

How to Generate Bodhicitta

By *Venerable Ribur Rinpoche*

The essence of Buddha's 84,000 teachings is bodhicitta: the awakening mind that aspires towards enlightenment so as to have the perfect ability to free all beings from suffering and lead them to peerless happiness.

On his two visits to Singapore in 1997, Venerable Lama Ribur Rinpoche taught extensively on how to generate that precious bodhimind. Using scriptural understanding and his personal experience, Rinpoche also gave insightful teachings on *lo-jong* (thought transformation), the practice of which enables one to transform the inevitable problems of life into the causes for enlightenment.

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PREFACE

In 1997 the students of **Amitabha Buddhist Centre** were blessed to receive teachings from the great master Ribur Rinpoche. Rinpoche visited us twice and stayed for a total of three and a half months, during which time he taught lam-rim and *lo-jong* (thought transformation). This small booklet is extracted from Rinpoche's teachings.

A Brief Biography

Ribur Rinpoche was born in Kham, Eastern Tibet, in 1923. He was recognized at the age of five as the sixth incarnation of Lama Kunga Osel, a great scholar and teacher who spent the last twelve years of his life in strict solitary retreat. All five of the previous incarnations were principal teachers at Ribur Monastery in Kham.

When Ribur Rinpoche was fourteen he entered Sera monastery, one of the great Gelug monastic-universities in Lhasa, to begin intensive studies in Buddhist philosophy, which culminated in his receiving the Geshe degree at the age of 25. During his stay at Sera Monastery Rinpoche also attended many teachings and initiations given by his root guru, Pabonka Rinpoche, the greatest Gelug lama of the time. After receiving his geshe degree, Rinpoche returned to Kham where he spent many years doing retreat in a small hut he had built in the forest. But after the Chinese Communist invasion in 1950, the situation in Kham became increasingly dangerous, and in 1955 he was advised by one of his gurus, Trijang Rinpoche, to return to Lhasa, where he continued to take teachings and do retreats.

But Lhasa itself soon became unsafe. From 1959 (the year of the Tibetan people's uprising) to 1976, Rinpoche experienced numerous hardships and difficulties such as imprisonment and physical abuse, and being a helpless observer of the terrible destruction of the Cultural Revolution. However, during this time he was able to keep his mind peaceful and even happy by practising the teachings he had learned. As Rinpoche described his experiences, "I didn't really experience the slightest difficulty during those adverse conditions. This was due to the kindness of Lama Dorje Chang [Pabongka Rinpoche]. From him I had somehow learned some mental training, and in those difficult times, my mind was immediately able to recognise the nature of cyclic existence, the nature of afflictive emotions, and the nature of karma and so forth. So my mind was really at ease."

Following the Cultural Revolution Rinpoche worked with the Panchen Lama to restore many of the lost spiritual treasures of Tibet as they could. His main accomplishment was recovering the two most precious statues of Shakyamuni Buddha: the Jowo Chenpo and the Ramo Chenpo. These two statues, originally brought to Tibet by the Chinese and Nepalese wives of King Songsten Gampo (ca 617-698), were taken to Beijing during the Cultural Revolution and kept in various warehouses along with thousands of other statues for 17 years, until Rinpoche found them and returned them to their respective temples in Lhasa.

In 1987 Rinpoche left Tibet and travelled to Dharamsala, India, to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Since then he has lived at Namgyal Monastery in Dharamsala, where, at the request of His Holiness, he wrote a number of biographies of great lamas and an extensive religious history of Tibet. Rinpoche has also visited and taught in several foreign countries - Australia, New Zealand, America, and around Europe. His warmth, humour, profound wisdom and practical, down-to-earth teachings have endeared him to many students around the world.

Background of the Teachings

More than 2,500 years ago, Shakyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment and then proceeded to teach the path to enlightenment so that others could follow. His teachings have been kept alive to the present day through the great kindness and efforts of an unbroken lineage of practitioners who learned them from their masters, put them into practice, then passed them onto followers. In Tibet, the essential points of Buddha's teachings were formulated into a system known as the lam-rim, or stages on the path to enlightenment, which explains all the steps or practices one needs to follow in order to attain enlightenment.

The lam-rim consists of three main stages or levels, according to three different reasons or motivations for practising Dharma. The first level, known as the "small scope," starts from taking an interest in one's future lives. This comes about when we realise that this present life could end at any time, and that after death, we will be reborn in an unfortunate state (as an animal, hungry ghost or hell being), and to achieve a fortunate state (as a deva, titan or human being), by taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and by living our lives in accordance with karma, the law of evolutionary actions and their results.

The second or "intermediate scope" involves developing the aspiration to become free once and for all from the cycle of death and rebirth. Within this scope, one focuses on the Four Noble Truths: the sufferings of cyclic existence, the causes of suffering (delusions and karma), the state of freedom from all suffering (nirvana), and the means to achieve it by practising the three higher trainings of ethics, concentration and wisdom.

The third level, the "great scope," involves opening one's heart to consider the situation of all beings. Realising that all beings experience suffering that they don't want and they fail to find the peace and happiness that they wish for, one develops the aspiration to attain full enlightenment in order to help everyone reach that perfect state as well. That altruistic aspiration is bodhicitta.

This booklet contains extracts of Rinpoche's precious teachings on how to develop bodhicitta, and how to practise thought transformation through which we become less self-centred and more concerned for others.

Numerous people contributed to this work. Rinpoche's teachings were beautifully translated into English by Fabrizio Pallotti. Several ABC students kindly transcribed the tapes, and I edited the transcript with assistance from Doris Low and Rise Koben.

Any errors in the text are entirely the fault of the editor.

Sangye Khadro
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THE SEVEN-POINT CAUSE-AND-EFFECT INSTRUCTION

Bodhicitta, the aspiration to attain enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings, is something that is truly inconceivable, truly splendid and marvellous. One of the great gurus of Lama Atisha told him that an attainment such as clairvoyance, or a vision of a deity, or concentration as stable as a mountain is nothing compared to bodhicitta. For us, these attainments seem amazing. If we ourselves, or if someone we heard of, had a vision of a deity, achieved clairvoyance, or through practising meditation attained concentration as stable as a mountain, we would think this to be unbelievably wonderful. However, Atisha's guru said to him: "These are nothing compared to bodhicitta. Therefore, practise bodhicitta."

Even if you practised mahamudra or dzogchen or the two stages of highest yoga tantra [generation stage and completion stage] and even if you achieved the vision of many deities, these are not beneficial if you do not have bodhicitta.

As the great Bodhisattva Shantideva said, "If you churn the 84,000 teachings of the Buddha, their essence is bodhicitta." By churning milk we get butter, which is the very essence of milk. In the same way, if we examine and churn all the 84,000 teachings of the Buddha, their very essence is the practice of bodhicitta. Therefore, it is extremely important for us to strive to achieve the uncontrived, effortless experience of bodhicitta. At the very least, we should try our best to generate the contrived experience of bodhicitta, the bodhicitta that arises through effort.

There are two main lineages of instructions on the basis of which you can practise and generate bodhicitta. The first is the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction on exchanging oneself and others.

The first, the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction by which you generate bodhicitta on the basis of developing affectionate love towards all sentient beings, is a practice which was used by such great Indian pandits as Chadrakirti, Chandragomin, Shantarakshita and so forth. The second, the instruction on exchanging oneself with others, comes mainly from Shantideva. Whether you choose to train your mind in the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction or in exchanging oneself with others, the result is that you will generate bodhicitta in your mind.

The great saint Atisha showed extraordinary interest in bodhicitta. In order to obtain the complete instructions on the practice of bodhicitta, he embarked on a long journey to the Indonesian island of Sumatra to study with the great master Serlingpa, not caring about the many hardships he endured on the way. Today we can travel to Indonesia by a very fast ship or by airplane, but at that time it took Atisha thirteen months to reach Indonesia. Once he arrived, he received the complete experiential instruction on both the seven-point technique and exchanging oneself with others from the master Serlingpa. He then practised for twelve years at his master's feet, until he fully developed bodhicitta. Thus Lama Atisha came to possess both instruction lineages: the seven-point technique and exchanging oneself with others.

Although he held both lineages, Atisha would teach only the seven-point technique in public, to large assemblies of disciples, and would teach instructions on exchanging oneself with others secretly to a select group of qualified disciples. When Atisha went to Tibet, he gave the instructions on exchanging oneself with others only to his principal disciple, Dromtonpa.

Later, the great Lama Tsong Khapa, the Protector of all beings, incorporated the two sets of instructions into a single practice consisting of eleven points. When you are receiving teachings on bodhicitta, you receive the two sets of instructions separately, but when you are actually meditating on bodhicitta—training your mind—then you combine both instructions and meditate on the eleven points. Combining the two instructions into a single practice for the purpose of training the mind in meditation is said to be a particular greatness of the Gelugpa tradition.

In a prayer composed by Lama Pabongka Dorje Chang requesting to meet the doctrine of Lama Tsong Khapa, he wrote: "By merging the practices of the seven-point mind technique and exchanging oneself with others of the precious mind, this greatness which is not shared by others, may I thus be able to meet the doctrine of Lama Tsong Khapa." "Not shared by others" means that this merging of the two practices devised by Je Rinpoche is a unique approach which is not found in other traditions.

I first received these teachings from the holy mouth of the incredibly kind Lama Pabongka Dorje Chang, when he taught the eight great lam-rim texts over a period of four months at Sera Monastery in Tibet. At that time I was very young. When he reached the point of explaining exchanging oneself with others, he gave teachings on *The Seven-Point Thought Transformation*. Later I received these teachings twice from the late Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche.

The Seven-Point Cause-and-Effect Instruction

As for the seven points of the cause-and-effect instruction, one begins by meditating on equanimity and then proceeds through the following steps:

1. Recognising all sentient beings as one's mother
2. Recognising the kindness of mother sentient beings
3. Repaying their kindness
4. Affectionate love
5. Great compassion
6. The extraordinary intention
7. Bodhicitta

The first six points, recognising all sentient beings as one's mother and so forth, are the causes which give birth to the result, bodhicitta.

The way in which these realisations come about, step by step, is that bodhicitta, the thought of attaining enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings, arises from and must be preceded by a sense of responsibility. In Tibetan the term is *lhagsam*, which is sometimes called "extraordinary intention", or "exceptional attitude, or "universal responsibility"—it is a feeling of responsibility to benefit all sentient beings. For this intention to come about you must have a powerful wish for all sentient beings to be free from suffering—that is great compassion. For that to arise you must have developed affectionate love towards all sentient beings. At the moment we have affectionate love for our dear ones, but we don't have affectionate love for those who are not dear to us. In order to generate this affectionate love for everyone, you must develop a deep sense of closeness toward sentient beings, and the way to do that is by recognising all sentient beings as your mother, recognising their kindness and generating the wish to repay their kindness. This instruction is called the cause-and-effect technique because the later points arise after generating the preceding points.

You should not approach this practice with a short-sighted mind, thinking, "Oh, this practice is too advanced for me. It will require so much time and energy. I will not be able to develop such a precious mind." This is not the right attitude. You should not have such fears because these instructions are very profound and powerful. If you continuously train your mind, step by step, with persistence, there is no doubt that you will succeed. Generally speaking, all the instructions from the old Kadampa tradition are very powerful and effective. On top of that, there are the instructions combined by the great Lama Tsong Khapa, whose experience was based on his special relationship with Manjushri, with whom he had direct communication. These instructions are extremely powerful and effective, so you should not think they are too advanced for you and that you will not be able to develop bodhicitta.

Equanimity

Before beginning to train your mind in the first step, recognising all sentient beings as your mother, you should develop the thought of equanimity. It is similar to painting a picture: if you want to paint a picture on a surface, you must first make sure that the surface is smooth and even and has no rough or uneven spots on it. In the same way, before you can train your mind in the meditation on recognising all sentient beings as your mother, you must make your mind even with equanimity towards everyone. In other words, you must learn to stop discriminating among sentient beings, feeling close to some and distant from others, and the way to do this is by developing equanimity.

Now I will explain the way to meditate in order to develop equanimity. Those who are familiar with these instructions, please meditate while I am explaining. Those who are new, please pay special attention and try to retain the instructions in your mind. All of you please try to have the intention to develop bodhicitta, thinking that you must generate this realisation in your mind. As I mentioned before, these instructions of the Kadampa lamas are so powerful and effective, especially the instructions on merging the seven-point cause-and-effect

technique and exchanging oneself with others as taught by Lama Tsong Khapa. So please be attentive and generate this strong intention: "I am definitely going to practise and develop bodhicitta in my mind."

Visualise in front of you three people: first, someone who upsets you—just by seeing or thinking about him or her, your mind becomes unhappy. Next to him or her, visualise someone you love and are close to—just by seeing this person your mind becomes happy. And next to that person, visualise a stranger, someone who is neither beneficial nor non-beneficial. When you think about these people, you feel aversion towards the person you dislike, attachment towards the person who is close to you, and indifference towards the stranger.

Now, thinking about the person you dislike, ask yourself, "Why do I dislike this person? What is the reason I get so upset? What has he done to me?" You will realise that this is because he has harmed you a little bit in this life. At this point you should think about the uncertainty of friends and enemies as explained in the lam-rim, in the section for the person of intermediate scope. This is one of the disadvantages of cyclic existence: you cannot be sure of friends and enemies; sometimes a friend becomes an enemy and sometimes an enemy becomes a friend. Think in this way: "Although this person has given me a small amount of harm in this life for a very short time, in many previous lifetimes since beginningless time, this person has shown me great affection and has been very close to me for a very long time. The harm he has given me in this life is so small compared to the closeness and affection we have had since beginningless time, yet I treat him like my ultimate enemy, the ultimate object to be avoided. This is completely wrong!" You need to think in this way again in order to subdue your feelings of aversion for this person.

Next to him is the person you feel close to, who makes you feel so happy as soon as you see him or her. You regard this person as your ultimate friend, the person who is closer to you than anyone else. You have so much attachment for this person you may feel that you don't want to be separated from him or her for even a moment. If you examine the reasons why this is so, it is because in this life he has benefited you in some way such as with resources and so forth. On the basis of some very small benefits and for very limited reasons, your mind becomes so happy and excited. However, you should think, "Although in this life he has benefited me a little, he has not always been my friend. In many previous lifetimes since beginningless time, he has been my enemy. He harmed me so much that just by seeing him I felt very strong aversion. It is not reasonable for me to have so much attachment and desire for this person just because he has benefited me, is beneficial to me and will benefit me, because he has also been the opposite." By thinking in this way over and over again, you can subdue your feelings of attachment.

Now turn to the stranger. The attitude you have toward this person is: "I don't know this person and I don't care about him. He hasn't connected with me in the past, he is not connecting with me now and he will not connect with me in the future, so who cares." This attitude is also completely wrong, so you should think, "In this life, this person is neither an enemy nor a friend, but in previous lives he was my enemy many times, and also many times he was my dearest friend, someone I was very close to. Therefore, it is completely unreasonable to be indifferent to this person." Just as you equalised your feelings towards the friend and the enemy, you should equalise your feelings towards the stranger by thinking this way again and again.

Therefore when you meditate, you first think that there is absolutely no reason to be so upset and feel so much aversion towards the enemy who has been your dearest friend so many times. You need to think about this again and again in order to subdue your aversion and equalise your mind towards this person. Likewise, think that there is no reason to be so attached to the person you are close to, your friend, because he has been your enemy so many times. Think about this again and again to subdue your attachment and equalise your mind towards this person.

When we perceive these three different people, we perceive them in terms of these three categories: friends, enemies and strangers. However, none of them exists in this way forever—no one is a friend, enemy or stranger for all time. Therefore, they are all the same. There is absolutely no reason to feel attachment towards one person, to feel aversion towards another, and to feel detached and indifferent towards yet another.

If we examine what they actually are, from their side, they are sentient beings. And they are all exactly the same in that they all wish to be happy and free from suffering. Thus there is not the slightest reason to discriminate between them with attachment, aversion and indifference. They are all exactly the same. You must come to this conclusion and meditate on it again and again. By meditating on this over and over again, you will reach the point where you actually develop equanimity towards all sentient beings. You will feel that

they are all the same to you; your feelings towards them will be equal. This is the result that should come about.

Although you might recite every day the prayer of the Four Immeasurable Thoughts "May all sentient beings have happiness and its causes; may all sentient beings be free from suffering and its causes" and so forth—until you have actually developed equanimity, in reality it will be as though you are saying, "May all sentient beings have happiness and its causes and be free from suffering and its causes—but only those I like and not those I dislike." No matter how frequently and fervently you recite the Four Immeasurable Thoughts, until you have developed equanimity, they are only words. They don't become the actual Four Immeasurable Thoughts. Therefore, it is extremely important to develop equanimity, and even if you spent months and years meditating solely on equanimity in order to develop this realisation, it would be an extremely worthwhile method of practising meditation. If you can pacify your feelings of attachment and aversion towards friends and enemies, it will be very beneficial to your mind.

Recognising All Sentient Beings as One's Mother

The next point, recognising all sentient beings as one's mother, is actually the first step in developing bodhicitta. Lama Pabongka Dorje Chang said that this point is not easy and takes quite a long time to develop. However, it is crucial and indispensable, because only on the basis of this recognition can you develop the following steps. We cannot progress without it, so it is very important to give it a lot of attention.

In general, when you meditate you use perfect reasoning as well as quotations. Here, with this point of recognising all beings as your mother, it is very important to use reasoning. Although you can also develop the same understanding on the basis of quotations, there is a difference in the way the mind is activated on the basis of quotations and on the basis of reasoning—it is more powerful on the basis of reasoning. The specific reasoning to be relied upon here is the beginningless continuity of mind.

First you have to establish that the continuity of the mind is beginningless. Start by thinking that your mind of today is the result of the mind of yesterday. And yesterday's mind came from the mind of the day before yesterday. In that way, you go back, day by day. Each day's mind is the result of the mind of the preceding day. Also, the mind of each moment is the result of the preceding moment.

Continue to go back, all the way to the moment of conception, and think about how the mind of the newborn baby is also a continuity which needs a preceding moment of mind in order to be generated. The mind of the newborn baby is the continuation of the mind of the fetus which was in the womb of the mother. And if you go back in this way, you will not be able to find a beginning.¹ You cannot find a moment which you can point to as the beginning of the mind and say, "The mind began there." this is because any moment of mind would need a preceding moment in order to be generated. In this way you can establish that the continuum of the mind is beginningless. There is no single moment of mind which you can point to as being the first.

Following these reasons, you conclude that the number of times you have taken rebirth is countless. Not only that, but in all those rebirths, just as in this life, you needed a mother. For one hundred rebirths, you would need one hundred mothers; for one thousand rebirths, you would need one thousand mothers, and so forth. Since you have had countless rebirths, you have had countless mothers.

So if you think very carefully about these points, you will realise that not only have you had countless rebirths, you have also had countless mothers. Furthermore, although sentient beings are also countless, the number of sentient beings that exist is fewer than the number of mothers you have had. You have taken rebirth countless times in all different types of bodies, and the number of sentient beings you need to have been your mother is greater than the number of sentient beings in existence. Therefore, since the number of times you have taken rebirth and the number of mothers you have had is greater than the number of sentient beings, it means that every single sentient being has been your mother not just once, but countless times.

Start with your own mother, thinking that your mother of this life was your mother countless times in previous rebirths. When you have gained some experience of this idea such that your mind is transformed towards your mother, then think about it in relation to your father—that your father has been your mother countless times. Following that, think about how your friends have been your mother countless times. Then think about your enemies—even your enemies have been your mother so many times. Finally, widen your scope to include all sentient beings—meditate on how all sentient beings have been your mother.

You have to meditate on this subject again and again over a long period of time. While you are training your mind in this subject, you should rely on different lam-rim scriptures which explain various points and ways of meditating and can give you a lot of inspiration. You should request your spiritual teacher to give you explanations to help clarify your mind, and you should also discuss the subject with your Dharma friends. By thinking in this way again and again, you will reach the point where you realise that all sentient beings have been your mother, even down to a tiny insect like an ant. Even when you see a tiny insect you will feel certain that many times this being has been your kind mother, who took the greatest care of you and in whom you placed your trust. It is said that the great Atisha—who completely realised this point—would be immediately filled with a deep sense of respect whenever he met any sentient being. He would fold his hands and say, "Precious sentient being, so kind."

Recognising the Kindness of Mother Sentient Beings

The next step in the meditation is recognising the kindness of mother sentient beings. It is not enough just to recognise that all sentient beings have been your mother, you must also recognise the depth of their kindness. For example, your mother of this life was so kind, carrying you within her for nine long months from the time of conception, always being very careful about what she ate and drank, and doing everything with the sole thought of taking care of you. Even the fact that you are alive and are able to learn and practise the Dharma is completely due to the kindness of your mother, who carried you in her womb and took such good care of you since the time of conception.

She took care of you while you were in her womb, and also after you were born. When you were born you were completely helpless, like a little bug, unable to do anything. Nevertheless, your mother treated you as if you were a priceless jewel—continuously taking the greatest care of you, day and night, with no other thought in her mind than concern for your welfare. She fed you, bathed you, dressed you in soft clothing, took you here and there to make you happy, and even made funny faces or gestures to make you smile. Because of her constant feeling of love and concern for you, her mind was always full of worry that you might get sick or hurt—so much so that she would have difficulty sleeping at night.

You learned how to walk because of the kindness of your mother—she would help you stand up and take your first step, then the second step, and so forth. You also learned how to pronounce your first words because of the kindness of your mother and also your father. As time went on, you were able to study and learn many other things, but only on the basis of knowing how to walk and speak, which you learned because of the kindness of your mother.

In the preceding step you realised that all sentient beings have been your mother, and with this meditation you realise that not only has your mother of this present life been incredibly kind to you, but all the countless sentient beings have been just as kind.

Repaying their Kindness

The next step is generating the wish to repay the kindness of all mother sentient beings. Ask yourself, "Am I able to repay their kindness?" Then think, "I should be able to repay their kindness because I'm in such fortunate circumstances: I have met the Dharma, I have met perfect teachers, I have met the path, and I have all the right circumstances to practise. Therefore I must do as much as I possibly can to liberate them from their suffering and to bring them the happiness that they wish for. I must do this in order to repay their kindness."

Of course, repaying the kindness of sentient beings includes helping them on a conventional level, by doing as much as you can to give food to those who are hungry, drink to those who are thirsty, clothing and other material things. But the most important way of helping is by completely relieving all sentient beings of all their sufferings and giving them all the happiness that they could wish for. You should bring this thought to your mind again and again.

Affectionate Love

The next step, affectionate love, is the kind of love that a mother feels when looking at her only child. When a mother looks at her child, he appears to her in a very beautiful way, and she feels great love for him. Here, you generate this same kind of affectionate love towards all sentient beings, perceiving all beings in a beautiful, glowing way.

Actually, if you generated to previous step of recognising all sentient beings as your mother, recognising their kindness and wishing to repay their kindness, then you won't need extra effort or extra thought in order to develop affectionate love. It will arise spontaneously, due to the force of the preceding realisations.

When you meditate on affectionate love, you also need to reflect on the fact that all sentient beings, although wishing to be happy, are completely devoid of happiness, especially pure, uncontaminated happiness. By meditating in this way, you generate the strong wish that all sentient beings possess happiness and its causes, and that they actually abide in happiness. On top of that, you should also generate the wish that you yourself will make that happen. From the depths of your heart, request your lama to grant you blessings to be able to do this.

Great Compassion

The next step is great compassion. This is one of the special characteristics of the Buddha's teachings, and Lama Tsong Khapa in particular placed a great deal of emphasis on it as a very special cause that gives rise to very special effects. Also, the great Chandrakirti, in the introduction to his *Entering the Middle Way*, pays homage to great compassion, saying that it is extremely important at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. At the beginning, it is the seed which enables you to enter the Mahayana path. In the middle, while you are engaging in the bodhisattva's practice of the six perfections, it is the very soul of your practice. At the end it causes the result, Buddhahood, to ripen and makes possible all the Buddha's wonderful deeds for the benefit of sentient beings. Therefore, great compassion is praised as being extremely important at the beginning, in the middle and at the end.

It is said that in the beginning, in order to develop great compassion, it is very beneficial to observe and reflect on the way a butcher slaughters an animal—cutting the throat, ripping out its insides, pulling off its skin. Using this as an example is an easy and powerful way to meditate on great compassion. Here in Singapore, there is a market where we go to buy animals to liberate. It would be extremely beneficial to go there and observe the situation, reflecting both on the animals which are being slaughtered and those who are slaughtering them.

Once you have started to generate great compassion, then you reflect on the same meditations that you used while training your mind in the small scope section of the lam-rim, by thinking in detail about the sufferings of the three lower realms, the hells and so forth.² However, this time you generate compassion by thinking of the sufferings of the specific sentient beings: the sufferings of extreme heat and extreme cold of the hell-beings, the sufferings of extreme hunger and thirst of the pretas, and the sufferings of the animals.

What is the measure or sign of having generated great compassion in your mind? It is that you feel towards all sentient beings the same wish for them to be free of suffering that a mother would feel for her only child. When a mother sees her child going through intense suffering, she feels an unbearable wish for the child to be completely free from this suffering. Feeling this same strong wish towards each and every sentient beings is the sign that you have generated great compassion.

The Extraordinary Intention

The next step is the extraordinary intention. This is when you have the feeling that you yourself, alone, have the responsibility of eliminating all the sufferings of all sentient beings. and bringing to them all the happiness that they wish for. It is the same sense of responsibility that a child would feel towards his or her mother—feeling responsible to make her happy and free from suffering. So when you feel that way towards all sentient beings and feel that you yourself alone will achieve this goal, then you have generated the extraordinary intention. It is "extraordinary" because it is more exceptional or supreme than the intention of the Hearers and Solitary Realisers, those who practise the individual vehicle.

The extraordinary intention is similar to being in the position of saving someone from falling off a cliff, where you feel responsible to save the person. In the same way, when you feel a deep sense of responsibility for eliminating the suffering of all sentient beings and for giving them all the happiness they wish for, that is the extraordinary intention. It can also be called the "exceptional attitude" or "universal responsibility".

Bodhicitta

The next step is the actual generation of bodhicitta, also called "the generation of the mind". This comes by reflecting, "Do I really have the capacity to accomplish this goal of eliminating all the suffering of sentient beings and bringing them to happiness? Actually, at this point I can't accomplish that even for one sentient being. And if I check who does have the complete capacity to accomplish this goal, it is only the Buddha. Only the Buddha has the right qualities, because of his power, his knowledge, and his capacity to accomplish spontaneously the benefit of all sentient beings." At this point you have to reflect on the qualities of Buddha as a worthy object of refuge, as you did in the lam-rim meditation of the individual of the small scope.

Following this, you generate the thought that you will accomplish the benefit of all sentient beings by achieving the qualities of the Buddha yourself. This means that you generate the mind of bodhicitta, thinking, "I must achieve the supreme enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings." This wish to become a Buddha is not just to abandon whatever has to be abandoned in order to achieve the complete purpose for yourself. Previously you generated great love and great compassion in order to achieve the benefit of all sentient beings, therefore it is for that purpose that you now generate the wish to become a Buddha.

You must also check: "Am I actually able to do it?" Yes, you are definitely in a position where you can become a Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings. In fact, there is no better situation than the one you are in now. You have a precious human rebirth, and you have met perfect teachers and the Mahayana path. This means you are actually in the best situation to achieve Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Furthermore, you have met the perfect teachings of the great Lama Tsong Khapa. By relying on these incredible teachings, many practitioners of the past, on the basis of having achieved a precious human rebirth, were able to achieve the supreme realisation in that very lifetime. Some individuals, such as the omniscient Gyalwa Ensapa, were able to achieve this realisation in an even shorter period of time—twelve years or even three years. These practitioners had the same basis—the precious human body and other conditions—that you now have. Therefore you should feel a sense of confidence in having the basis that enables you to become a Buddha.

The contrived form of bodhicitta—the experience of bodhicitta which arises through effort—is known in Tibetan as "the bodhicitta which is like the outer layer of the sugarcane". The uncontrived form of bodhicitta is when the thought of wanting to achieve supreme enlightenment for the benefit of sentient beings arises spontaneously in your mind as soon as you meet any sentient being, no matter who he or she is. Having the uncontrived, effortless experience is the sign that you have achieved the actual realisation of bodhicitta. And once you have generated the realisation of bodhicitta, you earn the name "Child of the Victorious Ones".

This concludes the explanation on how to generate bodhicitta by way of the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction.

Notes

1. The implication here is that the mind of the newly-conceived child is the continuation of the mind of a previous life, which in turn came from another life, and so on without beginning. [\[Return to text\]](#)

2. In the small scope section of the lam-rim, one imagines being reborn in the lower realms so as to generate a healthy fear and the determination to avoid such rebirths by taking refuge and living in accordance with the law of karma.

EXCHANGING ONESELF AND OTHERS

The second method of generating bodhicitta is that of exchanging oneself with others. The practice of equalising and exchanging oneself with others combined with the practice of *tong-len*, or giving and taking, is known as "training the mind" (*lo-jong*). If we look at the lineage of these instructions, they began with Buddha Shakyamuni and Manjushri and were handed down from them in an uninterrupted lineage of great masters including Shantideva. The great master Atisha received the lineage from Lama Serlingpa. When Atisha went to Tibet, he taught the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction publicly, and gave the instructions on exchanging oneself with others only to Dromtonpa, because he felt that his other disciples were not fit vessels for such instructions.

Dromtonpa himself kept this lineage very secret—among his many disciples, he gave it only to his spiritual disciple, the foremost Kadampa virtuous friend, Geshe Potowa. Geshe Potowa also kept this instruction very, very secret. Although he too had many disciples, he gave these instructions only to the great Langri Tangpa and Geshe Sharawa. Geshe Langri Tangpa, on the basis of having received and realised these instructions, composed the renowned text, *The Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*. Because these instructions had been put into writing, they became more widespread and many people were able to learn and practise them. Later, the great master Chekawa came to know them. Geshe Chekawa was a scholar learned in all the five sciences but was not satisfied with his knowledge and wished to learn the Dharma. One day he heard two lines of *The Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*, which said,

Give to others all gain and fortunes,
And take on yourself all loss and defeat.

Geshe Chekawa was intrigued by these lines and wanted to understand how to actually practise giving to others whatever victory and goodness there is and taking upon oneself all loss and defeat. Thus he went in search of these instructions. He traveled to the region of Penbo in Tibet, where Geshe Langri Tangpa lived, but discovered that this great master had already passed away. Fortunately, he met a disciple of Geshe Langri Tangpa, the master Geshe Sharawa, who gave him the complete instructions on exchanging oneself with others. By practising these instructions, Geshe Chekawa gained the full realisation of bodhicitta in his mind. He taught these instructions to many lepers, who were able to cure themselves of leprosy by practising exchanging oneself with others and *tong-len*. These instructions thus came to be known as "the Dharma of lepers." Meditating extensively on *tong-len*, with clear and powerful visualisation, is actually the supreme treatment for leprosy.

Geshe Chekawa, thinking that it would be a great loss if these instructions were kept secret, began to teach more publicly the practices of exchanging oneself with others and giving and taking.

The practice of *tong-len*, giving and taking, is indeed an inconceivably wonderful practice. In the past, when someone was sick, or had a spell cast on him, or was experiencing obstacles of some kind, he would seek the help of a Kadampa lama. The Kadampa lama would do the *tong-len* practice, taking upon himself both the suffering of the one who was being harmed and the one who was causing the harm, meditating on compassion especially toward the harm-giver. The lama would take upon himself all these sufferings with great compassion, and with great love would give away all virtues and benefits. The Kadampa lamas considered this practice to be the best remedy against spells, obstacles, sickness and so forth.

The instructions on exchanging oneself with others consist of five main points:

1. Equalising oneself with others
2. The disadvantage of cherishing oneself
3. The advantages of cherishing others
4. The actual thought of exchanging oneself with others
5. The meditation on giving and taking (*tong-len*)

Equalising Oneself with Others

At what point should you begin to meditate on the first subject, equalising oneself with others? Prior to this meditation, you should meditate on the first five steps in the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction: equanimity, recognising all beings as your mother, remembering their kindness, wishing to repay their

kindness, and the affectionate love which sees them as beautiful. Thus you begin to meditate on equalising yourself with others after having gone through these five steps, which I already explained.

How should you equalise yourself with others? First of all, you need to understand what you mean by "self", when you think in terms of yourself. When we think "myself and others", this "myself" has a sense of great importance, whereas "others" has a sense of much less importance.

So when you think in terms of "me" or "myself", there is a much greater sense of importance than when you think in terms of others. Whatever concerns you becomes extremely significant—whether you feel good or bad, whether you are cold or hot—it is always more important than how others feel. Also, everything related to you—"my body, my possessions, my friends, my family, my kids," everything which is part of your life, yourself—has a much greater sense of importance than the same things related to others—"their bodies, their families," and so forth.

Thinking in this way you can see how you do not regard self and others as equal—you esteem yourself much more than others. However, consider it from the point of view of numbers: you are just one, whereas others are countless. So there is a discrepancy in the way you regard yourself and others: although there are so many more others than yourself, you regard yourself as more important than others. This is completely wrong.

You should decide that your objective in this meditation is to correct this discrepancy and learn to equalize yourself and others. The way to do this is by thinking that you and all other beings are exactly the same in wanting to be happy and free from suffering. You need to think over and over again about the fact that there is not the slightest difference between yourself and others in terms of wanting to be happy and wanting to be free from suffering. In this regard, you and others are exactly the same.

If you compare the instructions of the seven points of cause-and-effect and exchanging oneself with others, the five points of recognising all beings as mothers, remembering their kindness, wishing to repay their kindness, the extraordinary intention and bodhicitta, are the same. However, there is a difference when we come to the two points of affectionate love and great compassion. The strength of these feelings is different in the two practices. How is that? It is because when you meditate on the kindness of sentient beings according to the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction, you recollect how kind they were when they were your mother, whereas when you meditate according to the instructions on exchanging oneself with others, you recollect their kindness not only when they were your mother but also at other times, when they were not your mother. This meditation is more extensive. Therefore, when you train your mind in the instructions of exchanging oneself with others, the strength of your affectionate love and great compassion will be greater than when training the mind in the seven-point technique of cause-and-effect.

The aim of these instructions is to train your mind in actually exchanging yourself with others, and the way to push the mind in that direction is by contemplating both the faults of cherishing oneself and the advantages of cherishing others. Therefore the next step in the meditation is contemplating the many faults or disadvantages of cherishing oneself.

The Disadvantages of Cherishing Oneself

The sources of these instructions on recognising the disadvantages of the self-cherishing thought or egoism are texts such as Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* (*A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*), and *The Guru Puja*. There is a verse in *The Guru Puja* which says:

This chronic disease of cherishing ourselves
Is the cause giving rise to our unsought suffering;
Perceiving this, we seek your blessings to blame, begrudge
And destroy the monstrous demon of selfishness.

A verse from the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* says: "All the suffering in the world comes from the desire for one's own happiness" and so forth. In the root text of *The Seven-Point Thought Transformation*, it says: "Banish the one to blame for everything." This means that all suffering—whatever unwanted problems, obstacles, shortcomings, and sufferings that exist—should be blamed on the self-cherishing thought alone. "All suffering" includes not only the problems that you yourself experience in your life, but from a larger point of view, it also includes wars between countries, disagreements between the leaders of different countries, disagreements at work, arguments within a family such as husband and wife fighting or parents and children fighting, and so

forth. All these unwanted experiences come from egoism, the thought of cherishing oneself, and thus they should be blamed on the self-cherishing thought.

As another example of the disadvantages of the self-cherishing thought, let's say you eat too much and get indigestion, and maybe even die from indigestion. Although it may seem that the cause is some kind of digestive ailment, in fact the real cause of the problem is that your self-cherishing mind was not satisfied but wanted more and more food. So you died not from indigestion but due to the self-cherishing thought.

Even in situations where it seems you are not responsible—for example, you are falsely accused of having done something wrong, or you are robbed of your possessions or killed—even in these situations, the cause is the self-cherishing thought. These experiences are the result of your past evolutionary actions [karma] which were motivated by the self-cherishing thought. In past lives, due to egoism, wanting happiness just for yourself, you harmed others, robbed and killed. In this life you are experiencing the results of those actions, therefore those sufferings are to be blamed only on egoism, the self-cherishing thought.

In the past, you were born countless times in the three lower realms, and this too is due to self-cherishing. The self-cherishing thought motivated you to create the causes to experience the sufferings of rebirth as a preta [hungry ghost], as a hell being and as an animal. For example, being born as a preta is the result of miserliness, which in turn comes from egoism, cherishing yourself more than others. Also, if, out of self-cherishing, you point out the physical faults of someone, saying that his face resembles that of an animal, you create the cause to be born as an animal. Therefore, all the sufferings you experienced in countless rebirths in the three lower realms come from nothing other than the self-cherishing thought.

Even from an ordinary point of view, the egoistic self-cherishing thought causes us so much harm. For example, because of holding yourself in high esteem, feeling that you are so great, when you meet someone who seems better than you, you become miserable with envy. When you meet someone who is equal to you, you will want to compete with that person. For example, you could be a businessman who always wants to be on top—that competitive attitude leads to so many problems. Then, when you meet people who are lower than you, you bully them, put them down and point out their faults. All this comes from the self-cherishing thought, feeling that you are so important, so high, so good. Because of these actions you create a great deal of problems in the present as well as the causes for future suffering. Actually, if you really think about all the disadvantages of egoism, the self-cherishing thought, they are inconceivable.

In brief, all the sufferings and difficulties you have encountered from beginningless time until now, all the unwanted experiences in cyclic existence are caused by egoism, the self-cherishing thought. In fact, all the sufferings of cyclic existence are caused both by self-grasping ignorance and the self-cherishing thought. From the philosophical point of view these are two different things, but in the context of mind training they are considered to be the same. On the one hand there is self-grasping—grasping at a true identity, a true I—and on the other hand there is a mind that, instead of letting go of the I, cherishes it, thinking, "I want to be happy, I need this, I need that." That is the self-cherishing thought, and on that basis all suffering, all unwanted experiences and all negativities are generated. Therefore it is the one to blame for everything.

Those of us who practise the Dharma must think continuously over and over again, about the disadvantages of the self-cherishing thought and the advantages of cherishing others—taking care of others rather than oneself. We also need to consider the disadvantages of taking care of this life and the advantages of preparing for the next life. These are things that we need to do.

The Advantages of Cherishing Others

The next point is contemplating the advantages or qualities of cherishing others, or altruism.

This point is clearly stated in the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* by Shantideva, which says, "All the happiness of the world comes from altruism." Also, there is a verse in *The Guru Puja* which says,

I see that cherishing these beings, my mothers,
Is the thought that leads to happiness
And the door leading to infinite qualities.

The root text of *The Seven-Point Thought Transformation* says, "Meditate on the great kindness of all sentient beings."

On the basis of these quotations you should realise the advantage of cherishing others. For instance, all the happiness of the human rebirth and other fortunate rebirths—having perfect wealth, surroundings, relations and so forth—comes from altruism, cherishing others. Why? Due to cherishing others' lives you abandon killing, and the result of abandoning killing is a fortunate rebirth and also a long life. So having a long life and a fortunate rebirth come directly from having abandoned killing because of cherishing others' lives. Also, having perfect wealth and surroundings is the result of abandoning stealing and practising generosity, both of which are done on the basis of cherishing others.

In brief, as it says in the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, "There is no need to elaborate more than this; just look at the childish beings who work for their own benefit, and the Buddhas who work for the benefit of others." And there is a verse in *The Guru Puja* which says, "In short, childish beings work only for their own welfare, while Buddha Shakyamuni acted solely for the benefit of others."

Childish beings act solely for themselves, thinking of their own happiness, in the same way that a child thinks only about himself. On the other hand, the Buddhas became enlightened by cherishing others. Without needing to go into detail, just by looking at the differences between these two types of beings and their actions, we can clearly recognise the differences between self-cherishing and cherishing others.

Consider Buddha Shakyamuni—in the past, since from beginningless time, Buddha Shakyamuni had been like us, trapped in cyclic existence. Then, at some point, He began to cherish others and on the basis of practising altruism, was able to fulfill the two purposes [of attaining enlightenment and leading others to enlightenment]. Now look at ourselves—because of continuously caring for ourselves alone, cherishing ourselves, we haven't been able to achieve even our own purpose but have been wandering in cyclic existence and the three lower realms again and again since beginningless time. We don't need to go into much detail, just compare the results of Buddha Shakyamuni's actions and our own—one comes from cherishing others and the other comes from egoism, cherishing ourselves. Therefore, by following the self-cherishing thought, no good will come about—only the three unfortunate rebirths.

At this point, Lama Dorje Chang Pabongka would tell stories from the life of Drukpa Kunley, a great meditator of the Drukpa Kargyu tradition who was famous for having an unusual way of speaking which made people laugh.

One day Drukpa Kunley went to Lhasa and paid a visit to the Jokhang, the main temple of Lhasa where you find the Jowo, a very famous statue of Buddha Shakyamuni. Normally, you enter and pay homage to the Jowo, then you circumambulate and take blessings. Drukpa Kunley did this—he circumambulated the statue and took blessings—but then he stood directly in front of the Jowo and said, "In the past you and I were the same, but then you began to practise altruism and to take care of others, so you have become a perfect Buddha. I have been taking care only of myself and I'm still in samsara. Indeed I should now prostrate to you."

Drukpa Kunley was an unconventional yogi; he would express the Dharma truth in a very humorous way. It is said that he once visited the Bodnath Stupa in Nepal, which has an unusual shape, unlike other stupas which are built in one of eight standard designs. When he arrived at the stupa, he prostrated and said "Although you look like a round heap and unlike one of the eight stupas gone to bliss, I still prostrate to you."

Another time he said, "I've lost three important, precious things." When asked what it was he had lost he said, "One precious thing which I lost is called ignorance, another one is called desire, and the third is called aversion. I have lost these three things which others regard as important and cherish so much." This shows his achievements, but it was expressed in an unusual, funny way. At any rate, Drukpa Kunley was a great adept, and I think that there is a translation of his biography containing all these stories.¹

Therefore, we should consider what Buddha Shakyamuni achieved by cherishing others and compare this with the difficulties we are still experiencing because of cherishing ourselves alone. It is very useful to read the stories of Buddha Shakyamuni's previous lives when he was still practising on the path as related, for example, in *The Jataka Tales*. These stories show how he performed many incredible deeds in order to cherish others, and thus they can inspire us to practise thought transformation.

It is at this point in the meditation that you reflect on the kindness of sentient beings, both when they were your mothers and when they were not. This reflection becomes very helpful because you realise even more reasons to cherish others rather than to cherish yourself. To give an easy example of the kindness of others when they were not your mothers: the simple fact that we are able to gather in this room and enjoy listening to the Mahayana Dharma is completely due to the kindness of others. Many people put in a great deal of effort so that we can be here. First of all, there may have been another building here that had to be torn down, and that required a number of workers. Then other people worked to design the new building and buy the materials such as bricks, cement and so forth. Other people were needed to operate the machines, since machines don't work by themselves, and to do the actual construction work on the building. Then, when the building was finished, people worked on decorating the interior and collecting the representations of the Buddha's Body, Speech and Mind to place on the altar. Therefore, the fact that we can enjoy coming together here today and listening to the Mahayana Dharma is entirely due to the kindness of others, isn't it?

The same applies to your own home, your belongings, the things you enjoy—all of these are due to the kindness of others. You might say, "No, this is not true. I bought my house with my own money; I bought my clothes with my own money." Yes, that is true, but you earned your money on the basis of others. "Okay, I got the money from others but this is because I worked hard: I did something to receive this money in return." Yes, but the fact that you are able to work is because of others, isn't it? If you think about it carefully, you will see that whatever happiness you now enjoy comes exclusively from the kindness of others.

When you reflect on the advantages of cherishing others, it is very effective to incorporate all these different thoughts. You can also contemplate that all the benefits right up to the attainment of Buddha's state come about because of cherishing others. How is this? If you want to become a Buddha, you must generate the precious mind of bodhicitta, because without bodhicitta, there is no Buddha. The generation of bodhicitta comes about because of the wish to benefit others: "I must achieve the state of Enlightenment in order to benefit others." Also, the exceptional cause of bodhicitta is great compassion, and great compassion comes from cherishing others. Therefore, it is because of others that you generate great compassion.

Furthermore, the practice of the six perfections depends on others. For example, you practise morality in relation to others, and in order to practise generosity and patience you need an object, and these objects are others. It is so true what Shantideva taught in the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, when he says,

Both the Victorious Ones and sentient beings are indispensable to achieving the supreme enlightenment, and since I pay homage to the victors, why don't I pay homage to sentient beings as well?

This is saying that the achievement of supreme enlightenment is half due to the kindness of the Buddhas and half due to the kindness of sentient beings. When we give so much importance to honouring the Buddhas, why don't we give the same importance to honouring the sentient beings who are equally indispensable to our achievement of enlightenment? As the great master Langri Tangpa says in his *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*,

I can achieve the supreme state of enlightenment due to the kindness of sentient beings, therefore they are more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel and I should cherish them to that extent.

There are so many heart-warming instructions on the kindness of sentient beings.

This great master Tangri Langpa was so exceptional, he was truly a superior being. (By the way, he is in the line of the previous incarnations of the late Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche.) It is said that Langri Tangpa was always very serious and smiled only three times in his whole life, so he was known as "Langri Tangpa of the black face" (in Tibetan the term "black face" means "serious"). He spent all of his time meditating on the disadvantages of cyclic existence and bodhicitta, and that is why he didn't find many occasions to laugh.

I'll tell you the story of one of the three occasions when Langri Tangpa laughed and what made him laugh. This story is about his mandala set. In the Kadampa tradition and in the tradition of Lama Pabongka Dorje Chang, the practice of offering the mandala is very much emphasized. When I was young in Tibet, most of us would bring our mandala sets to teachings, so that at the point of offering the mandala very few would be without one. In the row of the *tulkus* [reincarnated lamas], each tulku would have his own beautiful mandala set—some made of gold, some of silver—but the top would always be of gold. It was quite a scene when all the tulkus offered their mandalas! But that was in the past, and then at a certain point everything was taken away. My own mandala set was taken away. There is also a particular implement used to offer the hundred tormas,

which is a kind of flat container decorated with symbols. I had one of these because the Kadampa tradition places so much emphasis on the practice of offering tormas, but that was taken away as well. By "taken away" I mean confiscated by the Communists. Nowadays, I use something very simple.

Anyway, one day Langri Tangpa was meditating, and he had his mandala set on the table next to him. It was probably a simple mandala set, not a beautiful or elaborate one. As he was meditating, he noticed that a mouse had come and was eating some of the grains of his mandala. Among the grains was a big turquoise and for some reason, the mouse was attracted to the turquoise and started to pick at it, trying to get hold of it, but it was too big for him. Then another mouse came and began helping the first one, so both of them were trying to get hold of it. Pretty soon there were five mice and they devised a way to get the turquoise: one mouse laid on his back and held the turquoise on his stomach, and the other four mice held his head and legs and were pulling him along. Langri Tangpa had been watching the mice and when he saw this he broke into a slight laugh. Why did he laugh? Because he thought that in cyclic existence when it comes to fulfilling one's needs, animals are more clever than human beings. It's true, sometimes animals can be smarter than human beings in taking care of the needs and happiness of this life.

The Actual Thought of Exchanging Oneself with Others

So now we come to the fourth step in the meditation, which is the actual thought of exchanging oneself with others. What is meant by exchanging oneself with others? Prior to this, we contemplated deeply the disadvantages of cherishing oneself, realising that all unwanted experiences and bad things come from egoism. Like a chronic disease which slowly, gradually destroys your health and physical form, the self-cherishing thought has, from beginningless time, been the source of all your suffering and problems. On the other hand, all the good things—good qualities, happiness, advantages and so forth—derive from cherishing others, from altruism. Realising this, you now begin to train your mind in exchanging the thought which cherishes oneself and disregards others for the thought which cherishes others and disregards yourself.

Until now we have been disregarding others and taking care of ourselves, but from now on, we have to take care of others and disregard ourselves. Exchanging oneself with others doesn't mean that you take others in your place and put yourself in others' place. Instead it means that you exchange the mind which cherishes oneself and ignores others with the mind which cherishes others and ignores oneself. You need to meditate on this again and again, continuously, and in this way train your mind in exchanging yourself with others.

The Meditation on Giving and Taking (*Tong-Len*)

On the basis of the thought of exchanging oneself with others, you practise the meditation on giving and taking. What is giving and taking? With the mind of compassion you take on the suffering of others and with the mind of love you give them happiness. The root text of *The Seven-Point Thought Transformation* says, "giving and taking should be practised alternately." In the Tibetan term, *tong-len*, giving comes first—*tong* means "giving" and *len* means "taking"—but in actual practice, you first train your mind in taking—taking upon yourself the suffering of others—and leave aside the practice of giving.

Taking

You begin the practice of taking by contemplating the sufferings of the precious mother sentient beings until an unbearable sense of compassion arises within you. Then you visualise that suffering in the aspect of black light, which separates from the sentient beings in the same way that hairs separate from your skin when you shave. You visualise that this suffering in the aspect of black light comes and absorbs into the self-cherishing thought which is at the centre of your heart.

You can do the meditation in an elaborate way, going one by one through all the different realms of the sentient beings, starting from the hells. For example, you can think about the sufferings of sentient beings in the hot hells—sufferings due to the intense heat, fire and so forth—and then take upon yourself this suffering in the form of hot fire, visualising that it absorbs straight into the centre of your heart, into the egoistic, self-cherishing thought.

You continue to meditate in this way, gradually progressing through all the different levels and kinds of sentient beings all the way up the bodhisattvas of the tenth *bhumi*, taking all their suffering into the centre of the self-cherishing thought in your heart. You take on not only their sufferings but all the obscurations and

negativities as well, wishing that they actually ripen upon you, and feel that in this way, all these negativities are completely purified.

For some individuals, it may be difficult immediately to visualise taking the sufferings of others, such as those of the hell beings, pretas and so forth—upon yourself. If that is the case, you need to first train your mind in taking on your own suffering. As mentioned in the root text, "You should begin by taking from yourself." The way to do this is to consider the sufferings that you will experience tomorrow, and take these sufferings upon yourself in the aspect of black light as I explained before. Then take on the sufferings you will experience the day after tomorrow, and so forth—contemplating and taking on all the sufferings of the coming month, the coming year, the rest of your life, the next life, and all the future rebirths—you gradually take on all these sufferings in the aspect of black light, and they absorb into the self-cherishing thought in your heart.

Once you have trained your mind in this meditation and become familiar with taking upon yourself all the sufferings you will experience in the future, from tomorrow through your future lives, then you train in taking on the sufferings of loved ones: your parents, relatives, friends and those who are close to you. Then, when you are familiar with this, train in taking on the sufferings of strangers, those for whom you feel neither attachment nor aversion. Then you switch to your enemies. In this way, meditating with the thought of compassion, you gradually widen your scope to include all sentient beings, taking upon yourself their sufferings in the aspect of black light that ripens in the centre of your heart, the self-cherishing thought.

Giving

Taking is practised on the basis of intense compassion, and giving is practised on the basis of love. The way in which you meditate on giving is as explained in the verse, "In order to benefit sentient beings, may my body turn into whatever they wish for." You emanate replicas of your body and visualise that these bodies transform the environment and sentient beings. Let's say you start with the hot hells: you first send out countless bodies which become a cooling rain that completely extinguishes the fires of the hells. Due to the soothing rain, the bodies of the hell-beings transform and they achieve precious human rebirths, with the freedoms and endowments. The bodies you send out also transform into pleasant, enjoyable things such as the objects of the six senses, and in this way you completely fulfil their wishes. Then you again emanate countless bodies which take the aspect of spiritual masters teaching Dharma to those beings who then practise Dharma and gradually achieve enlightenment.

Next, you move on to the sentient beings in the cold hells. This time the bodies you emanate become bright sunlight which completely warms up the freezing environment, and you provide the sentient beings with warm clothes. Again, the beings of the cold hells transform and achieve precious human rebirths, and by emanating countless bodies in the aspect of spiritual guides, you teach them the Dharma and they all reach enlightenment.

You progress through the meditation on each type of sentient being in the same way. For the pretas, the bodies you emanate become food and drink; for the animals, they become wisdom that clears away their ignorance; for the titans, they become armour to protect their bodies; for the devas, they become enjoyments of the five senses; and for human beings, who have such strong desire, they become whatever people need or desire. For the Buddhas and spiritual masters, when you train in giving, you emanate inconceivable clouds of offerings and make prayers for their long lives.

While you are training your mind in the practice of taking and giving, you should also practise the following advice given in the root text of *The Seven-Point Thought Transformation*: "The instruction to be followed, in brief, is to take these words to heart in all activities." This means that in your meditation and in all your activities, you should use the special words of the tong-len practice as a way to recollect and empower your meditation. For example, you can use the verse form *The Guru Puja* which says:

O venerable, compassionate Guru, bless me.
May all the sufferings, negative actions and obscurations
Of all beings, who were once my mothers,
Ripen on me now, without exception.
May I give all my happiness and virtue to others
And may all beings have happiness.

So while you are training, in your actual meditation and throughout all your daily activities, you should continuously recite this verse. These words from *The Guru Puja* are so powerful, so full of blessings, that it is indeed very important to recite them all the time. There is even a practice of accumulating one hundred thousand repetitions of this verse while meditating, and this would be an excellent practice to do.

In the prayer, you first entreat the lama by saying, "O venerable, compassionate Guru," and then you say, "bless me—may all the sufferings and negativities of all the precious mother sentient beings ripen on me right now, without exception. And bless me to give all my roots of virtue and goodness to others, so that these may ripen upon them." The verse concludes with the prayer: "may all sentient beings have happiness." This is really an exceptional, powerful prayer.

It has become a tradition that when *The Guru Puja* is recited, this verse is repeated three times. This tradition was initiated by Lama Pabongka Dorje Chang. Before his time, *The Guru Puja* would be recited straight from the beginning to the end, but because he placed so much importance on this verse, he began the practice of reciting it three times. So the fact that this tradition has continued up to now is due to the kindness of Lama Dorje Chang.

Practising Giving and Taking with the Breath

The next verse in the root text says, "These two, taking and giving, should be made to ride on the breath." This means that after you have become familiar and proficient with the meditation as explained, then you should combine the meditation with your breathing. The way to do this is as follows: while you are breathing out, think that you breathe out all your goodness, and this transforms into whatever is needed for the benefit of sentient beings. You breathe whatever goodness there is within you—your body, virtues, richness, and so forth—and this transforms into whatever benefits all sentient beings.

Then, when you breathe in, think that along with the flow of your breath come all the sufferings of all sentient beings in the form of black light. These sufferings in the aspect of black light enter you and go straight to the source of all the negativities and sufferings you have experienced since beginningless time—your egoistic, self-cherishing thought—and they ripen right there, in your heart. You see, the mind and the breath are inseparable. The mind rides on the breath, so this visualisation that combines giving and taking with the breathing becomes a powerful cause for generating bodhicitta. It's also similar to the vajra recitation which is found in the practice of highest yoga tantra.

It is very beneficial to do this practice as you are going to sleep. Before you go to sleep, generate the thought of love and do the visualisation of giving while breathing out; then with the thought of compassion do the visualisation of taking while breathing in. If you go to sleep doing this practice, then the whole time you are asleep, especially if you like to sleep a lot—until eight or nine in the morning!

As for myself, the more I progress in years, the more I need to sleep, and also my sleep gets deeper. But when I was young and studying at Sera Monastery, I had the habit of staying up all night. The night is very long and you can do so many things—you can do prayers, read texts, whatever you want to do. In the early morning, at dawn, I would feel so happy. My mind would feel very fresh and I would rejoice from the depths of my heart, thinking, "How lucky I am! I was up all night and was able to do these things while the majority of the people around me were asleep." I would consider myself so fortunate to be able to stay up all night and practise. This is something Venerable Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche does. But now, as I grow older, I need more sleep, so I am unable to stay awake all night even if I want to.

I really want to stress the importance of transforming sleep into virtuous practice because if you calculate the way you spend your life, almost half of it is spent sleeping. Therefore it becomes very crucial that the time you spend sleeping becomes virtuous practice, doesn't it?

In his *Songs of Experience*, Milarepa said, "At night, sometimes I sleep, and when I sleep I practise merging sleep with the clear light, because I have received instructions on the clear light of sleep. Other people do not have these instructions—how lucky I am!" There are very few people who are actually able to merge sleep with the clear light practice, so for the majority of us who are beginners, it is extremely practical and useful to go to sleep while meditating on giving and taking. In this way, the entire time you spend sleeping becomes the actual practice of tong-len, and thus becomes virtuous.

Practising in Daily Life

Actually it is extremely important that all the actions we do—sitting, walking, going, coming and so forth—become Dharma. If you divide twenty-four hours into two parts, almost the whole of one part is spent sleeping, and if your sleep is not transformed into virtuous practice, then it becomes empty and even non-virtuous. That means that half the day has disappeared in non-virtue. Then you wake up and, even if you generate a very strong motivation to practise virtue during the day, it is extremely difficult to maintain it. When you sit down to do your prayers, sometimes your mind is so distracted and goes in so many different directions that you're not even sure whether or not you have done all the prayers up to the point you've reached in your recitation. So you have to go back and recite those prayers all over again to make sure that you have at least completed all your commitments.

If it is difficult to generate a pure, virtuous state of mind when reciting prayers, how much harder it is to do so during the day when we are engaged in social activities, especially when most of our time is spent gossiping. Whenever we have the chance to talk, right away we start talking and then we spend so much time gossiping, which is a non-virtuous action, isn't it? Therefore it is extremely crucial that we transform as many of our actions during the day and night as we possibly can into virtue, into Dharma practice.

If we transform our actions into Dharma then we will make our life meaningful. The most important thing is to begin in the morning, as soon as we open our eyes, by generating a very strong motivation. We should think, "I'm still alive this morning, so I'm very fortunate. Due to the kindness of the Three Jewels, I didn't die last night. Therefore I must make this coming day as meaningful as possible by practising Dharma."

After generating a strong motivation in the morning, you should carry it through the day, reminding yourself of it again and again, in all your activities. Normally, the first thing you do after getting up is to jump into the shower, so while taking a shower you can practise the yoga of washing together with the ablution mantras, or do a purification practice. Following that, if you don't have to go to work, you can sit down and begin your daily meditation commitments. Otherwise, if you have to go to work, you can use your time at work to create virtue. If your job mainly involves physical activity, then you can turn your speech and mind to virtue—the mind especially can be made virtuous by recollecting again and again the motivation you generated in the morning.

Then you come to lunchtime. We normally eat at least three times a day, and when eating we can practise the yoga of taking food, which is part of deity yoga. There is a quotation from the great yogi Drogchen Lingrepa which says, "All the holy places are in your body—in your chakras. You don't have to go away. If you want to make pilgrimage, visit there. If you want to do the practice of purification and collecting merit, do it there, in your chakras, in your holy places." According to the practice of deity yoga, the assembly of deities resides in the subtle body of the psychic channels and chakras. Therefore, when you practise the yoga of eating, you visualise the deity's holy body or the body mandala and use the food to make tsog offering. Lama Dorje Chang used to quote this verse—it's very nice.

As you continue with your usual daily activities, remind yourself again and again of the motivation you generated in the morning. Then at night, before going to sleep, think over what you did during the day and check whether or not you have acted in accordance with your motivation. If you realise that you did any negative actions, confess and purify them, but if you realise that your actions were completely compatible with your motivation, then rejoice in all the virtues you created throughout the day.

The Kadampa lamas of the past used to keep count of their virtuous and non-virtuous actions. They kept two piles of stones, one black and one white. Whenever they noticed a delusion or a disturbing thought in their mind, they would add a black stone, and whenever a virtuous thought rose, they would add a white stone. At the end of the day they would count the black and white stones. They would confess and purify the delusions and negativities they had created, and generate the strong intention to keep their mind free from those negativities the following day. They would rejoice in whatever virtues they created and resolve to create even more the next day. Then they would go to sleep doing the practice of merging sleep with the clear light. This may be very difficult for us to practise, so it is important for us to go to sleep merging our sleep with the practice of tong-len.

The Eleven-Point Meditation of Developing Bodhicitta

As I mentioned earlier, when you actually undertake the practice of training the mind in bodhicitta, there is a way of combining the two sets of instructions—the seven-point technique of cause and effect and exchanging oneself with others—into eleven steps. This is according to the tradition of Lama Tsong Khapa. By meditating on either of the two techniques alone, you will definitely generate bodhicitta. However, this uncommon way of merging the two and meditating on the eleven points enables you to generate bodhicitta more quickly and with less hardship.

How do we merge the two techniques into eleven steps?

(1) First of all you meditate on equanimity, visualising a friend, enemy and stranger.

(2) The second point is to recognise all sentient beings as your mother, by using the reasoning of the beginningless nature of the mind and by reflecting on different quotations.

(3) Third is recognising the kindness of sentient beings when they were your mother, just as your mother of this life is kind to you in the beginning, middle and end.

(4) Next is the uncommon point of recollecting the special kindness of sentient beings when they were not your mother.

Then you meditate on:

(5) the equality of self and others,

(6) the disadvantages of the self-cherishing thought; and

(7) the advantages of cherishing others.

(8) Following that, with a mind filled with compassion, you do the meditation of taking upon yourself all the sufferings of sentient beings, and later incorporate this meditation with the breath.

(9) Then with a mind of incredible love, you give all sentient beings all your goodness and roots of virtue, sending these out with the breath as you exhale.

10) At this point you generate the extraordinary intention by thinking, "I have been meditating on taking upon myself the suffering of all sentient beings and giving them all my goodness and roots of virtue, but this has been only on the level of visualisation—it hasn't actually happened, but I am definitely going to make it happen in reality. I myself will definitely take on the suffering of all sentient beings and give them all the roots of virtue and happiness that they wish for." Thinking this way you generate a very special sense of responsibility.

11) In order to fulfill this responsibility, you generate bodhicitta: "I am going to become a Buddha in order to help all sentient beings."

At this point you take the result of bodhicitta into the path by visualising that you transform into the aspect of Buddha Shakyamuni, emanating countless rays of light which purify all sentient beings and lead them to the state of the Buddha. Visualise that they all transform into Buddhas, and stabilise your meditation on this. Conclude the meditation session by rejoicing that you have actually been able to bring all sentient beings to the state of enlightenment.

Transforming Adverse Circumstances into the Path to Enlightenment

The next section of the root text, *The Seven-Point Thought Transformation*, deals with transforming adverse circumstances into the path to enlightenment. This practice is absolutely crucial, especially for the present degenerate time in which we live. In this degenerate age there are so many obstacles, especially for Dharma practitioners. This practice enables the practitioner to take all the obstacles, all the adverse circumstances,

and transform them into conducive circumstances and even into the actual path to enlightenment. In fact, it enables the practitioner to not have any obstacles at all.

This section is divided into two points: transforming adverse circumstances by way of thought and by way of action. The first, transforming adverse circumstances into the path to enlightenment by way of thought is further divided into two: by using reasoning and by using the view.

With regard to the first, using reasoning, the root text says, "When the environment and its inhabitants overflow with unwholesomeness, transform adverse circumstances into the path to enlightenment." And the commentary quotes from *The Guru Puja*:

Should even the environment and the beings therein be filled
With the fruits of their karmic debts
And unwished-for sufferings pour down like rain,
We seek your blessings to take these miserable conditions as a path
By seeing them as causes to exhaust the results of our negative karma.

For example, when we get sick we tend to think that it is because of the food we ate, or because of spirits or obstacles, or because someone had cast a spell on us. These are the reasons that come to our mind. This is a clear indication that we are not able to recognise the real root of the sickness and to understand why we are experiencing that particular problem. We need to go back and look at [the section in the lam-rim on] the training for the individual of the small scope, which explains the teachings on evolutionary actions and results. Here it clearly explains that results are experienced due to karma, due to actions which we created in the past. It does not explain that a result such as sickness comes from eating a particular kind of food, or because someone has cast a spell on us, or because we are possessed by spirits. It explains that the results we experience are due to evolutionary actions created in the past. Therefore it really is indispensable to know how to transform adverse circumstances such as sickness into circumstances conducive to the attainment of enlightenment.

If you pay very careful attention to the advice of the old Kadampa lamas, it is so beneficial for the mind. They said, "Sickness and pain are the broom which sweeps away negativities." If you think about this advice, it is really powerful. It means that what bring the results of sickness, pain and suffering are the negative evolutionary actions which you accumulated in the past. By experiencing the result, that particular negative karma is cleared away, swept away by the broom of suffering. The advice of the old Kadampa lamas is so powerful.

This advice must be practised continuously. We should think in this way whenever we experience physical or mental suffering. In particular, we should think that up to now we have meditated so much on tong-len, giving and taking, and have made many prayers that all the suffering of all sentient beings without exception may ripen upon us. Now our prayers are bringing some result—we are getting what we wished for—therefore we should rejoice. We should even wish for more suffering to come—the more suffering, the better. Why? Because the more suffering we experience, the more accumulated negativities are cleansed. We can actually get to the point where we wish for more suffering to ripen upon ourselves because we understand that that is what cleanses the negativities.

There is nothing more beneficial than the practice of lam-rim and thought transformation at times of experiencing physical and mental suffering. This is something I have experienced myself. For instance, there were times when I experienced incredible hardships, incredible sufferings of body and mind. At those times, I was able to think that all these sufferings and hardships were the result of past evolutionary actions and that by experiencing them, the negativities will be completely purified. Then in my mind came the thought that the more suffering that comes, the better it is, because in that way more negativities will be purified. It is due to the kindness of my gurus—having received the teachings of thought transformation from Lama Pabongka Dorje Chang and also many times from the late Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche—that when I went through incredible pain, suffering and hardships of body and mind, I experienced the thought of not wishing the suffering to end. When difficulties come, I don't need to be afraid. In Tibetan the word for "existence" is *sipa*, which also means "possible". In existence, anything is possible, anything can happen. However, on the basis of practising the teachings of lam-rim and thought transformation, you can reach a point where no matter what hardships or difficulties occur, your mind is unshakeable. Your mind cannot be shaken by suffering, hardship or adverse circumstances.

The sayings of the Kadampa lamas are so true. For example, they say, "Adverse circumstances are an incentive for practice," and "Spirits and possession are manifestations of Buddhas, and suffering is the manifestation of emptiness." Another saying goes, "I don't like happiness, but I like suffering." Why did they say this? When we experience happiness, we consume the merits accumulated in the past; when we experience suffering, we purify negativities accumulated in the past. Therefore it is much better to experience suffering than happiness. As for ourselves, we like happiness and don't like suffering, but the advice of the Kadampa lamas is completely opposite: "I don't like happiness because in that way I consume merits, but I like suffering because in that way I purify negativities."

Another advice of the Kadampa lamas is, "I don't like a high position, I like a lower position." For us it is completely the opposite: we always like to be on top and don't like to be down below. However, the lower position is the position of the Victorious Ones, which allows one to proceed to become a Buddha. The Kadampa lamas also said, "I don't like praise, but I like criticism." Why is this so? Although we feel uneasy when we receive it, criticism is actually very beneficial because it allows us to see our faults and to change on the basis of that. If we receive nothing but praise, the only thing that increases is our pride. Praise is therefore not beneficial, and it is even damaging because it increases our delusions. Criticism on the other hand allows us to identify our faults and work on them.

Transforming Adverse Circumstances by Way of the View

So now we come to the thought transformation practice of transforming adverse circumstances into the path by way of the view. This is done by reflecting again and again on the fact that if you search for the actual entity of what an adverse circumstance appears to be, if you search in depth, you cannot find a single atom which exists on its own, by its own nature. Instead, what you find is just what is merely labeled. It is completely unfindable in nature; ultimately it is not there. You have to bring this thought into your mind again and again.

However, if you are not proficient in analysing the nature of phenomena with the view, then you should think in this way, "Whatever happens to me in this very short life, whether it is happiness or suffering, at the end of this life all those experiences will be just memories. They are like dreams, completely insubstantial, so there is absolutely no reason to grasp at them with attachment or aversion. There is not even a single atom of them that I can grasp with attachment or aversion."²

The Importance of Bodhicitta

In conclusion, the most important thing is to apply one's energy as much as possible towards the development of bodhicitta in this life. The significance of bodhicitta was shown by the way Lama Atisha greeted people. When we meet people we usually say, "How are you?" or *Ni how ma?* Lama Atisha, however, would greet people by asking, "Do you have a good heart?" or "Has the good heart arisen within you yet?" This showed the importance he gave to the practice of bodhicitta.

As I mentioned earlier, the great master Shantideva said that just as we churn milk to extract its essence, butter, we should extract the essence of the 84,000 heaps of teachings given by Buddha Shakyamuni—this essence is bodhicitta. Therefore, as bodhicitta is the essence of the entirety of Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings, we must definitely make an effort to develop bodhicitta in our mind in this very life.

Notes

1. See Keith Dowman & Sonam Paljor, *The Divine Madman—The Sublime Life and Songs of Drukpa Kunley*. London, 1980.

2. Earlier Ribur Rinpoche mentioned that one can also transform adverse circumstances into the path to enlightenment by way of action, but he did not elaborate on the point. As found in *Advice from a Spiritual Friend* (Geshe Rabten and Geshe Ngawang Dargyey; Wisdom Publications, London, 1986, pgs. 68-69), this includes the practice of accumulating merit, purifying negative karma, and making offerings to harmful spirits and dharma protectors.