

# DEVELOPING BODHICITTA

*Through the Sevenfold  
Cause and Effect  
Practice*



**Venerable Geshe Doga**

*Translated from the Tibetan by Sandup Tsering*



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# Dedication

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*We dedicate the merit from publishing these teachings to the long life of the Venerable Geshe Doga, Tara Institute's resident teacher since 1984 – we can never thank Geshe-la enough for teaching us the vast and profound teachings of the Buddha with unfailing kindness, generosity and skill over so many years.*

*We also dedicate the merit to the long life of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the Spiritual Director of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT); and to the flourishing of the Buddha's teachings, to bring happiness to all sentient beings, and for all suffering to end.*

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# Foreword

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‘Bodhicitta’ – the genuine heartfelt wish for all beings to have happiness and be free from suffering – is unique to the Mahayana, or Great Scope, Buddhist path. Over the centuries, Buddhist scholars have written many works that provide advice on how to cultivate this extraordinary mind. A key text is Shantideva’s *Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, which details the benefits of bodhicitta and how to develop this mind, step by step.

While Shantideva’s text emphasises the practice of **exchanging self and others (*tong len*)** for developing bodhicitta, another method is outlined in the Great Scope section of the Lam Rim (or ‘Stages of the Path to Enlightenment’). This method is the **sevenfold cause and effect instruction for training the mind in bodhicitta**. The sequence of steps is:

1. The first cause: understanding all sentient beings to be your mother
2. The second cause: remembering their kindness
3. The third cause: repaying their kindness
4. The fourth cause: meditating on the love that comes from the force of attraction
5. The fifth cause: great compassion
6. The sixth cause: superior intention (altruism)
7. The effect: development of bodhicitta.

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# The Value of Dharma Practice

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The four important points we need to consider in our Dharma practice are:

- Why we need to practise Dharma
- We are capable of practising Dharma
- We must practise Dharma in this very lifetime
- We must practise at this very moment.

Whatever the level of our spiritual practice, for example in terms of the three Scopes (Small, Medium and Great), we must do that practice with an awareness of these four important points.

## Why we need to practise Dharma

First, we must look into the purpose of practising Dharma or some other spiritual practice. We know there are different schools of spiritual teachings, and here we must investigate the point of following such spiritual practices.

The answer lies in the inborn sense of “I” that all beings have. This sense of “I” arises spontaneously and is always present within us; it always wishes for happiness and tries to avoid suffering. Whoever has this spontaneous sense of “I” will automatically have this fundamental desire to find happiness and be rid of suffering.

Based on this natural wish for happiness and no suffering, every being engages in activities they see as a means to fulfil that desire. Even those who live a worldly or mundane life ultimately try to fulfil this wish within their lives, whether it be in their education or work.

We have to distinguish spiritual actions from very worldly actions. What they have in common is the hope that they will produce happiness and eliminate suffering.

However, the worldly person is one who views outer or material objects as a true means of finding happiness and eliminating suffering. They view making progress in the material world, and in the ideas that help develop that material world, as the way to increase their happiness and reduce their suffering.

A person who follows spiritual teachings does not share that view: they believe those teachings that will eliminate their suffering and help them attain happiness. The spiritual person believes that the source of happiness is wholesome, positive, virtuous actions; and that the source of suffering is unwholesome, negative, non-virtuous actions. Thus, they act accordingly in order to achieve happiness and remove suffering.

### THE SCOPES OR LEVELS OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

A spiritual person knows that no matter how much outer development you make, it does not necessarily bring more inner happiness. They see that, in addition to material conditions, humankind also needs a spiritual guide to truly find inner happiness.

Generally speaking, all schools of religion are founded or initially developed on the knowledge that human problems cannot be solved, nor can all human wants be fulfilled, by material outer conditions; and that inner wants, in particular, cannot be fulfilled just by material conditions.

We can say the basic foundation of all religions is the same – the values of love and compassion. All religions are founded on the principles of helping other living beings, and eliminating their problems and suffering.

By seeing that inner happiness does not necessarily come from outer conditions, no matter how good, we come to appreciate the spiritual teachings as the true means for us to find happiness.

We need to follow these spiritual teachings in order to find happiness and peace, especially those practices that serve as antidotes to the mental defilements or delusions in our mind. All our unhappiness or suffering is the direct outcome of the delusions we generate, and if these delusions are not counteracted, there is no inner happiness or peace.

We also have to understand that our spiritual practice is the true antidote to these delusions; material conditions, on the other hand, can sometimes increase them. When that happens, in spite of our great material comfort, we find that instead of feeling happier, we experience more suffering. Thus we must realise that we need to practise the spiritual teachings or Dharma.

### *The Lower Scope*

What is the real spiritual teaching? As mentioned earlier, it is the practices we can apply to diminish the mental delusions within us.

The next question is the meaning of the words ‘mental delusion’ (or ‘mental defilement’). The term refers not just to one, but to various types of mental delusions. A true spiritual practice is one that counters delusions. What type of delusion qualifies as an object to be countered by spiritual practice? At the very least, the practice must counter the delusion of being attached, or attracted to this present life or world.

If we follow the practice of Dharma at the lowest level, the type of delusion to overcome is attachment to this world. If our practice does not target attachment to this world, it

will not be effective in enhancing our inner peace and happiness.

However, if we could turn our mind away from the affairs of this world, and engage in wholesome actions, these actions will truly bring us more peace, relaxation and happiness, as well as being a cause for a better future rebirth, for example, as a god or human being. This is the practice of Dharma at the lowest level.

### *The Middle Scope*

If we go further with our spiritual practice, we realise that it is not enough to overcome attachment to this present life and engage in spiritual practices in the hope for a better future rebirth, because a better future rebirth does not ensure lasting happiness. Therefore, our next goal is to seek the everlasting happiness of liberating oneself from samsara or cyclic existence.

To attain this goal, the delusion one has to counteract is attachment to the pleasures and marvels of cyclic existence. If this attachment is not removed, there is no end to being reborn over and over again in cyclic existence; there is no end to suffering, and no true happiness.

Motivated by the desire to overcome such attachment, one turns to the spiritual practice called the three-fold training (morality, concentration and wisdom). If you follow this training, you see the end of this cycle of rebirth in cyclic existence. This is the medium level of spiritual practice.

### *The Great Scope*

You may feel complete confidence and conviction in following the three-fold training to overcome attachment to cyclic existence, and thereby bring about an end to this cycle of rebirth in cyclic existence, but this is still not enough.



You see that the cause of your dissatisfaction is your self-cherishing attitude: only seeking your personal goal of happiness, and not seeking to benefit all sentient beings.

Therefore, you seek to achieve full enlightenment in order to benefit other sentient beings, and you generate the genuine mind of enlightenment. This is the aspiration of the Great Scope or goal of spiritual practice, the bodhi-citta mind.

In short, we need to practise Dharma because we want happiness and do not want suffering.

Our knowledge of Dharma has to be such that, when we engage in analytical meditation, we will be able to start from one point or subject as a base or root, then like a tree, from that point we should be able to think of other whole branches or topics that come from that root, and of all the sub-topics that come from that branch.

At the same time, we need to be able to condense a whole range of topics into one main point.

## We are capable of practising Dharma

To completely understand why we are capable of practising Dharma, we need to fully contemplate the meaning of this precious human rebirth, and realise how we have all the suitable inner and outer conditions of life.

In terms of outer conditions, we are now human beings having all the leisure and endowments that make this life a perfect base on which to follow spiritual practice. Inwardly, we possess a human mind gifted with a sharp knowledge and ability to discern things.

So, gifted with all these physical and mental conditions, one has very suitable conditions for practising Dharma.

## We must practise Dharma in this very lifetime

We need to practise Dharma in this lifetime, because this wonderful human life of leisure and endowment that we have found is rare, and not something that can be found again and again. This thought provides us with the motivation to practise Dharma now, while we have this wonderful human life.

## We must practise Dharma at this very moment

We must practise Dharma right at this moment, because not only is this suitable human life meaningful, with great potential and very rare, it is also uncertain, and could end at any moment. It is wrong to think, “Before I practise Dharma, I shall enjoy life and become rich”. It is wrong to delay or procrastinate over one’s practice. We have to see that we must practise Dharma at this moment.

Meditating on these four points of Dharma leads us to the last point: no form of laziness should prevent or interfere with Dharma practice.

It is as if you must rush to practise Dharma, because you have no time left if you don’t practise now.

Such a thought of committing oneself to practise must be genuine, and arise on the basis of a great deal of contemplation and understanding of spiritual practice.

It is with this mind that we commit ourselves to follow spiritual practice.



# Bodhicitta and Mahayana Practice

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Before you engage in the practice of this sevenfold cause and effect method, make sure you have a bodhicitta motivation, which is the thought, “I must achieve bodhicitta to benefit all beings, and for this reason, I am listening to these teachings on the stages of the path to enlightenment”.

Bodhicitta is the essence of all the Mahayana teachings. Whether what we study and practise becomes a Mahayana practice or not depends upon whether bodhicitta is incorporated into it.

Bodhicitta is the source of accumulating all the merit and wisdom needed to achieve enlightenment. It is like an alchemic liquid that can transform our spiritual practice into the causes for the truth body and form body of a buddha. So, bodhicitta is the main practice of all the bodhisattvas.

There are three main obstacles to generating bodhicitta. They are:

1. Attachment to this life
2. Clinging to the pleasures of the cyclic existence in general
3. Desiring peace, but only for oneself.

The appropriate meditations to counteract these obstacles are:

1. For the first, meditating on death and impermanence

2. For the second, developing renunciation by contemplating the suffering nature of cyclic existence
3. For the third, meditating to cultivate even the seed of bodhicitta, for instance producing an artificial or fabricated bodhicitta, as a preliminary to cultivating actual bodhicitta.

With this method of generating bodhicitta through the sevenfold cause and effect practice, the first six steps are causes, and the seventh the resulting effect of bodhicitta.

The order of the steps – from firstly recognising all beings as having been one’s mother, through to bodhicitta – shows how the causes and effect are linked. We can see this linkage clearly by contemplating the sevenfold cause and effect in reverse order.

Bodhicitta is the genuine and spontaneous aspiration to attain full enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Such bodhicitta cannot be produced without having cultivated the thought of superior intention, which is taking personal responsibility for the suffering of all beings.

In order to cultivate this superior intention, one must cultivate great compassion by completely understanding the suffering of all other beings. Such great compassion depends upon having loving kindness towards all beings. In order to cultivate this loving kindness, we have to cultivate the first three causes.

Why are these first three causes so necessary? If we look into our own mental attitudes, we see that we do not have this loving kindness towards all beings. We do however, have loving kindness towards those who are close to us.

Therefore, in order to cultivate the type of loving kindness generated with the sevenfold cause and effect practice, we have to establish in our mind that all other beings are

equally close to us. In order to establish this, we meditate on recognising all beings as our mother, since the relationship with our mother is generally the closest relationship we have had.

Once we have established that we have this close relationship with all other beings, naturally the next two causes – remembering the mother’s kindness and wanting to repay that kindness – will develop automatically.

If we go back through the Lam Rim, or stages of the path, then before cultivating the stage of remembering all beings as our mother, we meditate on immeasurable equanimity.

Prior to that, we have to realise the uncertainty of friends and enemies. The latter meditation is taught in the stages of the path for the person of Medium Scope.

In order to realise this uncertainty of friends and enemies, we have to study and gain conviction and faith in the Small Scope teachings of the stages of the path, particularly the teachings on the law of karma.

To gain such conviction, we must take refuge in the Three Jewels from the depths of our hearts. Doing that depends upon having fear of the suffering of rebirth in the lower realms. To fully understand that suffering, we have to meditate on death and impermanence.

If we go further back in this meditation, we see how this human life of leisure and endowments is so rare and meaningful. To fully realise how rare and meaningful this perfect human life is, we must rely upon a qualified spiritual guru or teacher, who shows us all the teachings.

To be able to find such a perfect spiritual teacher depends upon success in the practice of purifying negativities and

accumulating merit. Therefore, one must first engage in the practice of the six preliminaries, of which the primary one is the seven-limb practice.

## Bodhicitta as a motivation

Recalling the benefits of bodhicitta, we should then try to actualise it in our mind. Make sure you generate the correct motivation. This is very important because the quality of the actions we perform, whether good or bad, is predetermined by the motivations that preside over those actions.

To ensure our actions will yield a good result or fruit, we have to make sure that our motivation is right at the start, and then do our best in the middle, and at the end of our actions.

In the practice of generating the right motivation of bodhicitta, we are training our minds to be more thoughtful, or considerate of other beings. We are also making sure that in our mental attitude there is no stain of mental delusion, no selfish motive.

In other words, we are trying to develop love and compassion towards other beings by performing all of our actions with this motivation, and also by overcoming all self-interest and self-importance.

At this point, we need to know why we must think of other beings and work to benefit them. If we do work to benefit them, we will see that not only do others benefit, but we also meet our own needs. Not only will our actions benefit other beings, but we will bring more happiness to our own life, which will become more satisfying and meaningful.

We can see that with the selfish motivation of thinking only of oneself, all the actions and goals we pursue in life

become small or narrow. Instead of happiness and satisfaction, these selfish thoughts bring more harm and suffering to our life.

We can understand this simply by asking ourselves, “Why is my mind still dissatisfied with my life? Why am I still short of peace and happiness in my mind?” We can then see it is because all the actions we have done so far in this life have been done under the influence of this selfish mind – the mind that thinks only of our own comfort and satisfaction.

Because of this mind, many of our actions have had the effect of bringing disharmony to our relationships with friends, relatives and others. As a result of this selfish mind, we meet many unwanted things that we have not confronted before.

If, on the other hand, we could create more positive actions towards others, we could achieve more happiness and satisfaction in our own life.

## Our great human potential

We also need to consider our own self-potential and realise how great it is. As human beings, we all have the eight freedoms from unfavourable states and ten suitable conditions.<sup>1</sup>

We should think that we must work to utilise this life to benefit other beings. Benefiting other beings broadens the scope of our life. We have the self-potential to achieve not only our own purpose, but we can do the same for all other beings.

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<sup>1</sup> The eight freedoms and ten endowments are discussed in more detail in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, pp. 308–313

We are trying to understand what Dharma practice means, and how it benefits us.

The main point is to always cultivate positive states of mind, while eliminating all negative states of mind. We have to see that our happiness and suffering are mainly derived from our mind. Happiness arises from using our self-potential in the right way, and suffering arises by misusing that self-potential.

As human beings, we all have positive self-potential. We all possess a human nature that shows love and compassion for others. If we develop and strengthen that good human nature, and express it in our actions, the result is we will find more happiness.

Alternatively, if our actions are motivated by strong self-cherishing, the result is unhappiness and suffering. For instance, as a university student, you might wish to come top of the class, but not extend that wish to any other students. With this attitude, if some other student comes first, you will be disappointed and unhappy, and feel miserable. Obviously, this misery is the result of your faulty way of thinking.

You would not experience this suffering if you believed that, like yourself, all the others wish to come top, and as a result you would be happy to see another student achieve this goal.

We are all the same in always desiring the best outcome. With the right attitude, these problems of mental suffering can be prevented.

Adopting the correct way of thinking, such as cultivating love and compassion and thinking of the needs of others, is Dharma practice.



We have to see that as human beings, we all have enormous potential within us: we have the unique human qualities of discrimination, wisdom, love, and so on. However, if we let any negative emotions overrule our mind, our actions will harm us.

It is important to see the role our mental attitude plays in deciding our future. We need to understand how our mind plays a key role in our life, and how important it is to always make sure we have the right state of mind.

If we do not do this, all the actions and decisions in our life will only become a source of suffering. Even the actions we recall as giving us some pleasure, in the end become a cause of suffering, called the suffering of change. The reason why the end-result is suffering is because there was something wrong with the motivation preceding our actions.

We have to understand the real meaning of Dharma and its opposite. Our practice must be to always control or tame our mind. The unwanted suffering that we experience is caused by our own unruly, negative state of mind: it arises from within us. So, the solution or remedy to overcome that suffering is also within our mind.

For example, we feel disturbed and unhappy when our mind is overpowered by anger. No matter what we do, we can find no comfort for as long as anger is present in our mind. Therefore, we can see that to find happiness and comfort, we have to overcome our anger. The true remedy to anger is found within us, through the cultivation of love, compassion and tolerance.

It is important to see that Dharma practice is the source of all goodness and happiness. Virtue and non-virtue – the source of happiness and suffering, respectively – has to be understood in the context of one's own mind. From this

point of view, we have the self-potential to prevent suffering. Likewise, we have the self-potential to find happiness. The elimination of suffering and the achievement of happiness are in our own hands.

Happiness and suffering do not come from the outside. If we strongly wish for happiness, we must create the causes ourselves. It is impossible for any other being to give you the happiness you seek. Likewise, it is impossible for others to remove the source of your problems and suffering.

The most effective way of eliminating suffering and of finding happiness is to transform your mind. The Lam Rim, or the stages of the path, is very suitable for us, since that path includes teachings that are relevant to all levels of practitioners – those of Small, Medium and Great Scope. The Lam Rim teachings are suitable for all these levels of beings.

The essence of all the teachings is cultivating bodhicitta, or good heart, which is possible if you put in the effort. If you always wish for love and compassion for all beings in your prayers, and you are always accompanied by such great love and compassion, it has the potential to be of benefit to you in this and in future lives.

If you always wish and pray to have that mind, and rejoice for others who are endowed with it, your prayers become a cause to generate bodhicitta.



# The Basis: Immeasurable Equanimity

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Before beginning the meditation on recognising all beings as being like one's own mother, one must meditate on immeasurable equanimity. To explain the reason for this, the analogy of painting is used: in order to paint, the base or surface upon which you paint must be even, soft and level. Likewise, to generate bodhicitta, our mental attitude towards others must also be even. If it is not, and we hold some close and others distant, we cannot cultivate bodhicitta.

Here we must note the difference between the immeasurable equanimity that is the preliminary practice to bodhicitta, as discussed here, and the immeasurable equanimity that is one of the Four Immeasurables.<sup>1</sup>

The immeasurable equanimity referred to in the Four Immeasurables is the meditation in which one contemplates or wishes, "May all other beings be free from the thoughts of attachment and aversion of holding some close and others distant. How wonderful it would be if they were free of such thoughts of closeness and distance. May I be able to free them from those thoughts", and so on. Here, the emphasis is upon the minds of other beings.

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<sup>1</sup> "May all sentient beings have happiness and the causes of happiness. May all sentient beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. May all sentient beings abide in equanimity, free from attachment and hatred, free from holding some close and others distant. May all sentient beings never be separated from higher rebirths and the supreme bliss of liberation."

The focus of the immeasurable equanimity that is a precondition to generating bodhicitta, on the other hand, is personal – generating a state of equanimity in one’s own mind.

It is very effective to focus on one’s own mind and see how, with the biased attitudes of attachment and hatred, there can be no true inner peace and happiness. When we see the faults of having attachment to some and hatred for others, and the negative influence this attitude has upon our daily actions and decision-making, we can try to overcome these feelings.

Before meditating upon immeasurable equanimity, we should know what the meditation means, and what its benefits are. The purpose of this meditation is not to convince ourselves that friends are not friends, and enemies are not enemies; rather, it is to get rid of our attachment to friends, and our hatred for enemies, and enable us to see the benefits of equanimity, not only at a theoretical level but also in a practical way.

If we look carefully, we see that attachment is the main source of the problems for which we cannot find solutions. Because of attachment, we have the problem of not having a particular friend. Then, having found a friend, there is the fear of losing them. Then there are the problems of difficulties arising in the relationship. There is also the problem of never being satisfied.

If we look at the true cause of our problems in this way, we can see they are all due to some conflict in our mind. The causes are not external. If we look inside, it is as if there is a war going on between our attachment and hatred, and we become a victim of that fight. We might have only one friend, but in our dealings with that friend, we change and show different moods. Sometimes we

show happy moods, at other times we show a frowning face. This is all because of our attachment and hatred.

We must realise that the reason we have so many problems and why we have to struggle so hard is because of this conflict and delusion in our mind. The positive side of this is that with a settled mind, we will find more inner peace and happiness.

While we can see how most of our problems are mentally created, it is more important to actually meditate on them, and see for ourselves that most of them are caused by attachment and hatred in our relationships with others. Deriving knowledge through our own practice will give us the impetus to overcome such delusions in our mind.

This desire or attachment within our mind can never be satisfied or fulfilled: it never stops wanting things. Desire or attachment can even want things that we cannot ever mentally and physically achieve in life. Being influenced by such unfulfilling desire is like being asked to carry a weight that is beyond your strength. Desire or attachment can be very misleading: it can make us pursue a goal that we have no hope of reaching.

There are many people whose problems and suffering are obviously due to unfulfilled desire. While the object they seek is unachievable, they cannot comprehend this because of desire. In other words, they are completely deceived by desire. To others, they do not appear to have any reason to suffer, yet they may inwardly experience a lot of suffering. Even though they have the best conditions surrounding them, because they are driven by desire, they cannot appreciate and enjoy those conditions. So, they live a completely unfulfilled life.

This is how desire can bring us great suffering. With less desire, on the other hand, we will enjoy more peace and satisfaction. The Lord Buddha is an example of someone who, in this life, completely renounced all objects of desire, and who followed the path of non-desire or non-attachment. By following that path, he reached the highest goal. Because of his practices, he is still admired as a great being, not only by Buddhists, but also by followers of great religions such as Christianity or Hinduism.

It is wrong to think that if we diminish desire we will lose something in life. Rather, the opposite is true: we will gain more. We will find more satisfaction and have fewer problems in our lives.

#### THE UNCERTAINTY OF FRIENDS, ENEMIES AND STRANGERS

We noted earlier that if you want to paint or draw something, it is important that the base of your painting is even and smooth, otherwise you will not get a good result. Likewise, if our mental attitude towards all beings is uneven, any form of love or compassion we show towards them will be biased or partial. Therefore, it is important to train the mind with the meditation of immeasurable equanimity.

If we focus on our own attitudes towards others, we might see they are biased: we have attachment for those we call friends, and aversion for others whom we feel to be enemies. For those who are neither enemy or friend, we have neutral thoughts; indeed, there is some sense of abandoning those we regard as neutral beings.

With this biased attitude, we have no hope of cultivating impartial love and compassion for all sentient beings.

This biased attitude is the source of many faults. Because of it, our mind is narrow, even foolish sometimes. We feel joy or pleasure when we see good things happening to our friends, but feel unhappy if the same thing happens to our enemy, without understanding the real reason for these different responses. If we see our friend suffering in an unpleasant situation or experiencing a problem, we feel unhappy; but if we see our enemy with that same problem, we feel good and wish that they had even more problems and suffering! Thus, our usual mental attitude with respect to other beings is totally deluded.

We should first meditate on immeasurable equanimity. In this meditation, the object being observed is other beings: friends, enemies, and neutral beings. There are two systems for visualising the objects of immeasurable equanimity.

According to Lama Tsong Khapa's text, *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path*, you think of the three classes of beings in sequence: first, you think of the neutral person; then having trained the mind in equanimity with that neutral person, you do the same with respect to the friend; then, finally, the enemy. Having trained in equanimity using the enemy, you extend this towards all sentient beings.

According to other Lam Rim traditions, instead of meditating on each of these three objects sequentially, you use all three (friends, enemies and neutral persons) at the same time, and then try to train the mind to cultivate the state of equanimity towards these three. *Liberation in The Palm of Your Hand* uses this latter system of visualising the three objects at the same time, and so shall we.

To begin this meditation on immeasurable equanimity, the first and most important thing is to just sit in the meditation posture, and try to remove all external distractions. Then, try to imagine three people in front of you: a very close friend, an enemy, and someone who is neither of these two. Try to develop as clear a picture of each of these three as possible, and focus single-pointedly on them.

Check what sort of attitude you have towards each of those three beings. If we have a very clear picture of them, we can see that we have attachment to the friend, aversion towards the enemy, and the thought of abandoning the neutral person. It is important for us to see that these three different attitudes are caused by ourselves, not the other person.

When we think of a person we hate, we produce all sorts of negative states of mind. Sometimes we feel strong hatred or anger, and want to retaliate, or hurt or harm that person. At other times, we feel strong jealousy or competitiveness towards that person, in that we do not want to be inferior to, or lower than that person. One may also feel pride, feeling far superior to that person. We regard those who we call 'enemy' and for whom we feel hatred as a source of misery for us.

### *A meditation on immeasurable equanimity*

To meditate on immeasurable equanimity, choose the right sitting posture and make sure your mind is abiding within. Then think of three beings – friend, enemy, and a neutral being – and cultivate a state of equanimity.

One very important thing is to make sure your mind is not distracted by any other object. We tend to forget what we are supposed to remember, and remember what we are



supposed to forget. Meditation can often help us remember the things we are supposed to do.

The funny thing about our memory is that sometimes we can forget certain things that suddenly come to mind in other circumstances. For instance, you may not be able to remember something in an exam, but as soon as you finish and walk out to the toilet, it comes to mind! This is the nature of our memory.

You should also try to cultivate the bodhicitta mind and use this as the motivation to listen to the teachings. It is important that even if you cannot cultivate genuine bodhicitta, you still pray that you can generate true bodhicitta in future.

Each of the three beings in front of you is, respectively, a cause to generate attachment, aversion, and the thought of abandonment, or a sense of disregard. In this meditation on equanimity, one also tries to contemplate the reasons why we have these three different attitudes.

The obvious reason for aversion, or hatred for an enemy, is because you think that they have caused you some harm or loss. The reason why the thought of a friend spontaneously gives the pleasant feeling of joy and closeness, is because they have helped you by providing material things like food, clothing, or other forms of aid. And the reason why you have a sense of disregard for the neutral person is that you cannot recall having received any harm or help from that person.

In order to counteract these three different attitudes, and to cultivate an equal attitude towards the three beings, we must recall the teachings of the Medium Stages of the Path concerning the uncertainty of enemies, friends, and neutral beings.

As you do this, you realise that even the person categorised as an enemy has, in the past, been your friend, and shown tremendous help and kindness. By doing this, you overcome your hatred. Likewise, the same person you see as a friend, and to whom you have some attachment, was an enemy in the past, and caused you much harm. Doing this overcomes attachment. Similarly, the neutral person has been both friend and enemy in the past; therefore, there is no reason to disregard that person. This is a brief explanation of the meditation on immeasurable equanimity.

In this meditation, we come to understand that these three types of beings are all the same, in that they have all been friend, or enemy, or had a neutral relationship with us. This gives rise to the questions: Which one should I love? Which one should I hate? Which one should I ignore? In the case of a friend, why be so attached to them when they have been an enemy many times in the past?

This approach equalises our attitudes to all beings. We can see how in this meditation we are using logic and reason, the power of which can help our mind transcend our preconceptions and change our attitude. In our daily life, our mind becomes confused and worried about certain things because it cannot see things clearly, and lacks some understanding, or simple knowledge. Such simple knowledge might be just one reason and, if we could open our mind to that one reason, it might be enough to destroy our confused state of mind.

In the *Sutra Requested by (a Woman Called) Dawa Chog*, the Buddha said, “I have murdered you numberless times in the past, and similarly you have sliced up my body numberless times in the past. Likewise, you cannot count the numberless times sentient beings have killed

each other in the past”. This sutra also shows the unreliability of friends, enemies and neutral beings.

Here, we are also learning about the unreliability of our relationships with others. We can understand this by studying scriptures such as Shantideva’s *Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, Gyelsay Togmay’s *Thirty-seven Practices of a Bodhisattva* and various Lam Rim teachings. These say that when your life is prospering, there are many who become friendly with you. Even if you try and run away from them, they follow you. If you become poor and destitute, on the other hand, they run away from you, even if you seek them out.

If we think about it, our own experiences of relationships with others confirm what the texts say.

It is important that we cultivate an awareness of the unreliability of friends and enemies, because this is a major source of problems in our life. For example, it hurts us very much when a friend becomes an enemy. As mentioned previously, this is because we are not fully aware of the changing nature of relationships, or the unreliability of friend and enemy. When we think of someone as a friend or enemy, we regard them as being an absolute friend or enemy. Our mind is fixed, so when change occurs, and our friend becomes our enemy, it is a great shock. Some people cannot cope with this change.

If we look further into the cause of why losing a friend causes such disturbance to our mind, it is because we are attached to our friend. Therefore, attachment is something that we need to overcome in our relationships. In place of attachment, try to cultivate a true love, which means the thought of giving and extending help to others. With true love, you will receive much help and benefit from your relationships with others.

Even if we cannot completely overcome it, we can see the importance of minimising attachment. Then friends will be less of a cause of suffering in our life. If we practise the meditation on immeasurable equanimity, not only can we contemplate what we have learned from the text, but we can also bring our own experience into the meditation. This can be very effective in gaining realisations.

In this meditation on equanimity, we are trying to overcome hatred for the enemy, strong attachment to friends and disregard for strangers. It is not enough to simply sit in meditation and say, “I cannot hate an enemy because the same person has been my friend in the past”. No matter how many reasons you see in meditation, they are not sufficient unless they help you overcome, or at least minimise, hatred towards your enemies.

It is important to see the connection here between friends and enemies. Even if we can recollect receiving harm from a person, through this meditation, we can see how we received benefit and help from that same person in the past. We can see that the person we see as a friend, or an enemy, or a stranger has not always been our friend, or enemy, or a stranger. We also have to see how hatred and attachment serve as continuous sources of suffering and misery in this life, and that eliminating them will bring us more happiness, joy and satisfaction.

As we do this meditation, we need to understand why we must overcome and minimise hatred and attachment, and how we can find some meaning and happiness in our life through transforming ourselves inwardly. It is important to have some belief in the fact that we can find inner happiness. Otherwise, our approach is no different from the material world, where the whole focus of finding happiness is on outer objects. Instead, we should try to understand that many of the problems we experience in

life are related to our attachment to friends, and hatred for our enemies.

One of the verses of Geshe Langri Tangpa's thought transformation teaching says, "When someone whom I have assisted, and in whom I have placed great hope inflicts upon me extremely bad harm, I shall view that one as my supreme spiritual friend".

Most of us have suffered from being a victim of a close friend or relative. We need to understand that the true cause of suffering is one's attachment to the friend or relative, and not necessarily that the friend has done something wrong, or lack some worthy quality, as most people think. Such change is inevitable, and when it happens, the reason it becomes a cause of suffering is because of one's attachment, because one has the fixed idea that this person is close. So, it is important to use this meditation to at least minimise strong, fixed hatred or attachment.

The idea that, "If I find the right person, this will solve all my problems" is also deluded, because having a partner is not necessarily a source of happiness. Indeed, a partner can be a source of problems. It is not just about finding someone – we then have the thought "they will stay with me forever". What if your partner later leaves? All this needs to be considered.

Many people have the thought that finding a partner is the most essential thing. They believe that becoming rich, or influential, or having an attractive body will help them to find the right partner. Does being rich, good-looking and having many friends solve relationship problems? No, it does not. There are many wealthy, strong and attractive people who have more relationship problems because of their attractiveness.

We have to see that the real solution to life's problems and crises, and the real way to peace and happiness in life, lies in minimising desire and hatred in the mind. If outer material objects were a cause of happiness, then finding that object should eliminate suffering.

There are even many teenagers who can see the benefits of meditation and of having a calm mind for dealing with the problems they encounter at that stage of their life.

### OVERCOMING ATTACHMENT AND HATRED

We should not think: "Since there is no certainty in friends and enemies, what's the point of sustaining a friendship with others?". Distancing ourselves from others, or discontinuing our friendly relationships, would be using this teaching in the wrong sense.

Through this practice, we are aiming to totally overcome attachment and hatred. It is true that friends will become enemies, or enemies may become friends, and that we do not want to undergo suffering when that change occurs. But we have to see that the suffering we feel as a result of our changing relationships with others is caused by our own afflictive emotions in the form of attachment and hatred.

So, what we need to challenge and overcome are these negative emotions. We do not want to eliminate love and compassion for our friends. In fact, our love and compassion is not only for the times when we see them as a friend – even when they turn into an enemy, we still have to see them as someone who is deserving of our love and compassion.

Whether we understand the reason for not having attachment or hatred from either our own perspective or

from the perspective of other sentient beings, clearly there is no point in having such emotions.

From our own experience of attachment and hatred, we can understand how these emotions influence the actions of our three doors of body, speech and mind. We can consider the sort of mental attitude we show to someone for whom we have attachment, and how that influences our verbal and physical actions. Likewise, we can investigate the influence of hatred upon our daily actions. Then we can see that due to attachment and hatred we accumulate a great number of negative karmas.

Not only that, but as a result of these attitudes, we face many problems in this life. Therefore, from the point of view of our own life, having attachment and hatred is a great source of problems and negative actions.

Now, from the point of view of other beings, is it right for us to call some of them friends, holding them close to our heart with attachment? Or to call others enemy, regarding them with hatred?

In reality all sentient beings are the same in that they all want happiness and to avoid suffering. So, from the point of view of other beings, we are being unfair if we say that only our friends deserve happiness while our enemies deserve suffering.

From their side, those we see as enemies do not want suffering. If, from their side they wanted to suffer, there would be nothing wrong from our side in causing them suffering and loss. But as this is not the case, it is therefore not right for us to treat them differently from a friend. As we discussed before, from their own side, they have all equally been our close friend numberless times.

As the great master Kamalashila said, “There is no good reason to have such attachment and aversion, whether we look from the point of view of our own side, or from the side of other beings.”

It is important that we engage in this meditation on immeasurable equanimity until we gain some realisations. Even if it is not an inner experience, but just a theoretical understanding, we can cultivate this state of equanimity towards all beings, holding neither attachment nor hatred.

As said before, in this meditation we need to see how all sentient beings have the same form of connection with us, in terms of having been a friend or enemy and having given help or harm not only in this life, but in all our previous lives. There is no difference between whether someone gives us help and benefit in this life, or harmed us in past lives; there is no difference between receiving help or harm in this life and in previous lives.

We can think of all beings in terms of this analogy: if ten beggars come to you seeking help, you cannot favour one over the others, because they are all equal in begging for help. They are all the same in being destitute, and needing food and drink.

We should make an effort in our meditation, therefore, to understand why we should not have attachment or hatred, and why we should see that all sentient beings are the same. Start your meditation by focusing on selected beings whom you regard as enemies, and through the meditation try to minimise, or remove, this hatred. Then extend this same meditation to friends and neutral beings.

As we do this meditation over and over again, and develop our knowledge, we can cultivate this feeling of equanimity



towards all beings. It is not easy to gain this feeling as an inner experience or realisation, but at least on the level of knowledge, when we engage in this meditation, we can view all sentient beings with the same mental attitude.

It is said that if we could cultivate this state of equanimity within our mind, we will have established the foundation to generate the bodhicitta mind. On the other hand, if we have not built this foundation of equanimity, there is no hope of cultivating bodhicitta.

Even though we are not yet able to gain true realisations of equanimity, it is still worthwhile to put an effort into this by praying, “May I be able to show such a state of equanimity to all beings at all times.” We can also pray very strongly, “May I be able to always serve and benefit all beings.” Make this prayer strong.

Alternatively, perhaps you could make the personal vow to never cause harm to any other being. Even a prayer from our heart such as this can be a cause to cultivate the state of equanimity, and thereby the mind of enlightenment and bodhicitta.



# The Sevenfold Cause and Effect Practice

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## The first cause: seeing all beings as one's mother

The first of the sevenfold cause and effect instructions is to recognise all beings as having been one's mother. It is said that this first step is difficult to cultivate, yet we must realise that without this first step, it is impossible to generate the subsequent steps. Therefore, we need to make a serious effort to cultivate this first step.

The relationship with one's mother is the closest relationship one can have with another sentient being. One has to recognise all sentient beings as one's mother in order to cultivate bodhicitta, otherwise one will be deprived of the opportunity to cultivate this mind.

So, it is important to make an effort to see all sentient beings as one's mother at the level of our own experience. This is a difficult step and, unlike profound topics such as impermanence and emptiness, there is not much scriptural and logical evidence that can be employed to prove this fact. There are some scriptural sources, but these alone will not convince us.

The most important factor that will convince your mind is to employ, to the best of your knowledge, as much logical proof as possible. If you take time to explore this topic with many reasons, you can gradually see how it makes sense that all sentient beings have, in fact, been your mother.

## BEGINNINGLESS MIND

The logical starting point, and the most important thing we need to know, is that our life is beginningless. Once one has proved this to oneself, one can infer that each and every sentient being has been one's mother in the past.

By saying that life is beginningless, we are also saying that consciousness has no beginning.

The continuum of our consciousness is like a seed: you cannot trace the initial cause of any particular seed. That seed came from a cause, which came from a former cause, and so it goes, without beginning.

If we consider the lives we have taken in cyclic existence due to the force of karma and delusion, the number of lives we have taken in the past is infinite. If we trace back, we can find no starting point where we can say that, "This is the start of my life in cyclic existence".

If you burn a seed in a fire, that is the end of the seed. If you trace forward rather than backwards, you realise that, just like that burnt seed, your life in cyclic existence has an end, because that life is based on the object of the conception of self-grasping, which does not inherently exist. When we realise this, we can understand there is an end to continual rebirth within cyclic existence.

The ignorance that is the conception of self-grasping is the seed, or the root of our continuation in cyclic existence. When the seed is completely burnt, there is no chance for it to sprout and grow branches. Likewise, once the seed of ignorance is destroyed – or at least if we can see the possibility of its destruction, or the removal of that root cause – we can understand that there will be no creation of karma, and without karma there is no birth.

So, although life has no beginning in cyclic existence, we can see the possibility of it having an end.

### LOGICAL PROOFS OF BEGINNINGLESS MIND

Regarding the logical proof which shows that our consciousness, or mind, has no beginning Chandrakirti stated, “The mind of a just-born child has a preceding moment of mind, because it is a mind.”

If we are asked, “Where does our current mind come from?” we might say, “It comes from the mind that we had yesterday.” This is one simple reason we can use, because if the mind we have today is not a continuation of the mind we had yesterday, there would be no connection.

But there is a connection, in the sense that we planned yesterday to do something today, and we have completed that task. The reason why we can do it today is because it was planned in our mind yesterday. Just as today we have plans to do things tomorrow, or on the next day, when the time comes we are able to do those things.

Therefore, it is clear that the mind we have today comes from yesterday’s mind, and yesterday’s mind came from the day before that. We can see this for as long as we have lived in this current life.

Where does the mind we have in this life come from? We could say it comes from our body, because the body supports the mind. If it comes from this body, then where does this body come from? We can trace right back to the first moment of conception in the mother’s womb, which is when life in this body began. The question is, does that first moment of body have a karmic cause, a previous life, or does it come totally from our parents?

The initial cause of one's body is the union of egg and sperm from one's parents. Even scientifically, however, it is clear that this union of egg and sperm does not always develop into a new body. Therefore, we say that at conception, consciousness must also be entering, since the union of egg and sperm alone does not always form life.

We can say that the egg and the sperm come from our parents, but can we say that our consciousness also comes from our parents?

If it does come from our parents, many unsolved questions arise. If we look at children from the same parents, each one of them might have very different habitual behaviours and different personalities. If their minds as well as their bodies came from their parents, then why are there so many differences in the children? You can see, for example, how within the one family one child can be calm, soft and placid by nature, whereas another child can be rough, aggressive and angry by nature.

It is said that there is some parental influence in the personality of the children; boys will have more personality traits of the mother, and a girl will have more traits from her father. However, this needs to be examined. But in terms of the child's natural habitual behaviour, it is extremely difficult to say that this has anything to do with the parents. If habitual behaviour was inherited, it would follow that all children would resemble their parents in this respect.

So, the mind of the child has not come from the parent, and is not a continuation of the parents' minds. Then what is the origin of the mind? If we say that it comes from some mind other than that of the parent, this is a sign of existence of a previous life. Logically then, if we have to contend that this current life must have a former

life, it follows that the former life must have had a life before that, and so on.

We cannot trace back to the beginning, as the number of lives we have taken in the past becomes infinite. It follows that if each sentient being has served as our parent, logically, there are not enough sentient beings to have served as our parent in the past.

In this way, we see that in the countless numbers of past lives, each time we were born from a mother's womb or from an egg, we relied upon some other being as our mother. Using this method, we can deduce that there is not one sentient being who has not been our mother in the past.

This first step of recognising all sentient beings as one's mother is an essential cause to generate impartial love and compassion for all sentient beings, as it extends the number of objects for whom we generate love and compassion.

Another effective reason proving the existence of previous lives is our experience of a different identity as "I" when someone calls our name. We have some notion of a self-identity, which is attached to the name of this life, but we also have the experience of another "I" that can arise without any connection to the name of this present life. Therefore, there is an "I" related to this life, and another "I" not related to this life.

When we talk of the existence of life before and after, the whole question is one of the continuum of our mind, and of our self. If we can prove that our mind is beginningless or comes from a previous life, then naturally we can also understand that there is a future life.

Given the fact that our mind's continuum has come from a past life and has no beginning, and will likewise go on into a future life, we need to understand that in our continuum there is an habitual pattern or familiarity that determines our mental attitude and our ability to achieve things.

It is important to see that happiness and suffering are the outcomes of our good and bad nature, our habitual patterns of behaviour. Therefore, the focus of our spiritual practice should be on developing this good nature, or habitual pattern, in our mind.

Our most important spiritual practice is subduing our mind, but we cannot achieve a result instantly. It takes a continuous effort, and to make this continuous effort, we must maintain our motivation to practise Dharma. Having such a continuously strong motivation to practise Dharma also depends upon our understanding of the connection of this life with previous and future lives.

On this basis, we slowly develop an understanding of the spiritual path. Then, how we make continuous progress is a matter of being skilful, realising that it is important to not rush, or force, the pace. Rather, spiritual practice is a gradual process, where we make an effort, bit by bit, but always in a continuous way.

The point of continuously training our mind to focus on non-attachment, non-hatred, non-jealousy, non-competitiveness, and so on, is not only to enhance the peace and happiness in this life, but also to benefit our future lives.

We know from experience that we feel peaceful and calm when there is no disturbance of anger, jealousy, or attachment in our mind: we feel totally relaxed. So, if we train our mind to be distant from attachment, anger and so on, then if we are born as a human in the future, we

will find more peace in the sense that there will be less influence from desire, and so forth.

As we always emphasise in the teachings, what we are looking for in our spiritual practice is help or support from within ourselves. Once we have found that support, then even when we encounter deceit, we are not disturbed and do not feel deceived or helpless.

In the Lam Rim, you will find this comment, “He eats his father’s flesh and hits his mother. The enemy he killed sits on his knee. A wife gnaws her husband’s bones. Samsara can be such a farce!”.

You need to develop your understanding of the fact that all sentient beings have been your mother, to the point that it spontaneously arises in relation to any sentient being: when you eat meat you feel some negative sense that you are eating the flesh of your mother; or if you observe a tiny ant, you immediately recall how, in many past lifetimes, all your hopes of survival depended on that ant, who once served as your mother.

If you actually realise the step of remembering all sentient beings as being your mother, that thought will arise spontaneously in your mind.

Even if you do not achieve this realisation, some meditation on this step will help reduce the self-cherishing mind, and increase the thought of helping and benefiting others. Then, as a benefit of this meditation you will have more patience and tolerance, especially when others cause personal harm.





## The second cause: remembering the kindness

In this second step, you contemplate the kindness of all mother sentient beings every time they were your mother, and since all sentient beings have been your mother, you extend the thought of this kindness to all sentient beings.

The easiest way to remember the kindness of all sentient beings is by first remembering the kindness of your mother in this life. This is easy to remember in terms of the beginning, the middle, and the end.

### HER KINDNESS AT THE BEGINNING: DURING PREGNANCY

Our mother's kindness in the beginning is for the nine months when we are in her womb. Physically our mother felt the moment of conception. It is said that this very first moment of a new life takes away all the energy from the mother's body. You all know how women become very weak and lethargic at this time. It is said some women feel like they are falling over a cliff, or that they have a feeling of sinking down at the moment of conception.

It is good to contemplate how one's mother sacrifices herself at that moment, and this is important because our relationship with our mother is important. This meditation can develop closeness with one's mother and help to overcome any problems, either now or in the future.

Despite the loss of her freedom and pleasures, and the extra burden that she has to carry, the moment one is conceived, your mother feels a tremendous, spontaneous flow of love towards you and thinks, "This is my child". At the same time, extra worries and concerns arise in her mind. She is no longer responsible for just her own life, but now has the direct responsibility for two lives. If we

consider the sacrifices she makes, her love must be very great and deep.

Your mother is always concerned about your safety when you are in her womb, and because of this, she may have to change her lifestyle. If she is fond of jogging or dancing, she might stop this. She is also very thoughtful of what she eats or drinks – whether it is too hot or too cold – and she is even aware of her body temperature. As a result of your conception, there are great changes and more stress in her life.

When you are in the womb, you receive all your energy and nutrition from your mother, so whatever she eats or drinks comes to you through the umbilical cord. When you are in that state, you would probably die if you were fed by mouth. There are karmic explanations as to why it is like this.

At the back of her mind, your mother is always concerned about your safety. She cannot even sleep properly for fear of causing harm to you. Even at this early stage of your life, you can see how much affection and love you receive from your mother, what sacrifices of her own pleasure and freedom she makes, and what pain and discomfort she endures.

We should always remember our mother's kindness so that we can be more grateful and appreciative of her. There are those who believe their mother has been very bad or has abused them. Why do these people hold such a negative attitude towards their mother? Do the reasons for which they feel negative outnumber her kindnesses?

It is not right to completely forget the kindness that you receive from your mother, and hold in your mind the few abusive words she said to you. Rather, you see the

benefits of viewing your mother from the perspective of all the good things she has done for you.

Without the kindness of our mother, we would not have survived. All the credit for meeting with the Dharma and being able to do what one has wanted in life goes to our mother.

In a formal meditation on the topic of the kindness of the mother, you clearly and vividly visualise your current mother in front of you. Then as we have just discussed, remember her kindness from the moment of conception through the nine months and ten days in the womb. Not only did she show great love and affection, but she also underwent great physical and mental pain.

To some extent, you can justify her difficulties by saying that her body was karmically or biologically built to carry you, but you should still consider how very difficult it is to carry even a small load for just a few hours, and imagine how you would feel. Your mother made great sacrifices while you were in the womb.

#### HER KINDNESS IN THE MIDDLE: AT BIRTH

Next, we think of our mother's kindness in the middle, when she gave birth. Here we contemplate what our mother undergoes, and what we are like at the time of birth. Of course, all women who have given birth know from their own experience that birth is physically very painful.

Those who have not had the experience of giving birth can learn about that pain through reading books, or by observing birth. Here, however, it is important to think as if you had experienced the excruciating pain of childbirth yourself.

When you are first born, you are just like a maggot. Compared to other species, the human being has more potential, but at birth we are more helpless than most. Other creatures can get up and find their mother's nipple to suckle, but we cannot.

Despite all this, our mother forgets all her pain amidst her joy, which is greater than if she had found a treasure. When newly born, we are completely powerless and helpless, and reliant upon the care and affection of our mother. Immediately after our birth, she holds us up to the warmth of her body. Having been in so much pain and in such a mess, how could she manage to hold you up if not for her love and affection? After all the pain she underwent, there is no anger or hatred: it is all love and affection.

As you develop, she always provides every comfort through the warmth of her body, and she tries to entertain you and bring a smile to your face.

Her love is such that she is prepared to do virtually everything. Even if she is normally very fastidious, she will wipe your nose with her own mouth, or clean up your urine and excrement with her hand if necessary. These things happen even with women who would not normally even go close to a smelly room.

If you do not remember your mother's kindness, you will not have a sense of gratitude, and the wish to repay that kindness. It is important to know the ways our mother has supported us. Then, when the time comes, you have the thought of repaying her kindness. If your mother is ill, you think, "It is now my turn to serve her. It is now my opportunity to repay her kindness."

## HER KINDNESS IN THE MIDDLE: DURING CHILDHOOD

The kindness of one's mother in the middle includes all the kindnesses from birth and through childhood.

We cannot remember all the support and care shown to us by our mother during our childhood. If you were a parent, you would know this, because of your caring, kind feelings towards your own children. Even if you are not a parent, by observing parents you can clearly understand a mother's dedication to her children, and the sacrifices she makes. A mother's affection is so strong that, in order to protect their own child, some mothers would willingly suffer their child's illness, even to the point of sacrificing their own lives.

We spend more of our childhood with our mother than with our father, so it is mainly from her that we learn how to eat, drink and walk. Seeing her child take its first step brings so much joy and pleasure to the mother.

I recall that when I sat my geshe exam I was asked, "What is the substantial cause of great compassion?". I replied, "The substantial cause of great compassion is a mother's actions of love for her child." The high lamas gathered there at that time, including Lati Rinpoche, commented that there was some sense in this point.

In childhood, we receive so much love and affection from our mother, without which we would not have survived. The effort our mother made to protect and support us in a single day of our childhood is said to be equal to saving one hundred lives.

Thus, we can see how a child has a special bond with its mother. Somehow, the child learns more from, and depends more upon, their mother. This shows the importance of her role in our upbringing.

From the mother's perspective, she has added responsibilities when she brings up children. As mothers spend more time with the children, they have more influence upon the children's lives. Once a woman has a child, she has this spontaneous flow of love: she must automatically assume more burdens and responsibilities in her own personal life.

We are learning this because that is what happened to our own mother. When I see a pregnant woman, I feel a strong sense of sympathy, because it is not easy being pregnant, and then later on, there is giving birth, and the effort of child rearing. It is not easy, and we need to know that our own mothers did this for us.

If we think about our school days, not just on one day, but day after day, year after year, from kindergarten, through primary and then secondary school, our mother supported us. She took us to school, picked us up, and provided for all our needs – physical support, financial support, and even just her time and interest.

As said in the Lam Rim teachings, the mother's only concern is her children, and she wants to do everything she can to give them happiness and to prevent any suffering.

We have to remember these things, as it is easy for one to think one has achieved everything – for example, a higher degree, or a special skill or qualification – all by oneself. If your parents had neglected their responsibilities when you were at school, it is most likely you would be lying in the street penniless, or wandering around looking for trouble.

#### HER KINDNESS AT THE END: DURING ADULTHOOD

Even after we pass through childhood and reach adolescence, we are still financially dependent on our

parents. We also depend on them, particularly our mother, for our whole direction in life.

Even when we reach maturity, our mother's love does not stop. Unfortunately, at a mature age, we are in a position – whenever we find the opportunity – to challenge our mother or our parents. From the mother's side, however, she is still concerned about our future, our marriage, and so forth. She always remembers our well-being.

In this meditation, we try to recollect the kindness and support our mother of this life has given us. Then we recall how we have also received this kindness and support in other, countless lifetimes, when she was also our mother.

If we consider the infinite number of lives we have had in the past, then the number of lives we have had as a human being is also beyond count, as is the number of times we relied upon another human being as our mother. In each life, we received the same love and support that we are now receiving from our mother of this life. In the same way, we can think of our father as having been our mother in the past.

We can then extend this meditation on remembering the kindness of the mother to all sentient beings. We can consider this kindness of mothers in non-human lives, such as animals and birds. We can see how other creatures are also affectionate to their young, and how they are willing to sacrifice their lives for their young.

Once, when I was on retreat at Illusion Farm in Tasmania, I saw a peacock hen with three chicks. When a predator arrived, the peacock immediately gathered up all her chicks under her feathers, and just stood there protecting them, at the risk of her own life. In the end, she came to

no harm, but I have noticed how even birds and animals will give up their own life to protect their young ones.

So, we can also think about how, in the past when we were born as an animal or a bird, we received the same motherly kindness and support from other sentient beings.

Through this meditation, try to cultivate from your own side a pure mental attitude towards your mother and parents. This is very important, and if we make progress in this meditation, we can see the amount of love and kindness we have received from our mother.

When we remember her kindness, it helps us at times when we may receive some abuse or harm from our mother or parents, because we can see this abuse as small compared to the love and support our parents have given us.

In this meditation on the first two stages of the sevenfold cause and effect, we establish in our mind that all other sentient beings have been kind in the same way as our mother of this life.





## The third cause: repaying the kindness

To develop the sevenfold cause and effect meditation, it is necessary to progress from one stage to the next. Just realising that all sentient beings have been one's mother is not sufficient; nor is remembering their kindness. You have to develop the third stage, which is wishing to repay that kindness.

In this third stage, we have to consider the best way of repaying the kindness of all mother sentient beings.

There are two main ways:

1. Repaying the kindness in a worldly, mundane way
2. Repaying the kindness in a spiritual way.

Firstly, we consider repaying the mother's kindness in a worldly sense. This is very important, and regarded as worthwhile even by ordinary, worldly people. It is widely held that if you receive help or kindness from another, then you should repay that kindness.

Take, for example, our own mother's kindness. We received a great deal of material help and support from her. If we required food, drink, clothing or shelter she provided them; if we were sick she looked after us. So, in the worldly sense, we should repay her kindness in the same way.

Repaying our mother's kindness in a spiritual way means repaying her with benefits far greater than these material ones.

You have this wonderful opportunity to hear the profound Mahayana teachings from Mahayana teachers. You know how beneficial these teachings are, because they show the path to full enlightenment or buddhahood.

However, you have to realise that you have had this opportunity because of the kindness of your mother, who protected and sustained you. So you try to cultivate the wish that your mother will benefit from the teachings in the same way that you have done.

### HOW TO DEVELOP THE WISH TO REPAY THAT KINDNESS

Imagine that your mother is blind and with no guide, and is also insane. You see her walking close to the edge of a cliff. In this situation, upon whom should the mother rely for help? Of course, it would be her child: you have the responsibility of protecting her from danger.

Next, imagine that all other sentient beings are wandering about in a strange country. They are blind in both eyes: the right eye is blind to the conventional or relative truth, being covered with a veil of ignorance of the law of cause and effect; while the left eye is covered with the veil of ignorance of the ultimate truth.

Furthermore, these beings have no spiritual guide to show them the right path, or even friends who have faith and conviction in the karmic law of cause and effect. Their minds are filled with the three poisons, completely darkened by ignorance. So all their actions are faulty and are the causes for them to remain in that state of bewilderment and suffering for a longer time. In other words, all sentient beings are about to fall over the cliff, into the great abyss of the three lower realms.

Then you think of your own situation, which is better than most, because you have at least met the Mahayana teachers and teachings, and you have some faith and conviction in them. In this way, you try to generate the strong thought that, because you are in a better situation,

you have some sense of responsibility for rescuing others from suffering.

It is important here to see within yourself the capacity to benefit other motherly sentient beings. As we have discussed, we can do this by comparing our own situation with that of others, and see how our situation is very good, compared with the pitiful situation that others endure. So you develop the thought of benefiting other sentient beings. In other words, a sense of universal responsibility strongly arises.

How can we benefit others? It can be in material terms, such as with food, clothing, and so forth. Of course, these are beneficial, but they only serve to temporarily reduce others' suffering. So you seek to benefit others in the long term or in an ultimate sense, which is to extend happiness to them while freeing them from all types of suffering – in other words, placing all sentient beings in the state of buddhahood. You strongly develop the thought of benefiting other sentient beings by placing them into a state of buddhahood.

So you focus on your mother in this current life, and generate a strong sense of wishing to repay her kindness. Then, extend this to all other sentient beings, including your enemies. In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, there are clear instructions on how to do this.



## The fourth cause: loving kindness

Loving kindness here refers to a very specific kind of love. It is said that the loving kindness generated through the sevenfold cause and effect practice is the cause that produces great compassion.

This distinguishes it from the common idea of love, which is not necessarily a cause for compassion, because, generally speaking, there is no order as to whether love or compassion will arise first.

Here, love is the natural feeling one has for all beings as a result of successfully doing the preceding meditative practices – beginning with equanimity, then remembering all sentient beings as one’s mother, remembering their kindness, and then wishing to repay that kindness.

When we have done those preceding meditations successfully, it is said this feeling of loving kindness will arise spontaneously. It is similar to the close, intimate and pleasant feeling you have for your mother, for whom you feel much gratitude and love. So, this feeling of loving kindness arises as a result of your previous meditations, where the object is all sentient beings, rather than any specific object.

The best way to describe this loving kindness is as follows: the famous Geshe Potawa said to an old mother who asked him, “What is love?”. He replied “It is precisely the very special, loving affection and feeling that you have for your child”. This loving kindness is the same love that a mother has for her beloved child.

## HOW DOES THIS LOVING KINDNESS DIFFER FROM EVERYDAY LOVE?

We should know the slight distinction between the kind of love generated as part of the sevenfold cause and effect practice, and the general, everyday meaning of love.

Generally, love refers to a mental attitude that wishes other beings to experience happiness and joy. One can cultivate the wish for others to have happiness, thinking, “How wonderful if they had such happiness”. We generate such a wish when we see others lacking happiness and joy. This is the general meaning of love. What is most important here is that we fill our whole mind and inner continuum with loving kindness towards others.

Knowing this general meaning of love, we then ask ourselves, “Do we possess such love in us?”. Of course, we do, but it is not enough and not perfect. Before we can generate a strong and genuine motivation to develop more love for other beings, we have to know the benefits of developing more love.

We can see the true benefits of love when we show love for those who are close to us. By showing true love to them, we can see the way they benefit, and how this love supports and helps them. If you support the beings close to you, what sort of effect does that have upon your own life and your relationships with them? What is the effect of that love on your mind?

We can see that the benefit of love is not only that through our mental attitude and good actions we make others happy – we also find more peace, fulfilment and satisfaction within ourselves.

If developing love has such benefits for us and others in our everyday life, what is preventing us from utilising our

potential for showing more love towards them? We have the potential to fully develop love within us, but because of the obstacles posed by our inner, opponent states of mind, we cannot make this potential visible to other beings, especially those closest and dearest to us. It becomes difficult to gain the love, trust and friendship from others.

We should understand that to develop love, we need to put a lot of effort into our meditations, thinking of the benefits of generating love, how to generate that love, and to whom we should show that love. It depends on the effort we make in understanding the meaning of love, and on our efforts to do the meditation on loving kindness.

#### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LOVE AND ATTACHMENT

It is important to be able to discriminate between love and other attitudes, such as attachment. By understanding this difference, one should be able to see whether one is showing love or attachment to others. And, by correctly discerning the difference between love and attachment, you should also be able to determine whether others are showing you attachment or love.

If the other person shows attachment, you need not necessarily like that person, but at least you realise you should not trust them as a lasting friend.

We, too, are judged by our friends depending on whether we show love or attachment to them. If they judge that we are showing them more attachment, they will regard us a selfish person with no concern or care for them. If they see us in this way, it is an obstacle to our relationship. Whereas if we show more love to others, there is naturally more mutual care and benefit in that relationship.

Therefore, discriminating wisdom plays an important role in guiding the mental attitude we should project towards others. If we project more desire and attachment, the consequence will be more disadvantage and loss in our own, and in others', lives.

Even in terms of this very lifetime, we can see how many times we have been the victim of our own attachment to others, and the number of times we have been the victim of others' attachment, which we misinterpreted as love.

One apparent difference between love and attachment is the different feelings we have for our kind parents, and those we have for our boyfriend or girlfriend. With a parent, there is great love and an intimate bond, with an automatic care and concern for them. Any time they have problems or pain, you immediately wish for them not to have that pain. That is love.

We need to develop this same attitude towards our partners and friends. Why? Because having a good relationship is an important factor for a stable and happy life.

The major cause of the unending difficulties we face has nothing to do with material things, such as lacking food or drink, or clothing, or a place to live. It is mostly related to the lack of stability in our relationships, or because we have been deceived in our relationships.

Thus, there is great benefit if, right from the start of a relationship, we try to see that the most important cause for happiness is love, which we must show to our partner, and which we expect them to show to us. This depends upon having the correct understanding of the difference between love and attachment.

While one should learn the teachings from the texts, it is more important to apply them to one's own life, trying to

see the benefits. As we learn of the many benefits of universal love and compassion, we need to realise that the love or compassion we have within us is precious and needs to be nurtured, developed and strengthened. There is no benefit if we think that this good quality called 'love' is some remote thing outside of us.

It is best if we can cultivate the loving kindness we have just discussed by engaging in this meditation practice of sevenfold cause and effect. At least we should try to derive some other benefits from this meditation practice, by enhancing the love we already possess in our mind. We must take this teaching to heart. Simply talking about love, or saying that we have love for others, means nothing.

For instance, if you are married, then you pledged on your wedding day to share your life together in times of happiness and sorrow. It is easy to say that, but if those words are not integrated into your life, this ceremony has no meaning.

An example of a couple who have real love for each other would be an elderly couple who have lived together for many years and who always share everything. They share the good times, like having picnics together, or, if one is sick, the other will readily look after them. If they are joined together in true love, they are like servants to each other for their entire lives. If one is sick in bed, the other sits by the bed and is completely dedicated to their partner's welfare, and that is the most important thing.

On the other hand, we can see situations of couples living together for many years where, if one partner is suddenly hospitalised, instead of being concerned and available the other will go out to find another partner!



It is not easy to have pure love, but at least by knowing the difference between love and attachment, we can try to make our feelings of love stronger than those of desire. If we can achieve this, it is a cause for a healthy and stable relationship.

We should investigate our own situation. Can we live alone or do we need a partner? For most people, it is important to have a partner. Therefore, we have to think about how we can bring happiness in our life by having a partner, or how we may end up with more suffering by not having a partner.

In this way, by seeing the importance of our relationship, we develop our skill in maintaining it and making it more mutually beneficial.

The eight benefits of loving kindness can be found in the Lam Rim text. They are based upon Nagarjuna's text *The Precious Garland*:

Though such a person might not be liberated, they will achieve love's eight cardinal virtues. The merit of giving the three hundred types of food every day in the three times, cannot compare with the merit gained from meditating a short while on love. Gods and humans will come to love them; and give protection; they will have mental ease; and much happiness; poison and weapons will not harm; they will achieve their aims effortlessly; and be born in Brahma's world.

#### A FURTHER MEDITATION ON LOVING KINDNESS

In general, if one has progressed well in the preceding stages of the sevenfold cause and effect sequence, then as a result of your success in the previous stages, loving kindness will arise without any difficulties and extra effort.

However, there is also a specific meditation to generate loving kindness which is separate from the sevenfold cause and effect sequence, and which can be used if one has difficulty meditating on the first three stages of the sequence.

In this meditation, one initially thinks of all one's friends and those who are close, then reflects on the various ways they lack joy, happiness and satisfaction. Let alone possessing a high degree of uncontaminated happiness, they do not even possess a mundane or contaminated happiness and joy. Even more unfortunate is that you can see how they mistake suffering and pain for pleasure and happiness, and thus seek out that suffering and pain!

You naturally wish for those you cherish to have satisfaction and happiness, and this thought indicates that you have generated loving kindness. Having cultivated love for your friends, you do the same for strangers, by considering how in various ways those strangers are also deprived of happiness. Then, by doing this same meditation, you can extend your love to your enemies. In this way, it is possible to generate loving kindness towards all sentient beings.

In practical terms, we can see whether we really do generate and possess love for other beings. We may feel that through our meditation, we can extend loving kindness to all other sentient beings.

However, if we check closely, we may find we have a long way to go to cultivate a true love that comes from the heart, rather than a love that seems to exist in the space outside of us. Do we really have this true love coming forth from our heart for even one person? When we reflect on this, we may see that, most likely, we do not.

This shows that, although we may talk of the benefits of showing love to others and say we care for others, in terms of practical experience, we fall far behind. So we must put more effort into generating this loving kindness.

All beings have the potential to cultivate true loving kindness. Because of this potential, we feel love whenever our mind meets with the right conditions: for instance, if we engage in meditation on loving kindness or compassion. Therefore, to develop this potential for love and compassion, we have to familiarise ourselves with the practice of generating love and compassion.

It is said the first three stages of the sevenfold cause and effect sequence form the basis on which we produce the thought of benefiting other beings, which is loving kindness and compassion. We can understand the meaning of love and compassion to be the thought to, respectively, fulfil all the desires of other beings, and eliminate all that they do not want.

What all other beings desire is happiness, and when we show love to others, we wish for them to possess happiness. What other beings do not desire is suffering, and this is eliminated by showing compassion, since compassion is the wish for others to be free from suffering. From this point of view, it is said that loving kindness and compassion are either the thought of benefiting other beings, or the aspiration to achieve that goal for other beings.

In fact, the more we know about the benefits of showing love and compassion, the more we become inspired to develop it. We can see that the only way to truly benefit other beings is by developing love and compassion.

Regarding the measurement of having cultivated loving kindness, one Lam Rim text says the sign of having

cultivated loving kindness towards all beings is that, whenever you come across any sentient being, you feel so close and affectionate to them that “you feel like patting them on the head”. If this is the kind of feeling you experience with any other sentient being you see, this is the indication of having generated loving kindness.

### THE EIGHT BENEFITS OF LOVE

As mentioned previously, Nagarjuna’s text *Precious Garland* lists the eight benefits of meditating on love.

Prior to listing them, there is a verse in *Precious Garland* comparing the benefits of offering a clay pot filled with food and drink to an infinite number of beings every day for the three times, with the benefits obtained from meditating on this love for even the instant it takes to snap the fingers. You gain more merit from that momentary meditation on love than from offering all that food to all those sentient beings.

*Precious Garland* lists the eight benefits as follows:

1. Receiving love from godly and human beings
2. Receiving protection from godly and human beings
3. Achieving health of body
4. Achieving happiness and health of mind
5. Not receiving harm from poisons
6. Not receiving harm from weapons
7. Fulfilling all one’s wishes effortlessly
8. Achieving the higher existence of Brahma.

It is true that if you show love to other beings, it will be returned. Even if you show love to a lesser being such as an animal, they also return it. Pets show love for their owner, not necessarily because of the food they receive,

but because of the affection the owner shows them. Then the dog, or pet, responds with affection, even guarding their owner's possessions and doing other favours for the owner.

In Tibet, there were many nomads, and their dogs were not particularly well-trained. Even though they slept during the day, at night they stayed awake and patrolled the area. This was a responsibility the animals assumed in order to do a favour for their owners. They also showed affection for their owners by wagging their tails.

So there is no doubt that any person who extends love to all beings will receive love and protection from the gods and other humans.

As followers of the Lord Buddha's teaching, the main basis of our practice should be compassion and love. Based on the practice of compassion, or refraining from harmful actions to others, one follows the perfect training of the Buddha's teaching. We should understand the benefits of cultivating love and compassion in our everyday life.

For example, compassion is the best way to resolve conflict with enemies. As said in many texts, compassion gives you true victory over your enemies, and this victory is lasting. Whereas, if we try to defeat an enemy by violent means, although we may gain victory initially, later, when the enemy gains strength and power, they will retaliate and defeat us. Therefore, it is important to see the advantages of this practice in everyday life.

By cultivating loving kindness for all beings, we purify a large portion of our own negativities, and accumulate a large amount of merit or positive energy. This practice is the true cause to take rebirth in the human and godly realms.

It is said that by cultivating loving kindness for all, you attain as many rebirths as human or godly beings as there are living beings. There is also the benefit of preventing undesirable diseases and untimely death, as well as preventing harm from non-human spirits.

Therefore, cultivating loving kindness is the spiritual practice we should do in order to achieve any goal on our spiritual path, whether it be purifying negativities, or speeding up our spiritual progress in the path, or removing obstacles in our path.



## The fifth cause: great compassion

Having meditated on loving kindness, the next stage of cultivating bodhicitta is great compassion. To engage in this meditation on compassion it is necessary to know:

- The object of one's compassion, which is all other sentient beings who are undergoing great suffering
- The mental attitude of compassion, which is wishing all these beings to be free from this suffering.

With this mental attitude of compassion, you feel, "How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from suffering", and then "May they be free from suffering", and "May I be a cause for them to be free from suffering".

Great compassion holds a unique place in Mahayana spiritual training. It is said that great compassion as a method for achieving full enlightenment is like a father, whereas the wisdom of realising emptiness is likened to a mother.

The point of using this analogy of mother and father is related to ancient cultures in which the race (or caste) of the child is determined by the race (or caste) of the father. If the father is a king, all his children will be of that kingly race.

Likewise, when you generate great compassion, you create the definitive cause to achieve the Mahayana enlightenment, or buddhahood. In other words, great compassion does not result in the enlightenment of the Lesser Vehicle of hearers and solitary realisers. The wisdom of emptiness, on the other hand is likened to a mother, since the mother can produce a child of any race dependent upon the race of the father.

So great compassion is the root practice of the Mahayana or Great Vehicle, which means that all Mahayana practice

should be based upon great compassion. In general, it is said that the basis or foundation of Buddhist practice should be non-harmfulness.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF GREAT COMPASSION AT ALL STAGES OF THE PATH

It is important to know the significance of great compassion in all stages of the Mahayana path, from the beginning to the fruit of the path.

Because of the importance of great compassion to the Mahayana path, Chandrakirti paid homage to great compassion at the beginning of his text, *Supplement to the Middle Way*. This is quite unusual, since most compositions pay homage to buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Chandrakirti's praise to compassion indicates that great compassion is important at the beginning, middle, and the end of the Mahayana path.

To yield a good harvest, the most important cause at the beginning is sowing good seed, in the middle it is water and heat, and at the end, that the harvest is a good crop. In yielding the great harvest of buddhahood, compassion is the only cause that is important in the beginning, middle and end. In his praise of compassion, Chandrakirti uses this analogy of seed, then water, then harvest, to explain why compassion is the one and only cause important at the beginning, middle, and end.

#### *At the beginning*

The reason why great compassion is important at the beginning of the Mahayana path is that, when compassion is generated, it makes a person feel definite about entering that path. It is the very direct and substantial cause for bodhicitta to arise.



Without great compassion, one cannot enter the Mahayana path. To enter into the Mahayana path, one must generate bodhicitta, and in order to generate bodhicitta, there has to be a strong sense of responsibility for freeing all other beings from the ocean of suffering, and a strong resolve to do so. Such a sense of universal responsibility to free all sentient beings from suffering will only arise from great compassion. Otherwise, there will not be this sense of responsibility.

On the other hand, we see that if we do not generate great compassion, we cannot produce this sense of responsibility and vow to free all beings from suffering. Without this we cannot generate bodhicitta, and without bodhicitta, we cannot be a Mahayana practitioner.

### *In the middle*

We have seen why great compassion is important at the beginning of the Mahayana path, but it is also important at the middle of that path. This is the time when we first generate the bodhicitta mind that will eventually enable us to attain full enlightenment

In this middle part of the path, great compassion is important because the Mahayana practitioner has to meditate all the time to further develop and intensify great compassion. If the practitioner fails to focus on great compassion in the middle, there is a danger of falling into the Lower Vehicle as a result of losing one's Mahayana spirit and courage.

Shantideva said that, if not for great compassion, we could easily lose the Mahayana spirit and feel discouraged when we thought of the great number of sentient beings; their negative, ill-mannered and pathetic deeds; and the length of time and training needed to complete the Mahayana path. Then, it would be easy to

fall into the Lesser Vehicle of hearers and solitary realisers.

However, with great compassion to sustain the mind, the Mahayana spirit will never diminish, because one will have no concern for one's own needs and suffering, and will voluntarily take upon oneself any hardship in order to benefit other beings.

So great compassion in the middle is an important cause to quickly accumulate merit.

*At the end*

At the end, on attaining the state of buddhahood, the reason why all the activities of a buddha or enlightened being automatically benefit other beings is said to be due to great compassion.

Having attained the state of enlightenment, a buddha does not think that the ultimate goal has been reached and remain satisfied with self-peace and bliss. Rather, every action of a buddha is to benefit other sentient beings.

How quickly bodhisattvas achieve full enlightenment or buddhahood depends on the intensity of their development of great compassion. We should also understand that the reason why the tantric path is the quicker path to enlightenment is because that path requires a more intense state of great compassion.

### RELATING THIS TEACHING TO OURSELVES

How can you relate this knowledge that great compassion is important at the beginning, middle, and end of the Mahayana path to your own practice?

You have to realise that whatever compassion you have within you is important and precious, and is a quality

through which you can truly help and benefit other beings.

In the context of your own practice, compassion is important at the beginning. In the beginning, whether you show any concern for those around you – friends, relatives, strangers, enemies – depends on whether you have compassion and love for them.

Not only is compassion important at the beginning, because it initiates within us the thought and actions to help others, but in order to continue these beneficial actions, we must retain this thought of compassion.

It is obvious that in the beginning, we generate some compassion and then because of this compassion we go and help others. But if that compassion does not continue, our actions to help others will stop. The benefit of compassion is not only in terms of other beings, but also for your own life, in terms of sustaining lasting peace and happiness in your life, which you can continue to enjoy if you practise compassion.

We can judge our progress towards complete enlightenment on the basis of how our compassion is progressing. If someone asks, “How close are you to reaching full enlightenment?”, you can answer by checking your own mental attitude to other beings – how much compassion there is, and whether or not it is biased, and how strong it is.

In this way, we can, to some extent, judge for ourselves how close we are to reaching our spiritual goal. You may notice some negative thought you had towards other beings in the past has been transformed to compassion and love, and also that your compassion is unbiased and is stronger. The text says this is a sign that you have

minimised your faults, and increased the positive qualities.

You can see that if you continue with your practice, it is possible you can completely remove all faults and attain all the excellent qualities, which is full enlightenment.

In our spiritual practice, we try to gain those qualities that have lasting benefits for this life, the next life and the lives thereafter.

However, we cannot expect to gain these spiritual qualities quickly and easily. So it is important to be convinced of the benefits of seeking these qualities. Then we are able to continue to follow our spiritual practice, even if it is hard and there is no apparent sign of any development or progress. If we do this over a period of time, our progress will become apparent, and this in turn gives us the motivation to continue to practice. As a result, our practice will become easier and a source of inspiration and delight.

The qualities we seek to develop through spiritual practice are far more beneficial than anything we can gain in this mundane world, where we see and hear so many appealing objects, and we feel we must possess them all.

We have so many things in this world, but still feel we must collect more. Yet all these things are futile and meaningless, because we must leave them all behind when we face death. At death, it is only the qualities of our mind that will support us and bring peace and happiness.

If we keep the continuity of our practice, it is possible that when we die, we will die as an excellent practitioner. When an excellent practitioner dies, they do so with a great celebration of this life – it is said like a son meeting his father with great joy. In order to encourage ourselves

in spiritual practice, we must remind ourselves of its long-term benefits.

The stronger our compassion, the closer we are to completing the goal of our spiritual path, which is complete and full enlightenment. Compassion is an indispensable quality that enables us to benefit other beings. The example used is that of a child caught in a fire pit. Although others might observe this with horror, the mother will jump into the fire to try to save her child. What forces her to do this? It is her compassion for the child.

It is likely that if people share love and compassion for each other, whenever one of them is in need of help, they will always get help and support from the other.

There are many instances where we find this. I heard of a Tibetan sent to Japan for training. Where he stayed, there was a huge gas tank that caught fire and was in danger of exploding. Realising that this could result in the death of many people, he grabbed the gas tank and threw it to a safer place. As a result, he lost one hand, but he saved the lives of many other people in the area.

Likewise, for us to be truly able to support our friends, partners and special friends, we should develop love and compassion for each other, because if we do there will be mutual benefit.

To generate compassion, Lama Tsong Khapa in his *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* recommended to first generate compassion towards the being who endures the most suffering or the most pain. It is said that if, instead of focusing our compassion on a particular specific being, we focus it on all other sentient beings, then while in meditation it may seem that we have had some success in cultivating compassion for others. However, afterwards,

when we check and ask ourselves “To whom have we generated compassion?”, we find that we have made no progress in developing compassion for even one specific being.

In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* (p. 581), there are clear instructions on how to generate compassion using the example of a sheep about to be slaughtered. If you observe that sheep, there is every sign of its fear and suffering, and it clearly has no protector. In this way, we can generate compassion for sheep being led to the slaughterhouse, then extend that compassion to all the other sheep that will be slaughtered in the future. Thus we can generate compassion for all other sentient beings, by realising that they are the same as the sheep in the example.

The Small and Medium stages of the path explain the suffering other beings undergo. Think of those already in the hell realms and how they are subject to that suffering, and of those born in the animal realms and subject to the suffering of that existence. All sentient beings are subject to suffering because of being bound to cyclic existence. Think of the causes of suffering, which are negative or non-virtuous actions.

Thus we can observe that, due to their non-virtuous actions, all other sentient beings have suffered immensely in the past, are suffering in the present, and will also suffer in the future.

Because of your understanding of suffering, its causes, and how with a sense of renunciation you truly wish to be liberated from this suffering existence, you understand that other sentient beings suffer in the same way, and that they too wish to be liberated from suffering. So you can generate compassion for them.

Generating compassion for others is a matter of just replacing the object – replacing oneself with other beings. Understanding personal suffering and the reasons to be free of this suffering, one realises this is the same for other beings. This becomes compassion. By contemplating the fate of other beings, you generate compassion for them.

### COMPASSION AND RENUNCIATION

When you contemplate your own fate, you generate renunciation. Through this, you realise that in order to eliminate suffering you have to eliminate negative or non-virtuous actions, and to create happiness you have to generate positive or virtuous actions.

We can see that cultivating compassion for other beings complements developing personal renunciation. Likewise, when we cultivate renunciation, it helps us to develop compassion for other beings. The key to this whole practice of developing compassion and renunciation is to inspire us to engage in more virtuous practices. Whether we think of ourselves or of others, we are all in the same situation of being subject to cyclic existence.

This is best explained by Chandrakirti in his text where he said that the initial cause of cyclic existence is self-grasping, which is the deep sense of “I”. From this arises the deep sense of “my”. From “I” and “my” arise attachment to those who are on our side, our friends, and hatred towards enemies. Impelled by attachment and hatred, we accumulate negative karma, and as a result of these karmic actions, and without any choice, we revolve around in cyclic existence.

Here we are mainly talking about great compassion. But, even if we fail to produce great compassion in this life, it

is still worthwhile putting an effort into trying to do so. Then, even if we do not generate great compassion in this life, our effort leaves some seed in the mind so that in the future, it will be easier to generate compassion. It is even possible to produce compassion in the future just by meeting a Mahayana spiritual teacher.

#### THE MEASURE OF HAVING GENERATED COMPASSION

As you will find in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, the measurement of having cultivated great compassion is described using the analogy of a mother with a child of whom she is extremely fond and affectionate.

If we could have that same feeling towards all beings as the mother has for her child when it is in pain or suffering, that is the indication of having cultivated great compassion.

Cultivating such great compassion depends upon training in meditation and the practice of compassion. We may find that with respect to a specific being, we have made no progress at all.

As mentioned previously, the Lam Rim text gives the example of a sheep about to be killed by a butcher. Anyone who observes the sheep being slaughtered will feel some irritation in their body, to the point where it is easy for compassion to arise for this poor being who is in such a desperate state of suffering. After training in the generation of compassion by using a specific being, one then slowly generates compassion for other beings to the point of being able to generate compassion for all beings.

Generating compassion requires us to make a deliberate effort, and contrive situations for our mind to contemplate, such as the suffering of other beings. Great compassion, however, is always spontaneous. It is not



conditional upon thinking of the reasons for sympathy and compassion, but rather arises just by observing any other sentient being.

### CULTIVATING UNBIASED LOVE AND COMPASSION

As a result of your meditations on the first three causes or stages of the sevenfold cause and effect meditation, there is some transformation of your mind, and you make some progress mentally. This mental development takes the form of loving kindness and compassion for all beings.

The cause of this loving kindness and compassion is a stable, genuine and unselfish feeling towards others. You would have a similar feeling of love and compassion for your boyfriend or girlfriend, but the cause for having such close loving feelings includes an element of attachment, as well as genuine love.

The kind of loving kindness for others that we generate in the sevenfold cause and effect meditation is the result of seeing them as very close friends. This close feeling arises on the basis of understanding that, just like ourselves, all other beings wish to be happy and to avoid unhappiness. It is based on this understanding that you cultivate loving kindness by wishing others to have happiness, and you generate compassion by wishing them to be free from unhappiness or suffering.

So the love and compassion you generate is not conditional upon some specific relationship. When it is conditional on a specific relationship, for example with one's partner, then as the relationship changes, so do your feelings of love and compassion for that person.

Even our enemies qualify as suitable objects for the love and compassion we generate in the sevenfold cause and effect meditation, because they fit the criteria.

Our reason for cultivating the form of loving kindness and compassion we are discussing here must be that the other person wishes for happiness and does not want unhappiness, and we genuinely wish them to have happiness, and genuinely wish them to be free from suffering.

Therefore, it is important that we examine our reasons for showing love and compassion. For example, the reason may be that he or she is a relative or a partner. But such love is imperfect; it is tainted and impure.

To cultivate universal love and compassion, the reason must be applicable to all beings, in that everyone wishes for happiness and to avoid suffering.



## The sixth cause: superior intention

Through generating strong love and compassion, one would generally feel, “How wonderful it would be if all beings have happiness. May they have happiness. May I be able to cause them to have happiness”, and then be able to show this kind of loving kindness. Likewise, when you feel, “How wonderful if all beings were free of suffering. May they be free of suffering. May I be able to free them from suffering”, this gives rise to a very genuine compassion. Such true love and compassion can arise from our meditation practice.

After this, we have to realise that, although we have generated thoughts of love (wishing other beings to have happiness) and compassion (wishing them to be free of suffering), no matter how genuine and strong the wish is, it remains just a wish.

In actuality, it neither brings happiness nor decreases the suffering of other beings, and their situation remains the same. All that changes is something within yourself – you have sympathy for them, and you have a genuine wish for all beings to have happiness and to be free from suffering.

Therefore, to further develop this love and compassion, you must take responsibility for the welfare of other beings. For this you must have such a sense of responsibility that you think, “I alone shall lead all beings to happiness, and I alone shall release them from suffering.” You vow to yourself that you will lead all beings to happiness and free them from suffering.

This taking of personal responsibility is called superior intention. It is superior in the sense that it makes the love and compassion you generate superior to the love and compassion possessed by practitioners of the Lower Vehicles, the hearers and solitary realisers.

Lower Vehicle practitioners also have love and compassion: they too wish for others to be happy, and cannot bear to see others suffering. However, their love and compassion is not superior because they do not personally vow to shoulder the responsibility for bringing happiness to all beings, and freeing them all from suffering.

In order to cultivate this superior intention, you must see that after generating love and compassion, the task of leading others to happiness and releasing them from suffering falls entirely upon oneself, just as children feel they have the entire responsibility for looking after their parents.

In the sevenfold cause and effect meditation, the stages of loving kindness, compassion and superior intention are mainly to cultivate the aspiration to benefit other sentient beings.

What is this aspiration to benefit other beings? It is the wish to place all beings into the state of buddhahood.

In the text, it says that loving kindness, compassion and superior intention each has a special role or function in cultivating the aspiration to benefit other beings.

**Compassion** is like an eye through which to see other beings. **Love** is like the hand with which to hold other beings close to one. **Superior intention** is like the arm by which we take responsibility for the well-being of others entirely upon ourselves.



## The effect of the practice: bodhicitta

With the cultivation of superior intention, you generate the aspiration to benefit all beings, thinking, “I shall place all beings into the state of full enlightenment, and free them all from suffering”.

There is a strong intention as well as a strong resolution to benefit others. From this, you generate the bodhicitta mind by thinking that, despite your sense of responsibility for placing all beings into full enlightenment and freeing them all from suffering, you do not have the capacity or power to fulfil that responsibility.

If you do not have such capacity, then who does have such power? Only a fully enlightened being or buddha has the capacity to place all beings into the state of full enlightenment. Thus you realise that, in order to fulfil your aspiration to benefit all beings and lead them all to the state of full enlightenment, you have to achieve full enlightenment first.

So, having cultivated superior intention, in which you generate the aspiration to benefit others, you then generate the aspiration to achieve your own enlightenment, in order to benefit all other beings. In this way, after superior intention the bodhicitta mind arises: it arises simultaneously with the aspiration to achieve your own enlightenment.

Thus, there are two types of aspiration:

1. The aspiration to benefit others
2. The aspiration to achieve one’s own enlightenment.

The first aspiration is the cause for the second. In other words, the aspiration to achieve one’s own enlightenment is generated after the aspiration to benefit other beings.

However, it is said that in terms of the fulfilment of these two aspirations, the order is reversed. The goal of one's own enlightenment is accomplished before achieving the goal of benefiting all other beings by placing them in the state of full enlightenment.

In generating bodhicitta, or the aspiration to achieve one's own enlightenment, one needs to take into account all the qualities of the Buddha, which are discussed in the Lam Rim under the topic of 'Taking Refuge'. The Buddha's qualities include those of holy body, speech and mind, and the Buddha's enlightened activities.

You have to consider these qualities in order to know the power and qualifications of a buddha, and the qualities you will have when you achieve buddhahood. The more you contemplate these qualities, the stronger your faith in the Buddha. The stronger this faith, the stronger will be the aspiration to become a buddha, and so the stronger our effort will be in our practice.

It would be good to make some effort to remember the main practices of each of the three scopes of the path:

1. In the Lower Scope, the main practice is abandoning the ten non-virtues: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct; lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, gossip; covetousness, harmful intent, wrong views.
2. In the Medium Scope, the main practice is the three-fold training – morality, concentration and wisdom – and knowing its meaning.
3. In the Great Scope, there is bodhicitta and generating bodhicitta by the sevenfold cause and effect method; and the deeds of bodhisattvas, the six perfections – generosity, morality, patience, enthusiastic effort, concentration and wisdom.

If you recall this as much as possible and become familiar with these practices of the three scopes of the teachings, then even if you do not achieve full enlightenment or the state of buddhahood in this life (which, for most of us, is impossible), at least by making some effort to focus on these topics of the spiritual path, you will plant the seeds in your mindstream.

Then in future lives you can be very sure of being born as spiritual practitioners of a very high class, that is, as learned and highly realised practitioners.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF INNER DEVELOPMENT

Of course, it is not impossible for us to achieve full enlightenment in this lifetime: in fact, it is very possible. Everybody has the choice and ability to become whatever we want to become.

If we have the strong will to become a knowledgeable and learned person in this life, we can achieve success by making an effort. Similarly, by making an effort, we can transform our mind into a calm, happy one in this lifetime: we can fully transform ourselves, so everyone will see us as a kind-hearted, gentle person with a calm and happy mind. Just as we can achieve much in our material pursuits, with strong aspirations in our spiritual pursuits we can also achieve our goal.

In seeking happiness and security in our life, we do not just need outer support. Most importantly, we need inner support for life's happiness. The way to achieve this inner support is by engaging in such spiritual practices as the practice of moral ethics, the three-fold training, the six perfections, developing concentration and intelligent wisdom. We must be self-sufficient, direct our own life and make our own decisions.

This self-sufficiency is important, since outer conditions are unreliable and can deceive us at any moment. Outer support has some advantages, but without inner support, no matter how much outer support we have, we remain confused and unhappy about our life. If we develop our inner wealth and knowledge as much as possible, then even if there is not enough outer support, it does not matter too much. If there is an outer obstacle or problem, we can work it out for ourselves.

For our life to be secure and happy, we have to enrich ourselves by increasing our inner qualities, seeing that outer support is unreliable, and knowing that we cannot find what we want outside.

For example, people upon whom we think we can rely can change any moment, and turn against one. Their relationship with us changes so quickly. If you have wealth and reputation, they come to you, but if you have no wealth and reputation and need their support, they turn away from you. I often say to people, “You should be fully independent and self-reliant, and not rely upon other people”.

### THE QUALITIES OF AN ENLIGHTENED BEING

We have discussed how only a fully enlightened being or buddha has the full capacity to benefit all sentient beings without any limit or hindrance from his or her own side. This is because fully benefiting all sentient beings entails knowing their individual spiritual needs, interests, temperament and predispositions. Only a buddha has such knowledge.

Other beings, such as hearers and solitary realisers – spiritual practitioners of the Lower Vehicle – do not have such qualities. Although they have abandoned the afflictive obscurations or obstructions to liberation, they have



the fault of not having abandoned the obstructions to omniscience. Even bodhisattvas on the last part of their existence in their last life as a sentient being are not equal to a buddha or a fully enlightened being, since they have not abandoned subtle obstructions to omniscience.

Therefore, to fully benefit all living beings, one must achieve the state of buddhahood or the fully omniscient mind. This state is only attained by abandoning all obstructions that exist, including the obstructions to the omniscient mind.

Here, it is customary to reflect on all the qualities of a buddha, as is discussed in the section of the Lam Rim on 'Taking Refuge'. It is the qualities possessed by a fully enlightened buddha that qualify them to benefit other beings.

So, motivated by love, compassion and superior intention, and the understanding that unless you achieve the state of buddhahood there is no way that you can fully benefit all beings, one generates the strong wish to attain the state of buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.

Bodhicitta is defined as 'the wish or aspiration to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of other beings'. This implies that there is a purpose that you want to help other beings to fulfil.

What is this purpose? It is the state of cessation of suffering and its causes, or the state of liberation, or the ultimate state where all the faults and obstructions that need to be abandoned are abandoned. These are the qualities to be possessed within the continuum of other beings.

In the other part of this definition of bodhicitta, the 'full state of enlightenment' refers to the final state of ultimate

enlightenment which you attain yourself – your own ultimate future qualities. This mainly refers to the ultimate state of attainment of a buddha's truth body, which has two aspects:

- The quality that resembles the state of cessation of having removed all obstructions to both liberation and an omniscient mind. This is the **nature truth body** of a buddha.
- The quality that is the ultimate development of your mind, for example, love, compassion, and wisdom knowledge. This is the **wisdom body** of a buddha.

In this definition of bodhicitta, the state of enlightenment which we wish to generate is not the state of full enlightenment that was attained by the historical Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, which is a quality unique to Guru Shakyamuni.

Rather, in bodhicitta, one yearns to attain one's own future state of buddhahood. Why? To fulfil the needs of other beings. That is, the main aim of bodhicitta is focused upon fulfilling the purpose of other sentient beings.

As part of cultivating our motivation before engaging in any practice, we say the prayer, "In order to benefit all other beings, I shall attain full enlightenment or buddhahood." You should not just recite the prayer, but try to remember the meaning of bodhicitta as we have studied it here.

With this bodhicitta motivation, we aspire to achieve full enlightenment. Why do we aspire to achieve full enlightenment? Because achieving full enlightenment is indispensable, not only to fulfil our commitment and wish to benefit other beings, but also so that we can fulfil all the work we need to do for our own sake.

Before engaging in any spiritual practice, we need to cultivate this bodhicitta mind.

It does not matter if we cannot generate genuine bodhicitta. With the mind of achieving full enlightenment for the sake of all beings, even with a contrived form of bodhicitta, whatever form of practice we do thereafter is a much stronger form of practice and we have more merit because it is for the sake of all beings.



# Concluding Advice

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The sevenfold cause and effect practice can be categorised into three parts:

- 1) Including the preliminary meditation on equanimity, the first three steps are called **the basis to create the mind that aspires to benefit other beings** and they are:
  - recognising all beings as one's mother
  - recalling their kindness
  - the thought of repaying their kindness
- 2) The next three steps are called **the actual aspiration to benefit other beings**:
  - loving kindness
  - compassion
  - superior intention
- 3) Bodhicitta is the **result** produced by the love, compassion and superior intention.

What matters most to us is making progress in our spiritual practice. To make such progress it is important to inspire ourselves by thinking of the benefits of the spiritual practice we do, and of the unique and fortunate life situation into which we have been born.

We must remember how fortunate we are to be able to enjoy both spiritual teachings and material comforts. This excellent opportunity and these good conditions are all because of the causes created in the past – our good

karmic actions and the kindness of our precious spiritual teachers.

I always try to think of my fortunate life situation in this way, and that thought brings joy to every moment. Even drinking a cup of tea comes from the kindness of one's guru.

Look at our own situation. Not only can we listen to the teachings and practise them, but we have also found a perfect spiritual teacher in His Holiness the Dalai Lama, particularly those who have been to such a holy place as Bodhgaya, and received teachings there.

We are such fortunate beings. In the past, we must have done a great many virtuous actions to create such good karma. All this arose through the kindness of one's spiritual teacher.

Since we all have faith in the spiritual teachings, it is important that we apply them. The qualities of His Holiness are so great that he can teach according to the level of the listener – whether of high, medium or low intelligence, they all understand at their respective level. Not only that, but he uses such skilful means and wisdom in his teachings that whether the teaching is Sutrayana or Mantrayana, he can pass it on to all beings.

To be able to meet with such a perfect teacher and a living Buddha – along with having found a good life full of material comfort and receiving teachings, and having the freedom to practise religion or any study – is the result of karma created by past deeds. This thought encourages and inspires us to do the same now, so that in the future we can enjoy such good fortune again.

Spiritual practice is something we have to keep in our minds at all times, so that whatever we do and whatever

we experience is integrated into our spiritual practice. When we find some happiness in life, we should not forget our spiritual practice or knowledge. Because if we forget, we will become distracted or excited, and as a result of this we may face problems.

Rather, if we think that these pleasures and the happy times we experience are the result of good karmic actions we did in the past, we are inspired to do more positive actions, to create more good karma.

At the same time, when we face problems or even undergo some minor suffering, we need to be aware that the cause is the negative karma we have created. Then we can use that experience to refrain from creating any more negative acts. In this way, our spiritual practice can progress consistently, and our life becomes more stable.



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