

BODHICITTA (The Practice of All Bodhisattvas)

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Today (11th March, 1999) we are very happy to have this opportunity to share the Buddha-Dharma with all of you from Ratnashri Centre Malaysia. The topic for today's talk is Bodhicitta (Thoughts of Enlightenment).

Introduction to the Buddha-Dharma.

In general Lord Shakyamuni Buddha has preached 84,000 kind of Dharmas in order to pacify all the 84,000 afflicting emotions (fetters of disturbing emotions) within us.

All this can be summarized into the Three Roots of Afflicting Emotions, namely Attachment, Anger and Ignorance. For antidotes to these, the kind and compassionate Lord Buddha turned the Dharma Wheel four times and it is categorized as follows;

1. First Dharma Wheel, The Vinaya as antidote to Attachment.
2. Second Dharma Wheel, The Dharma of Meditation as antidote to Anger.
3. Third Dharma Wheel, The Dharma of Abhidharma as antidote to Ignorance.
4. Fourth Dharma Wheel, The Bodhicitta as antidote to all Three Afflicting Emotions.

These antidotes are most suitable to 'Three Individuals of Different Capacities' (*explained later in 'Categories of Bodhicitta'*) to rid off the three afflicting emotions, and the Bodhicitta is an antidote for all afflicting emotions. Similarly, there are different kinds of medicine for different kinds of sicknesses. In the same manner the Dharma are specially expounded for certain afflicting emotions, but Bodhicitta is the only medicine that can overcome all sicknesses (all afflicting emotions). The practitioner of Buddha-Dharma will eventually be free from samsaric existence, samsaric fear, and leads us towards the fruition of independence, the fruition of the state of complete freedom, the state of fearlessness, going beyond fear.

In general, the followers of Lord Buddha can be classified into these three distinct families who ends the cycle of rebirth;

1. The Family of the Self Liberators (Hearers) who attains the Shravaka-hood (Arahant).
2. The Family of the Solitary Realizers (Hearers) who attains the Pratyeka Buddha-hood.
3. The Family of the Bodhisattvas who attains the Buddha-hood.

Introduction to Bodhicitta?

No matter which of the above family one belongs to, when one who has developed Bodhicitta, it can transform oneself into a Bodhisattva of unlimited compassion who vowed to liberate all sentient beings from the six realms of Cycle of Rebirth (Samsara). Bodhicitta is the only quality that enables any sentient being to reach the Full Awakening or Enlightenment, without that quality there is no chance to attain Buddhahood. Bodhicitta is similar to a priceless gem, it is part of our nature, but we need to cultivate and cleanse the clouds of three afflicting emotions in order to reawaken this 'Gem-like Bodhicitta'. We can't buy or steal it from somewhere else as it is within us all the time.

In the mind of sentient beings like us, we have very a strong sense of attachment and grasping for worldly concerns. To germinate the Bodhicitta seed, we need to cleanse our mind of Attachment and Grasping by developing the sense of Renunciation. This is the foundation of

Bodhicitta and the Dharma of Vinaya for the family of self liberators. It is applicable to build up this base.

For beginners, it is advisable to maintain a kind heart and compassionate motivation. In doing so we benefit others as top priority before oneself, this is a basic path of all the past Bodhisattvas and Bodhisattvas in the present or future.

Whereas those who possess no Bodhicitta, one only thinks of oneself rather than others. The perception or mentality grasping of 'Self' or the thinking of 'I' as a reality has made us migrate in the Six Realms of Samsara, since time immemorial. The antidote to remedy this migration is developing the strong sense of renunciation by constantly reflecting on the suffering nature of Samsara. Progressively one will eventually walk the path previous Bodhisattvas' once walked and eventually develop and possess the Ultimate (Absolute) Bodhicitta in benefiting all suffering beings.

The Four Immeasurables.

The next foundation is cultivating the 'Four Immeasurables', i.e....

1. Immeasurable Love, to develop the concrete wish or aspiration for all sentient beings to be happy and have all the causes that bring about happiness.
2. Immeasurable Compassion, to free all sentient beings from suffering and all the causes that bring about sufferings.
3. Immeasurable Joy, to develop a concrete wish for all sentient beings that no suffering befall onto them and see to it that their happiness is not interrupted.
4. Immeasurable Equanimity, that is to maintain the mind in constant equanimity which is free from attachment, anger and ignorance.

One should train one's own mind based on these Four Immeasurables, on a daily basis even to the minutes and seconds, constantly with mindfulness and awareness of the Four Immeasurables. The next is to meditate on the equalness of oneself and others (all sentient beings), we should abandon the selfishness and place others on par with us or above us.

Exchanging self with others.

The third practice is exchanging oneself with others. What does it mean by exchanging self with others? This means to place oneself in the shoes of any particular sentient being who is suffering and wishing all of our happiness to be with that particular being and to take all of the sufferings of that being onto oneself. To start with this practice, we can look at any single being or an individual who is suffering and mentally try to exchange our happiness with his or her sufferings, gradually we can advance into exchanging ourselves with all sentient beings in the Samsara.

Having trained yourself into the practice of exchanging self with others, the next is to consider others dearer or more precious than oneself. In the beginning of almost all sadhanas, we can find the prayers of Refuge, Bodhicitta Development and the Four Immeasurables. The reason for having this particular aspect of Dharma in all sadhanas is to show the importance of Bodhicitta in all practices.

Recognizing Bodhicitta?

What is the way to recognize Bodhicitta, and what sort of a thing is Bodhicitta? Well, Bodhicitta is the combination of Compassion and Wisdom. Compassion means reflecting on all sentient beings as our own mother (parents), and all sentient beings were or had been as

kind as a mother (parents) in this or in previous lives. Importantly, Compassion should be practiced free from attachment and grasping.

All sentient beings who had been our parents are tormented by various types of suffering within the six realms. For instance in the hell realms, sentient beings suffer from extreme heat and cold. In the hungry ghost realm, sentient beings suffer from hunger and thirst, and in the realm of animals, sentient beings suffer from constant fear of their life, being abused and threatened by other beings of the higher realms. In the god (Dewa) realms, sentient beings suffer from the fear of falling down into lower realms. In the demigod (Asura) realms sentient beings suffer from constant war and conflicts with the gods. Whereas in the human realm, sentient beings suffer from the sufferings of taking birth and getting old and getting sicknesses and dying. On top of that they suffer from not achieving what they wish for. Humans always face difficulties that they do not desire and face much suffering. In trying to avoid these sufferings they indulged themselves in worldly activities which further drags them deeper into the realms of Samsara which is the very main cause of sufferings.

The Feel of Bodhicitta

There may be differences in all varieties of suffering, but there is a particular suffering which is technically called 'The All Particles of Suffering'. This suffering is pervading in all of us and it cannot be pointed out. So, who are all these sentient beings that is suffering from all these? They are, in fact, our very own mother (parents) in this or in previous lives since beginning of time. Just by understanding that all sentient beings have been our parents, we find it quite difficult to cultivate Bodhicitta. For instance, when imagining or visualizing the exchanging of self by placing those suffering beings' into a position similar to one's own parents. If our parents are suffering from all this torment in the six realms, how would we feel? Now, take a few minutes to contemplate and visualize it as real as possible in this life of yours. Visualize for three minutes now...

The resultant (compassionate feeling) from the above contemplation should be extended to all other sentient beings, because they have also been our parents in one or the other lives. Through this practice of extending the compassion to all sentient beings, one is in the process of training and cultivating the Compassionate Mind. If we reflect on the compassion towards our present parents, and with this we try to extend the same compassion to all sentient beings, then there is a great difference in the quick progress of Bodhicitta Cultivation.

One might have read from books about the practice of Bodhicitta, Loving Kindness and Compassion, and one might have heard also from Dharma teachers about these subjects. One could also easily fold one's hands and say out loud that all mother sentient beings is suffering, but in reality, this words of mouth cannot serve as cause or adequacy in cultivating Bodhicitta. You have to be practical in this process. Compassion isn't merely having the understanding in the suffering nature of all sentient beings. Merely saying that all sentient beings are suffering and feeling great pity for them is not enough. The cultivation of compassion when it becomes a consistent feeling in oneself, and when it is confidential and experiential, that is then called 'True Compassion'. The next step is to make a strong aspiration to benefit all sentient beings in attaining Buddhahood. This is also called 'The Reflecting on Complete Enlightenment' or 'The Thoughts of Perfect Enlightenment' for all sentient beings.

Categories of Bodhicitta.

What sort of thing is recognised as Bodhicitta? Bodhicitta is a combination of compassion and wisdom as explained. Bodhicitta can be classified into different categories, there are generally

three in all. The first classification is made from the point of view of individuals who are cultivating Bodhicitta, but in reality or ultimately, Bodhicitta itself is only one.

- The King-Like Bodhicitta, is the third type of Bodhicitta, or the average Bodhicitta. These are individuals when cultivating Bodhicitta, who wish to attain Buddhahood themselves before, and then to liberate other sentient beings. So this sort of attitude, or mentality is similar to the mentality of a king. A King wishes himself to become a king first, and only then he wants to look after his countrymen.
- The Navigator-Like Bodhicitta, is the second type of Bodhicitta, or the medium Bodhicitta. These are individuals who wish to liberate all sentient beings along with him or herself. This kind of mentality is similar to that of a Navigator who takes himself on the other shore of the ocean together with all of his passengers.
- The Shepherd-like Bodhicitta, this is the best of all Bodhicitta grading. When the shepherds take the cattle for grazing, he or she guides them from behind, so that the cattle move before him or her, and also takes care to ensure that the cattle are not in danger. Similarly, an individual who wishes all sentient beings to be enlightened before oneself, he or she is called a Shepherd-like Bodhicitta.

These are the three classifications that are made on the basis of 'The Three Individuals of Different Capacities' who cultivates Bodhicitta.

On the other hand, Bodhicitta is also classified into;

- Relative (Conventional) Bodhicitta.
- Ultimate (Absolute) Bodhicitta.

Relative Bodhicitta is further divided into two;

- Aspirational Bodhicitta
- Engaging Bodhicitta.

Relative Bodhicitta is called Conventional because it has to be developed through thoughts and conceptions. When all these thoughts are dissolved into Dharmadhatu, at that moment, the Relative Bodhicitta is transformed into the Ultimate Bodhicitta or Absolute Bodhicitta. Aspirational Bodhicitta means to aspire, to free all sentient beings from the sufferings of samsara. Aspirational Bodhicitta is to make a resolution for all sentient beings to attain the ultimate enlightenment or Buddhahood. You wish all sentient beings to be free from sufferings, and through this Bodhicitta, you put this into action until the final fruit is reached. Engaging Bodhicitta is to contemplate on the cause that actually develops the Bodhicitta, the cause is called the Six Paramitas.

Developing Engaging Bodhicitta based on the Six Perfection (Skt.; Paramita).

The Six Perfections are namely;

1. Generosity.
2. Morality.
3. Patience.
4. Enthusiastic Effort.
5. Meditative Absorption.
6. Wisdom.

To train ourselves in these Six Paramitas or Perfections is to engaged in the cause of cultivating Bodhicitta. It is said that without having the merit, one cannot attain the spiritual attainments. Bodhicitta is a kind of an attainment and in order to achieve it, one has to

accumulate merit. There are many different kinds of meritorious deeds, and all of them can be summarized into four. The merits that arise from the practice of;

- Generosity.
- Morality.
- Patience.
- Enthusiastic Effort.

Whereas the merit 'Meditation' is derived from practicing Patience, Concentration and Wisdom.

The Fourth Paramita, which is Enthusiastic Effort is a kind of support in the practice of all the other five paramitas. It is a necessary support while practicing generosity, morality and so forth.

Six Perfections – The Practice of Generosity.

In the practice of generosity, there are further categorised in different types which is;

- Generosity of materials, the generosity of materials includes any kind of materials, such as giving to one's own spouse, others in need, Dharma Centres or Monasteries, et cetera... with one's own wealth is generosity of wealth. Any materials, non-precious or precious that one gives is called generosity of materials.
- Generosity in giving Dharma teachings.
- Generosity in saving other living beings from the fear of getting killed, so it is a kind of protecting the life of other beings.

Six Perfections – The Practice of Morality.

In the paramita of Morality there are also different varieties. The first is the morality of abstaining from negative activities. So the morality of abstaining from negative deeds means to not indulge in the breaking of precepts (samaya) that are set forth by the Buddha and those precepts which have never been set by the Buddha, but are naturally considered negative. There are ten types of negative deeds, and there are negative deeds that have been made as precepts set forth by the Buddha for ordained monks and nuns. And there are also natural negative deeds, which means those which are not particularly set forth by the Buddha as precepts for ordained monks and nuns. These are also applicable for laypersons, the morality of abstaining from negative deeds means to get rid of all the ten negative deeds.

The ten negative deeds are:

- in which three are from the body are;
 - killing
 - stealing
 - indulging oneself in sexual misconduct.
- Four negative deeds from the speech;
 - lying,
 - slandering
 - using harsh words
 - gossiping.
- three negative deeds from the mind;
 - greed
 - intention to harm others
 - having a wrong view or perverted view.

Having abandoned the ten negative deeds, what we should do is to accomplish the ten meritorious deeds. Getting rid of the negative deeds, and accomplishing all of the positive deeds is called the 'Morality in Accumulating Merits'.

And the third type of morality is that of benefiting all sentient beings.

Six Perfections – The Practice of Patience.

After morality comes the paramita of Patience which is to resist by not reacting (through body, speech and mind) when others' create trouble towards oneself. It is said that there is no negative emotion worst than anger, and there is no positive deed more virtuous than being patient. For this reason, the Great Bodhisattva Shantideva stressed the importance of practicing patience, that a moment of strong anger can destroy all the merits of generosity and good deeds that had been accumulated for aeons. If one has the disease of anger, one cannot truly experience any happiness or peace. It also disturbs oneself, even during sleep.

Six Perfections – The Practice of Patience and Elimination of Anger.

The negative deeds that we do out of 'anger' serve as causes to take birth in hell realms, which is the lowest of the three lower realms. It also says that anger shortens one's life-span.

When somebody harms us, we term such a person as an enemy and in the case of anger, it shortens our life and it also ripens the other negative Karmas that causes different types of sufferings. Therefore, anger is considered as an enemy within us. For this reason it is said that if one does not subjugate 'anger' which is one's closest enemy, but tries to eliminate the external enemies, and the more a person tries to destroy them (external enemies), the more they will appear.

For the Bodhisattvas, they are equipped with the army of love, compassion and wisdom, goes into the sure win combat with the enemy of anger. This is how they engage in the battle of subjugating emotion of anger, this is the way of Bodhisattvas. In the Bodhisattva Caryavatara, Shantideva said that in order to protect our feet from getting pricked by thorns and other sharp things, we cannot cover the whole world with leather soles, there is no such big leather that we can use for the whole earth. But if we cover our feet with the shoes, these can and will protect us from all the possible harms. Similarly, it is not possible to tame all the external enemies because they are numberless. But if we tame our anger, it is like taming all other external enemies. It is so very important not to give in to anger, if we give ourselves into anger, then we are considered the loser, and anger the winner. In this way anger uses us as its slave. If we are able to control or subjugate anger, we then will be able to lessen or eliminate sufferings in future lives. And because of anger, some would even go to the extreme of engaging in illegal activities such as killing, which will result in severe punishments in one's present or in one's future lives. It is very important to recognize the negative energy of anger, and it is also important to recognize the benefit of being patient. We should always try to get rid of anger and maintain the practice of patience. It is said that when emotions arise in our minds, we should blow them off on the spot, without leaving any chance for it to react. This is the way of all the Bodhisattvas, whenever negative emotions arise they immediately recognize and become aware of it and thus stop it there and then by transforming the energy of anger into compassion. It is very important that one should always have clear mindfulness and constantly be aware of what is going on within us. This development of mindfulness and awareness, can be called creating the cause of cultivating Bodhicitta, or following the path of Bodhisattvas.

When we are not mindful and are not aware, then anger overpowers our state of mind, it will then diminish and exhaust all of the merits that we have accumulated in the past thousands of aeons. We need to understand by reflecting and contemplating on the defects of anger, it is very important to be mindful and aware, so that anger cannot arise in our minds. Shantideva has said that if one wishes to guard one's vows, first one should guard one's own mind. If one can guard the mind, then one can fulfil one's vows. Our mind is like a wild elephant and if we free a wild elephant in the crowd, it could create a lot of trouble. Similarly if we free the mind, which is like a wild and crazy elephant, without the rope of awareness and mindfulness and let it do whatever that is negative, then it could lead us directly to hell. To correct this, we tie it with the rope of mindfulness and awareness. Like a crazy elephant being tied up with strong rope, we should develop mindfulness and awareness and in similar way we tie our mind with the Dharma.

What is it actually mean by mindfulness?. Mindfulness' means to be always aware of what is to be abandon, what is to be cleanse and what is the virtuous deeds to be practiced. When our mind is constantly aware about what is to practice and what to abandon, it is then called mindfulness. Awareness means always to keep an eye on the three doors, which is the body, mind and speech. Constant inspection of what we do with our body, speech and mind. For example, Mindfulness is like the door and Awareness is like the spy who is constantly guarding the door. The reason for maintaining mindfulness and awareness which are likened to a door and a spy, is because all these afflicting emotions are waiting to destroy us all together. In order to get rid of this, we have to be attentive and be aware at all times before it strikes. When we are influenced by the distraction of afflicting emotions, liberation will then be too far from reach and it even cuts the root of all merits that allow us the rebirth in the higher realms. Shantideva said that one should not allow the mind without mindfulness and awareness. When we are driving we should be mindful and be aware of what is going on along the road, without that it is quite impossible to drive. This shows that mindfulness and awareness is necessary even in the minor activities.

There is another type of patience which is called bearing the austere life, the life of a practitioner. So in order to practice the Dharma, we have to face and accept difficulties and the exertion. In the Kadampa tradition, the essence of mind should be put into Dharma and the essence of Dharma should be like being a beggar (renunciation). The essence of being a beggar should be placed into the acknowledgement (and preparation) of dying (samsara), and the essence of the acknowledgement of dying should be placed into mountains or caves (solitude practice).

The practice of Patience in adjusting and bearing with the practice of Dharma despite all difficulties faced. A very good example was Yogi Jetsun Milarepa, he had persistently practiced the Dharma with patience despite all obstructions and difficulties. Another kind of patience is not to be threatened or frightened while listening to profound teachings of Emptiness.

Six Perfections – The Practice of Enthusiastic Effort.

The Fourth Paramita is Enthusiastic Effort, it is classified into three i.e. Amour like Effort, Consistency Effort and Effort of not being contended in the Dharma practice. Ignorance and Laziness is the major downfall in this practice.

Six Perfections – The Practice of Meditation Absorption.

The Fifth Paramita is Meditative Absorption. To effectively practice this, we need to cut off bonds with the crowd (persons around us) and renounce to secluded places. One should

refrain one's Speech from useless talks and we should rid our mind of discursive thoughts. Especially, in the practice of Bodhicitta, we need to rid our mind from being self-centered. All types of meditation are included in both the Calm Abiding (Skt.; Shamatha / Tib.; Shiney) and Special Insight (Skt.; Vipashyana / Tib.; Lhatong) Meditation.

Calm Abiding meditation is the method used to free one's mind of discursive thoughts, we should train our mind until we can effortlessly concentrate one's view single pointedly and to maintain the view on any one object (physically or mentally). It is also called gaining mastery over the mind, and the next is to proceed to Special Insight Meditation. This is to concentrate on the state of mind which is free of discursive thoughts. Both the Calm Abiding and Special Insight should be best practiced alongside of each other or in parallel.

Six Perfections – The Practice of Wisdom.

The Sixth Paramita is that of Wisdom and the procedure of developing wisdom is to engage in listening, contemplating and meditating on the Dharma. In order to illuminate the darkness, we need light. Similarly, in order to illuminate the darkness of ignorance in our mind, we need to listen to the Dharma. That is why listening to the Dharma is considered to be like the brightness that can illuminate the darkness of our mind. This means to hear it from a qualified Dharma Teacher (Guru). Just by listening is not enough, and after having listened, we should contemplate on the points until all the doubts within us are pacified. During the state of contemplation, if we do not pacify all the doubts pertaining to the Buddha's Dharma, then it will affect one's meditation stability caused by unsolved doubts stirring in our mind.

In the process of listening, contemplating and meditating on the Dharma, one should combine these three streams of practice in the unity. So the way to unify the process of listening, contemplating and meditating is to listen to the Dharma and then to contemplate on what we have listened and then meditating on what we have contemplated. So in this way we can unify these three. In the state of meditation, ultimately we bring all of what we have heard and what we have contemplated into our own experience and getting used to what we have listened and contemplated.

Meditation means getting used or imprinting the Buddha-Dharma in our mind. It is definitely great to be a learned person, even if one is not a learned person, perhaps minimal knowledge in the Dharma, when one contemplates and meditate on it, it becomes effective. Even if one has received a lot of Dharma teachings and knowledge, if one does not put them into practice, then there's no benefit. On the other hand, if one has a little knowledge of the Dharma, but if one contemplates on what one has and put it into practice and make it experiential, then there will be a benefit of that part. Then this can help us to understand a lot more, because if we understand the nature of a single aspect by contemplate often on that which is in fact similar to others. This is called understanding all by simply understanding one. On the other hand, if we know all the aspects of the Dharma, and did not practiced any of it, then it will be like knowing all, but not being useful because that person can't even have mastery over one single aspect.

It is said that the essence of the Vinaya vow is renunciation, and the essence of the Bodhicitta vow is benefiting sentient beings, and the essence of Vajrayana vow is to maintain a sacred outlook. To always maintain a pure vision, we should always look at the activities of the Lama with a pure vision. All that we have discussed so far, is associated with the Relative Bodhicitta, in the case of Ultimate Bodhicitta which cannot be cultivated, with ceremonies and rituals. It has to be developed through meditation. The Absolute Bodhicitta can be developed from the path of seeing, which is the first of the ten paths of Bodhisattvas. And this particular

path, the path of seeing, the primordial wisdom which is free from discursive thoughts is developed, and there the Bodhicitta can be cultivated.

Selecting a Lama (Guru) who could guide us in the Bodhicitta Practice.

To receive Dharma teachings, it is necessary to follow a Lama (Teacher/Guru) . And in order to follow the Lama properly, one should be expert in analyzing the Lama. Then after analyzing of the Lama, one should be expert in following the Dharma with all means of pleasing him and thirdly one should be expert in taking all the views and great conduct of the Lama into oneself. Whenever one follow a Lama, it is very important first to examine the Lama especially in the case of Vajrayana before one receive the Vajrayana teachings. To stress the importance, the Lama plays a very important role in Vajrayana practice. The Lama is also called a Vajra Master. The word Vajra is used to stress importance, and similarly Vajra Heir and Vajra Disciple and so on.

If a disciple follows a Lama without examining the Lama, it is sort of like drinking poison that would destroy oneself. If a Lama accepts a disciple without examining the disciple, for the Lama it would be like jumping into a pit. It is very important to have an authentic Lama, meaning an unbroken lineage of transmissions.

The way to examine a Lama is said with examples, such as when you see a water pot, by the influence of seeing a water pot you can come to know that there is water. And by seeing smoke you can infer that there is fire. Similarly by observing the qualities and, qualities and marks of greatness one can examine a Lama. There are various ways of examining a Lama, such as examining the Lama as Sutra Master and examining the Lama as Vajra Master and so forth. But, most of all, the essential qualities that a Lama should have is Bodhicitta. So if one should examine whether the Lama has Bodhicitta or not, if a Lama has Bodhicitta, then all the qualities are included in it.

In this degenerated age, when we examine the Lama, when the Lama has more good qualities than bad qualities, then we can consider accepting that person as a Lama. For instance, if his quality is good quality is like one kg, and if his bad quality is half kg, then you can accept him. (then much laughter from Rinpoche). After examining the Lama, one should follow the Lama with devotion and faith that is unwavering and undiminished.

It is a grave mistake on the part of disciples to follow a Lama without first examining him, so after having examined the Lama and in the course of following the Lama and then finding some faults in the Lama. Therefore it is very important to examine the Lama until one has gained total confidence in him. And after that, when one is following the Lama one should always try to maintain a positive view of the Lama.

That is all for today, so next we are going to dedicate the merit.