
Refuge and Bodhicitta

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**To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Highest
Assembly**

I go for refuge until I am enlightened.

**May I, from the virtuous merit that I collect by
practising giving and other perfections**

**Attain the state of a buddha to be able to benefit
all sentient beings.**

The meaning of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta

The first prayer that we recite before teachings is the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer. So the refuge and bodhicitta motivations are the motivations that we generate at the beginning of each teaching.

Refuge is the door to the Buddhist path and bodhicitta is the door to the Mahayana path.

Refuge protects one from following a wrong path, while bodhicitta protects one from falling into a lesser path.

Refuge

To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Highest Assembly

The first line identifies the three objects of refuge. When we recite the word *Buddha* we should remember that in addition to Shakyamuni Buddha the word *buddha* includes one's teacher, the deities, the eight medicine buddhas, the thirty-five buddhas and so forth. That is something that one should definitely contemplate when one is going for refuge.

One should contemplate that the word *Dharma* contains both the scriptural Dharma and the actual Dharma. The scriptural Dharma is comprised of the different categories of the scriptural Dharma taught by the Buddha through his kindness. The actual Dharma is the truth of cessation and the truth of the path.

The *Highest Assembly* includes the different beings who are actual Sangha, such as the Mahayana Sangha, as well as the hearer and self-liberator practitioners.

The Buddha refuge is that which shows one the Dharma. One goes for refuge to the Buddha as the person who shows one the Dharma. The Dharma refuge is the actual refuge. The Highest Assembly are those who one takes as one's example. While one is going for refuge, one also visualises that one is surrounded by all sentient beings who, together with oneself, go for refuge to the Triple Gem on the basis of the two-fold motivation.

I go for refuge until I am enlightened

The second line identifies the time for which one is going to take refuge, and the basis that is going for refuge. The words *I* or *I myself* identify the basis that is going for refuge. *Until I am enlightened* identifies the time period for which one goes for refuge. This is the uncommon Mahayana refuge.

General refuge is taken for a period of time in this life, as in the prayer that is done during the formal refuge ceremony, and also when one is taking lay vows, where one says, 'until the end of my life'.

The specific Mahayana refuge is until the attainment of enlightenment. Here the meaning of enlightenment is two-fold. It can mean the place of Bodhgaya, meaning that one will take refuge until attaining the state of the complete supreme emanation body in Bodhgaya. Or it means dharmakaya, meaning that one takes refuge until one attains the dharmakaya or truth body.

In these two lines we have the two causes for refuge; we have the objects of refuge; we have the time period for which one is going for refuge and the basis that is going for refuge. That completes all elements.

Bodhicitta

May I, from the virtuous merit that I collect by practising giving and other perfections

Here again, the word *I* identifies the person who is generating the motivation. *The virtuous merit that I collect by practising giving and other perfections* identifies the merits through which one wants to attain the aim of enlightenment:

- The merits of generosity
- The merits of morality
- The merits of patience
- The merits of enthusiasm
- The merits of concentration
- The merits of wisdom

Attain the state of a buddha to be able to benefit all sentient beings.

The fourth line identifies the purpose of generating bodhicitta. The objective is *all sentient beings*, while *benefit* is the purpose of others, and the state of a buddha refers to enlightenment.

This line identifies the nature of bodhicitta as being in the nature of prayer, as explained in both the *Ornament of Mahayana* sutras and *Explanation Illuminating the Meaning*. By the merits that one accumulates with one's three doors, through the practices of generosity, morality, patience and so forth, may one attain the state of a buddha, so as to be able to place all sentient beings in the state of liberation and complete enlightenment.

Mind, not mental factor!

The mind of enlightenment is exactly that – it is a mind and not a mental factor. If something is an awareness then it is either a mind or a mental factor. The mind of enlightenment is a primary mind and not a mental factor, even though it is sometimes labelled as an aspiration or wish.

As it says in *Ornament of Clear Realisation*,

Mind generation is the wish to attain complete enlightenment for the purpose of others.

The label of ‘aspiration’ or ‘wish’ is merely nominal, because the mind of enlightenment is a mind and not a mental factor. The reason the mind of enlightenment is labelled as an aspiration (even though it is not a mental factor) is because it has to be endowed with the two-fold aspiration:

- The aspiration of wanting to achieve the welfare of others
- The aspiration of wanting to attain complete enlightenment

The aspiration of wanting to achieve the welfare of others is the causal aspiration. The mind of enlightenment is labelled as a wish or aspiration because it applies the name of the cause to the effect.

The mind of enlightenment has within its entourage of mental factors the aspiration of wanting to achieve complete enlightenment. The mind of enlightenment is labelled as a wish or aspiration to show that it has the aspiration of wanting to attain complete enlightenment within its entourage of mental factors. So the mind of enlightenment is labelled as an aspiration or wish both from the point of view of one of its accompanying mental factors, as well as from the point of view of applying the name of the cause to the effect.

Seven-point cause-and-effect meditation

The aspiration of wanting to achieve the welfare of sentient beings is the causal aspiration that precedes the aspiration of wanting to achieve complete enlightenment. If you look at the sequence of meditation in which one generates bodhicitta, then this becomes clearer.

1. Having meditated on equanimity one meditates on recognising that all sentient beings were one's mother.
2. One meditates on the kindness of the mother.
3. One meditates on the necessity of repaying the kindness of one's mother.

These three meditations establish the basis for the welfare of sentient beings.

4. Then one meditates on love and compassion for all beings without discrimination, which trains the mind in the motivation that is concerned with the welfare of sentient beings.

5. Here the wish to achieve the welfare of sentient beings increases and becomes more refined.

6. This is then further refined with superior intention, where one takes upon oneself the responsibility for the welfare of all sentient beings.

7. Only after all these meditations does one generate the actual aspiration of wanting to attain complete enlightenment.

The actual aspiration of wanting to attain complete enlightenment is a result of the preceding meditations, where one meditates on the welfare of sentient beings, and generates a concern for the welfare of sentient beings in different stages.

Both bodhicitta and its accompanying aspiration of wanting to attain complete enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings have superior intention as their basis.

Superior intention has as its basis great compassion, which has love for all beings without discrimination as its basis, which in turn has as its basis the determination to repay the kindness of one's mother, which has as its basis recognising the kindness of the mother.

This in turn has as its basis recognising that all sentient beings were one's mother. Here one can clearly see that first one meditates on generating a concern for the welfare of sentient beings.

So the aspiration of wanting to achieve the welfare of sentient beings is generated first and acts as the basis for the aspiration of wanting to attain complete enlightenment. One has to relate these words to the enlightenment that one is going to personally attain in the future, and not to some kind of general enlightenment, because that would not be actual bodhicitta. To be actual bodhicitta, one has to relate it to the enlightenment that one is going to attain in the future.

Relating this to the lam rim

You can see that to generate bodhicitta one needs to engage in these step-by-step meditations. One cannot generate bodhicitta merely through reciting a prayer. Rather, one has to engage in these sequential meditations to initially generate an effortful experience of bodhicitta, and then increase that so that it becomes an effortless experience of bodhicitta.

The meditation on bodhicitta needs to be preceded by the generation of pure renunciation, which is attained through the meditations common to the being of medium capacity. This in turn has to be preceded by meditation on the law of cause and effect; which then in turn has to be preceded by meditation on refuge; which in turn is preceded by meditation on the lower realms; which in turn is preceded by meditation on death and impermanence; which in turn is preceded by meditation on the precious human rebirth; which is preceded by meditation on proper reliance on the spiritual friend. By meditating in this way, one places an incredibly valuable imprint of the whole path on one's mind.

The divisions of bodhicitta

1. There is of course a **division by nature** which is the division into wishing bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta

Wishing bodhicitta is the bodhicitta that is not directly held by the practices of the perfections of generosity and so forth.

Engaging bodhicitta is the bodhicitta that is directly held by the practice of the perfections of generosity and so forth. For example the bodhicitta in the continuum of a person in meditative equipoise is wishing bodhicitta and not engaging bodhicitta.

2. There is the **division from the point of view of example**. Here we have the twenty-two bodhicittas that are related to twenty-two examples such as ground-like bodhicitta, gold-like bodhicitta and so forth.

3. Then we have the **division from the point of view of their mode of generation**. Here we have king-like bodhicitta, ferryman-like bodhicitta, and shepherd-like bodhicitta. This is very meaningful.

King-like bodhicitta is the bodhicitta that has the motivation of wanting to first attain enlightenment oneself and then to subsequently lead all other sentient beings to enlightenment. It is called king-like bodhicitta because the king is always the foremost person in the realm and everybody follows him.

Shepherd-like bodhicitta is the bodhicitta where the person has the motivation of first wanting to place all other sentient beings in the state of enlightenment, with oneself attaining enlightenment last. Here the analogy of a shepherd is used because a shepherd always has all the sheep and goats in front of him while the shepherd brings up the rear. That is

why this bodhicitta is called the shepherd-like bodhicitta. The practitioner wants to first bring all other sentient beings to enlightenment and then, and only then, attain enlightenment for themselves.

With *ferryman-like bodhicitta* the practitioner has the motivation of wanting to attain enlightenment together with all other sentient beings. When the ferryman ferries his passengers over the river, they all go together on the same boat.

4. There are four **divisions from the point of view of boundary**: The *bodhicitta of wish and practice*, which is the bodhicitta on the level of the path of accumulation and preparation.

The *bodhicitta of superior thought*, which is the bodhicitta from the first ground to the seventh ground

The *ripening bodhicitta*, which is the bodhicitta on the eighth, ninth and tenth ground

The *bodhicitta abandoning obscurations*, which is the bodhicitta in the continuum of a buddha.

We should always practise pure refuge and bodhicitta, and base all our activities on them both.