is the emptiness of phenomena. Dependent arising refers to phenomena arising in dependence upon causes and conditions. These two complement each other; by refuting one, the other is established, and vice versa.

By establishing phenomena as arising from causes and conditions – i.e. as dependent arisings – you are implicitly refuting phenomena as being totally independent. The word 'implicitly' establishes the lack of total independence of phenomena. Having understood that the dependent arising of phenomena, then implicitly you have also established that phenomena lack total independence. By establishing that phenomena are empty, you are refuting phenomena as being totally independent. By refuting that phenomena are totally independent, you implicitly establish the opposite, which is that phenomena are dependent arisings. In

this way, emptiness and dependent arising complement each other.

Uncommon characteristics of the Prasangika

*13. Furthermore, appearance eliminates the extreme of existence
And emptiness eliminates the extreme of non-existence.
When you realize how emptiness manifests in the manner of cause
and effect
Then you are not captivated by wrong notions holding extreme
views.*

While the lower schools of tenets say that emptiness is the extreme of existence, and appearance is the extreme of non-existence, the Prasangika assert the opposite. They say that emptiness is the extreme of non-existence, and appearance is the extreme of existence.

One uncommon characteristic of the Prasangika system is that they say appearances clear away the extreme of eternalism, and emptiness clears away the extreme of nihilism. This is the reverse of what the lower schools say. The Prasangika assert that appearances clear away the extreme of eternalism, because the mere appearance of a phenomenon shows that it has to lack true existence. Because of its mere appearance, any object lacks true existence, which clears away the extreme of eternalism, while emptiness clears away the extreme of nihilism, because mere appearance doesn't exist inherently.

Emptiness eliminates the extreme of existence. For the Prasangika, the mere appearance of phenomena establishes the lack of true existence, because their mere appearance is dependent on causes and conditions. This implicitly establishes that things are merely labelled and empty of inherent existence.

Emptiness also eliminates the extreme of non-existence or nihilism. The lack of inherent existence indicates that phenomena are produced and not independent. If something is produced, it must exist. So emptiness counteracts the extreme of nihilism.

The same point is made in the lines of the *Heart Sutra*, which says, 'form is emptiness and emptiness is form'. 'Form is emptiness' means that form lacks true existence and that form couldn't exist if it lacked true existence. The assertion that form implicitly lacks true existence, by virtue of its mere appearance, counteracts the extreme of eternalism. Likewise, emptiness is the lack of inherent existence, and the lack of inherent existence implicitly asserts the conventional existence of form. Therefore, emptiness negates the extreme of nihilism.

That concludes the explanation of the three principal aspects of the path – renunciation, bodhicitta and emptiness.

Having Gained Definite Ascertainment, Advice on Pursuing the Practice

*14. In this way when you realise exactly
The vital points of the three principal aspects of the path.
Resort to seeking solitude, generate the power of effort,
And quickly accomplish your final goal, my child.*

Here Lama Tsongkhapa exhorts the disciples to put into practice what they have learnt.

‘When you realise exactly the vital points of the three principal aspects of the path’ refers to the three essential activities of listening, contemplating, and meditating.

Wisdom arises from hearing, and that wisdom is strengthened by contemplation. The wisdom arising from contemplation is more reliable than the wisdom arising from hearing, because the wisdom arising from hearing has arisen in dependence upon an outer condition, while the wisdom arising from contemplation is more stable, because it arises through the through the force of your own reasoning.

Having developed wisdom through the actions of hearing and contemplation, you then have to go into solitude and generate the wisdom through single-pointed concentration while meditating. Then you should quickly reach your final goal.

This verse shows the necessity of meditation being preceded by contemplation and listening. Before going into solitude and practising meditation, one first has to generate the wisdom arising from listening, and the wisdom arising from contemplation. There’s not much point in jumping straight into meditation without having generated these two types of wisdom.

On the other hand, once you have understood the subjects of meditation well through the wisdom arising from listening and

the wisdom arising from contemplation, you should not procrastinate, but go straight away into solitude in order to generate the wisdom arising from meditation.

There are two places of solitude: internal mental isolation from disturbing thoughts, and external physical isolation from the disruptive behaviour of others. On a personal level, meditating in solitude means having few desires and being content with simple food, simple clothing, and a simple place to live. However, just going into the solitude of isolation is not enough. You need to practise with the power of uninterrupted enthusiasm.

Our enthusiasm is often uneven. We practise a bit of meditation, but then we get discouraged and give up. We do a few retreats trying to attain a calm abiding, and when we don't achieve it within a few months, we give up. The force of enthusiasm means a constant stream of joy in practising virtue. We need to remember that the Buddha meditated for three countless great eons in order to become enlightened, and be happy with small and consistent progress on our part.

The Kadampa masters said that you need to look far ahead and not be short-sighted. This means aspiring to the long-term goal of complete enlightenment.

A second piece of advice from the Kadampa masters is to open your mind and adopt the very expansive point of view of incorporating the whole body of the Dharma into your Dharma practice, in order to attain your aim of complete enlightenment. You should have the intention of wanting to practise the whole of the path, meaning all of the practices of the three types of beings, including the sutric and tantric paths.

Quite often, we begin to practise in a burst of enthusiasm, which fades quickly. So the third piece of advice from the Kadampa masters is that you should practise slowly and steadily, rather than in bursts of short, intense practice.

It takes a long time to reach enlightenment, and we need to be realistic about that. Otherwise, we might create stress for ourselves.

For example, we might do a mantra retreat with the goal of completing a certain number of mantras every day. Then things happen, and we can't finish the mantras as we had anticipated. We may get stressed and push on, finishing the mantras quickly with an uptight mind. It is much better to keep the mind relaxed and take Dharma practice slowly and easily. Then there will be a sense of comfort and joy in the practice of virtue. Having such a steady attitude is a much more sensible approach that will be long-lasting.

If we try to get to an external destination in a rush, it creates anxiety and stress, and is not peaceful. It is the same with meditation. If you try to achieve your goal in a rush, that will generate disturbance and tension, which will hamper your efforts. So you have to take care.

The root text is completed with these lines:

This short teaching on The Three Principal Aspects of the Path was given by the well-learned Bhikhu Losang Drakpa to Ngawang Drakpa, the governor of the Tsako district.

Transcribed by Lucy Bresich

Edited and compiled by Adair Bunnett; proof-read by Bernii Wright and Mary-Lou Considine