

Chapter 3

Arousing Bodhichitta

II. THE MAIN PRACTICE

The main part of the mind training practice is concerned with bodhichitta. Bodhichitta is a Sanskrit word which literally means “awakened mind.” It refers to the desire to help all sentient beings achieve complete happiness. Sentient beings, by the way, refers to all beings who have a mind, so this includes animals as well as beings we cannot see, such as hungry ghosts, jealous gods, and beings in the god and hell realms. Generally, there are two kinds of bodhichitta: relative bodhichitta and absolute bodhichitta. Usually, it is taught that absolute bodhichitta is more important than relative bodhichitta. However, because we are beginners in the mind training teachings, it is taught that relative bodhichitta is most important, while absolute bodhichitta is only briefly mentioned. The practice begins with a brief teaching on absolute bodhichitta. We begin visualizing the lama as explained above, reciting prayers to him or her that we might receive blessings, and counting the breath twenty-one times so that we become proper receptacles for training in absolute bodhichitta.

A. ABSOLUTE BODHICHITTA

1. THE PRELIMINARY PRACTICE

The first instruction of the main practice reads:

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1. Regard all dharmas as dreams.

Sometimes we contemplate that all outer phenomena—that is, trees, houses and mountains—are not real, but are like appearances in a dream. We also contemplate that the inner phenomenon of our mind, which perceives all outer phenomena, is also not real. Rather, our mind is empty of inherent existence,⁸ is not established in any one place, and is not a simple thing. To engage in the two contemplations that outer and inner phenomena are like a dream, we first think that everything we see in the animate and inanimate world is like the appearances arising in a dream, and that our sensations of these phenomena—smell, taste, touch, sight, hearing, and feeling are also like the sensations felt in a dream.

To repeat, we think that everything we perceive outside of us is not real; it is like a dream or an illusion. If everything out there is just a dream or illusion, then these phenomena must come from the mind. The next thought is, “Well, is the mind itself real?” To determine if mind is a real, solid entity or is empty just like outer phenomena, we can, if we have the pointing out instructions, or employ the Mahamudra or Dzogchen instructions,⁹ look directly at our mind. This practice of looking at mind is explained in the next instruction:

2. Examine the nature of unborn awareness.

Looking nakedly at the essence of mind,¹⁰ we find that mind is not established as any “thing” at all. This means that if we look for the mind, we find it has no color or shape, or any other definable characteristic as does an object. Since objects have a beginning, we may wonder, “Where does the mind start? Is there a point of origin for the mind?” Again if we look, we cannot find a point of origin for the mind. Other than thinking that it is like the wind moving in the sky, there is

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nothing to indicate what it is like. Since there is no place where it begins, it is said that mind is unborn.

If mind is unborn, we may then ask, “So where is it now?” Examining the present mind to see whether it is somewhere outside the body, we find that there is no place where it resides in the objects that we sense or see. It is not separate from the body, so we ask, “Well, is it inside?” But we cannot find a particular place where it is located in the body. Since mind does not have a color or a location, we therefore say that it is by nature empty.

Finally we wonder, “Where does mind stop when thoughts stop? And where do thoughts go?” Again, there is no place we can find where thoughts end. The mind does not attach itself to an outer object and stop there. There is no origin of mind, it does not dwell anywhere, and it does not end anywhere because it is empty. So the mind is without birth, abiding, and cessation. This awareness, which is our consciousness or our mind, can’t be found. This contemplation of looking for the mind, trying to find if it has any reality or not, is a very important practice to do over and over again until we are convinced that the nature of mind is emptiness.

So, first we examine outer phenomena to establish that they are like a dream; then we look at mind itself and see that it is without birth, abiding, and cessation. From this we establish that the inner phenomena of mind are also empty. But this thought that mind and phenomena are empty is just another thought, so now we must look at the person who has that thought with the next instruction:

3. Self-liberate even the antidotes.

We begin with the belief that everything is solid and real. Then we develop the belief that this is incorrect and everything is just emptiness or a dream. But this second belief developed by the previous instruction is not real either. To illustrate this

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point, Shantideva gave the following example: If you were dreaming that you had a son and the son died, you would think, “I had a son and now he is gone.” You might think that the thought that he is gone is an antidote to the thought that he existed. But in fact this can’t be correct because none of it is real since it is all a dream. So the thought that you had a son was not real and the thought that your son had died was also unreal. That is what “self-liberate even the antidotes” means. When you come to the belief that everything is emptiness, then you have to let that thought go, too. You have to look at the one who is thinking that thought and realize that it, too, is not real.

In his commentary on *The Seven Points of Mind Training*, Jamgon Kongtrul in his *Great Path of Awakening* said that this teaching is explained as conceptual meditation because examination of outer objects of the mind as having no birth, no abiding, and no cessation is done through using our intellect. Even though this is the teaching, we can go beyond what is called analytical meditation and do placement meditation, in which we look directly at our mind and come to the true realization of emptiness.¹¹

2. THE PRACTICE

The above instruction describes *analytical meditation*, while the next instruction describes placement meditation:

4. Rest in the nature of alaya, the essence.

When we use the word *alaya*, we usually mean the ground or eighth consciousness.¹² But in this instruction *alaya* is a name applied to our basic Buddha-essence (Skt. *tathata-garbha*). This instruction means looking without any conceptualization at the nature of mind. This nature is complete simplicity; it is emptiness and luminosity, or clarity. It is clarity

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in that it has the characteristic of wisdom, and yet it is not established as any “thing.” The nature of that clarity is emptiness. So this is the practical application of the meditation: just to look at the nature of mind, at that clarity and emptiness, which is a complete unity.

In the meditation on ultimate bodhichitta, we look at the nature of mind and find there is nothing at all that we have to think about or fabricate. We do not have to think that something that exists does not exist, or that something that does not exist does exist, and so on. We just look at the nature of mind.

Once we have finished the looking, we can do the seven branch prayer as we did in the preliminaries. After both relative bodhichitta meditation (the examining meditation) followed by ultimate bodhichitta meditation (looking at the nature of mind), we must dedicate the merit.

3. THE POST-MEDITATION PRACTICE

Then, after this formal practice, we continue on in post-meditation:

5. In the post-meditation experience, one should become a child of illusion.

The fifth verse means that after we rise from our cushion and move around, eat, talk with friends, and all the things we do in our normal activity, we should not be separated from the realization that everything is like a dream, like an illusion. To be “a child of illusion” means to consider and see oneself as a child born from an illusion.

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B. RELATIVE BODHICHITTA

In the teachings on relative bodhichitta, there are three parts: the preliminary part, the main practice, and the post-meditation.

1. THE PRELIMINARY PRACTICE

The preliminary practice of relative bodhichitta is to meditate on love and compassion for all living beings, but this is difficult to do, so we begin by generating love and compassion towards our mother. The way to start is to visualize our mother in front of us.

In modern times, when we look at the world, we like to think that in general everything is improving—that people’s conditions are improving, that wealth is increasing, and that things are getting better. But sometimes it is very obvious that something is wrong. One of the ways we know is that these days people do not like their mothers. Even though we love our mother, we sometimes become angry with her. If we think about it though, our mother has been most incredibly kind by giving us our life and then sacrificing a great deal for us.

When we think about our mother, we should think about how much our mother did for us. We think, “When I was first born, I did not know how to walk. I did not know how to speak. I did not know how to put food into my own mouth, or how to go to the bathroom. I did not know anything. And my mother was the one who took care of me. In fact, I would not have turned into a person at all had she not taken care of and helped me. She put food into my mouth, she took me to the bathroom, she put on my clothes. When I got a little bigger she would say, “No, don’t go there, that is dangerous.” She taught me that too. She taught me everything that is necessary to become a proper human being.”

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Of course, sometimes our mother became angry at us and she may even have spanked us. But again, we couldn't understand at that time why that happened. It wasn't because she didn't like us or had some kind of malice towards us. It was necessary because she was teaching us. If she hit us, she did not hit us because it was of some benefit to her; if she scolded us, she didn't do so because she liked it. It was all for our benefit and was a great kindness to us.

In this practice we first feel compassion for our mother with the thought, "May she be freed from all suffering," and we show love for her with the thought, "May she have complete happiness." This text on mind training gives us the oral instruction to start with our mother and gradually extend compassion to all the rest of the beings in the world. We extend this compassion (that all living beings be freed from all suffering) and this universal love (that they possess all happiness) to the point where we regard all beings impartially.

That was the preliminary. Now we come to the actual meditation, which is the *sending and taking meditation* (Tib. *tonglen*).

2. THE MAIN PRACTICE

What are we sending? We are sending all of our happiness and all the causes of happiness to living beings—that is, all the virtuous actions we have ever done or will do. What we are taking in is the suffering of all sentient beings, along with all the causes of suffering, which are the negative actions and *disturbing emotions*. This is expressed in the instruction:

6. Sending and taking should be practiced alternately.
These two should ride the breath.

What this means is that when we breathe out, we imagine that all of our happiness and its causes (our virtue), go out to all

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sentient beings who then receive it. And as we breathe in, we imagine that all the unhappiness and sorrow of sentient beings as well as its causes (negative karma and disturbing emotions) dissolve into ourselves.

3. THE POST-MEDITATION PRACTICE

7. *In all activities, train with these instructions.*

Begin the sequence of sending and taking with oneself.

This practice of sending and taking should be done both as actual sending and taking meditation on the breath, and also as part of our normal daily activities. For instance, any time that we have a feeling of strong attachment, we should think, “May all beings be free of this feeling of attachment.” If we are suffering or sick, or something terrible happens causing mental or physical pain, we should think, “May all living beings” be free of such pain.” If we become angry at someone, we should think, “All living beings feel this. May they be free of such hatred and anger.” In the same way if we do something very good, then we should think, “May all living beings have the conditions for this virtue.” If something very nice happens to us and we are very happy, we should again think, “May all living beings have this happiness.”

No matter what we are doing, we can practice this mind training. It is very beneficial to actually say the words, “May all living beings have happiness; may all living beings be freed of aggression, attachment, ignorance, pride” or whatever negative feelings come up.

Questions

Question: In the United States there are a number of mothers who whip their children for reasons that are not beneficial. When I use the instructions to teach the practice of compassion

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in abused families, it is very difficult for me to talk about that section because people who have been greatly injured say to me, “That doesn’t make sense and it is not true.”

Rinpoche: First of all, the meditation doesn’t necessarily have to be on the mother. The point is to meditate on somebody who has given as much loving kindness and help. Whoever that is, it is okay to start with them. Nonetheless, it is usually a mistake to think that one’s mother is not kind. Think back to the first year of life when you were completely helpless. If it weren’t for your mother, you would certainly have died. When the child grows and develops some kind of consciousness of self, then it can begin to have trouble with the mother. The mother might say, “You must eat now,” and you answer, “No, I don’t want to.” Then trouble starts. The child does not want to do what the mother says and gets angry, and the situation starts from there. It seems to me that still there is something wrong with the idea that the mother is not kind because there is something very natural that comes from a mother with her baby: “This is my child.” There is a natural protection and tendency to want to protect that child.

Psychologists have a very good motivation and really want to help. People are very unhappy and have much mental suffering, so psychologists and psychotherapists try to fix that suffering, to make it better. This is all very wonderful. But sometimes there can be a problem when they try to find out what causes the suffering or what the source of the pain is. The patient answers, “Well, my mother did this to me.” The therapist answers, “That’s it! That’s the source of your pain. It comes from your mother. She’s the one.” I think that this is not really necessarily true.

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Chapter 4

Transforming Unfavorable Circumstances

III. HOW TO CARRY THE PRACTICE ONTO THE PATH

A. THE GENERAL PRACTICE

1. When the world is filled with evil, transform all mishaps into the path of bodhi.

1. RELYING ON RELATIVE BODHICHITTA

We have described the meditation training of wishing all of our good fortune, happiness, and virtue to be given to other sentient beings, and taking all the evil, suffering, and causes of suffering of all living beings onto ourselves. This is the main meditation, but in our daily lives many things often happen unexpectedly, such as a surprise illness. Then the question becomes, “What do we do about these things? How do we meditate in situations where we are happy and situations where we are suffering?” This is the meaning of “carrying the practice onto the path.”

Sometimes it seems that the world is filled with negativity and that sentient beings have much suffering and many accidents befalling them. We must learn to transform these negative circumstances into the path to enlightenment. This can be done in two ways: through the practice of relying on relative

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bodhichitta and through the practice of relying on ultimate bodhichitta. The instruction describing relative bodhichitta is:

2. Drive all blames into oneself.

When something bad befalls us—maybe we become sick or injured or have great mental suffering, such as people gossiping about us or insulting us—we tend always to put the blame out there by thinking, “I didn’t do anything, yet this person has really hurt me,” or “This has happened to me. Why has it happened? It is not my fault.” We always put the blame on other people or outside circumstances. But in mind training we should do exactly the opposite. We should not think that the blame lies outside ourselves, but that the fault is ours. We should think the fault comes from holding ourselves to be precious, from believing, “I am important.” In fact, this is believing that the self is something which it really isn’t.

I want to give an example about how it is that taking the self to be real is the true enemy. The story in question is about the great teacher Patrul Rinpoche, who lived in Kham. One time he was traveling with a servant to Central Tibet. They had a lot of money with them. The reason they were carrying so much money was that they were going to Central Tibet to offer butter lamps, make statues, and do many other virtuous things. The two were traveling alone across the Chang Thang Desert which was notorious for its thieves. At night they couldn’t sleep because they feared someone was going to steal the money, so they suffered terribly. And in the daytime they were constantly looking around, ahead and behind, wondering, “Are the thieves going to come? Where will they come from?” It was very, very difficult.

One day when they were traveling Patrul Rinpoche thought, “I’m really not having a good time; it is so hard. What is the actual cause of my having such a bad time on this trip?” Then he realized, “It’s the money. If I didn’t have all this

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money, I could rest at night, I could travel comfortably, I wouldn't have constantly to look over my shoulder to see if a thief is coming." While he was thinking this, his servant was walking ahead looking out for the thieves and robbers. Patrul Rinpoche was behind. "Well, its really simple," he thought. "This money is the source of the trouble and I am going to get rid of it." With that, he threw the money into the river, thinking, "It's gone now. That's great. Now I'm really happy." So he went along while his servant was still watching out for the thieves and robbers. Finally he said to his servant, "We don't have to worry anymore. The thieves and robbers are in the water." The servant said, "What do you mean 'the thieves and robbers are in the water'?' They are everywhere." Patrul Rinpoche said, "No, I threw the money in the water. That was the real source of our problem." This illustrates that the problem was an internal attachment to the money, rather than the outside robbers.

The problem is we are so attached to a solid self which is, in fact, really empty. Shantideva said, "Whatever harm, fear and suffering there are in the world come from taking the self to be real. This is such a great demon. What will it do to me, this clinging to a self?" The answer is that the demon has to be tamed. The demon of believing the ego to be real has to be subdued.

3. Contemplate the great kindness of everyone.

There is another relevant quote from Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* :

"If the road is covered with rocks and thorns, you can either pave the entire road with leather, or you can take leather and place it on the soles of your own feet."

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This example shows that the world is filled with suffering which you cannot stop by trying to pacify all the different negative forces and obstacles. What you can do is put protection on yourself. This protection rids you of clinging to a self. That is the same as covering the soles of your feet with leather, rather than paving the whole world with it.

In still another quote Shantideva says, “All the suffering and bad things that happen in the world come from this clinging to a self.” The Buddha taught that one should not consider oneself to be more precious than others. Rather, others are considered more important and more precious. From beginningless time and throughout samsara we have considered ourselves to be more important and more precious than others, and this has brought about all our obstacles and suffering. Therefore, this attitude is what we must get rid of. The whole problem is based upon holding others to be more important than ourselves.

So that quote concerned reliance on relative bodhichitta. The next lines deal with relying on ultimate bodhichitta.

2. RELYING ON ULTIMATE BODHICHITTA

To rely on ultimate bodhichitta is to realize emptiness, and to understand that all suffering and negativity actually lack reality. It is like being carried away by water or burnt by fire in a dream; the suffering in that dream is not real. It is the realization of the emptiness of phenomena, the realization that life is a dream, that leads to realization of absolute bodhichitta. The instruction for this is:

4. Regarding confusion as the four kayas¹³ is unsurpassable shunyata protection.

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B. THE SPECIAL APPLICATION OF THE TEACHING

5. The four practices are the best methods.

In this section the instruction is that the four practices are the best method, meaning that they are the method for eliminating all pain and suffering for oneself, and bringing happiness and benefit to all beings. We can accomplish this with the following four practices:

1. ACCUMULATING MERIT

The first practice is accumulating merit. We can ask, “Is it really possible to rid ourselves of suffering and create circumstances which are conducive for the practice of dharma?” The answer is that this is possible because all things come from a cause, and the cause of happiness is virtuous activity. To create this cause of virtue we must first accumulate merit.

2. THE CONFESSION

To accumulate merit, we also need to be freed of our previous negative karma. To eliminate this previous karma we must engage in confessing our negative deeds, which is the second practice. This is done by means of *four powers*.¹⁴

3. MAKING AN OFFERING TO GODS AND DEMONS

When we encounter obstacles, whether from other persons or non- humans, we should practice the *three methods*.¹⁵ If someone dislikes us and harms us, we usually retaliate. But when we think about whether anger will solve the problem, we see that it won't. If someone is angry at us and does something

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hateful, and we get angry and want to do something back by saying mean words and fighting, all that will happen is that this person is going to become yet more angry and cause more harm. Whether the obstacle is caused by a human or non-human force,¹⁶ it is clear that by reacting with anger or revenge the situation will only get worse. Therefore, the correct thing to do if someone harms us is to be patient and compassionate. In these circumstances the other person's reaction can only decrease, whereas if we react in the same manner as they, conflict will only increase. Our sole option, then, is to meditate on patience and compassion.

When we request a Vajrayana initiation, a *torma* is usually offered at the beginning to all demons and obstructing forces, because it is possible that they may try to create some kind of obstacle to our receiving the initiation and doing the practice. This *torma* is a symbol for what we have just discussed: the fact that if harm or an obstruction occurs, it cannot be pacified by anger, retaliation, or resentment towards the person causing the harm. That simply will not work. As a token of this truth, a *torma* is offered before the initiation to all the non-humans present as a symbol of peace and friendship, an offering of *bodhichitta* so that no obstacles arise. Whether you are dealing with a human or non-human, or someone who really has it in for you, the only way to address the situation is to defuse it by sending forth love and compassion, rather than starting a fight.

4. THE OFFERINGS TO DAKINIS AND PROTECTORS

Dakinis and *dharma protectors* are friends to us; they are not going to create obstacles. The symbolism of offering *torma* to the protectors is to offer help to a friend. If you offer help to a friend, you will receive help in return. In the same way, if you make offerings to the protectors, they will help you. So whether we are dealing with *dakinis* and protectors, people or friends, if you help them, they will also help you.

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There is a visualization practice called *chod*, or “the cutting-off practice,” which is sometimes done in this context. This practice is effected to eliminate the clinging to a self which we consider precious. When we cling to this self, we are mostly attached to our body. To cut that attachment, the *chod* practice includes the visualization of offering one’s own body to others. The way to do this visualization is to invite all the gods and demons to come before us. We imagine a multitude of them—some in peaceful form, some in wrathful form—appearing in front of us, and we offer up our own body to them. Sometimes we can visualize that we actually cut up our body into pieces and offer it to them to enjoy. Other times we can visualize that we flay our own skin off and then offer our body to them.

There are two methods of offering our body: one is called “the white offering” and the other is called “the red offering.” In the white offering, we imagine that we cut up our body, which is transformed into wonderful and tasty things, such as food of the five flavors and aromas. We then offer this transformed substance to the demons. In the red offering we imagine our body in its present state. We cut it up and offer it as it is. The gods and demons gnaw on our bones, drink our blood, and wear our skin.

6. To bring unexpected circumstances to the path, whatever we suddenly meet should be joined with meditation.

The reason for employing these four methods when we encounter negative circumstances, such as illness or hostile attacks, is to eliminate the belief that we are more important than others. The four methods are accumulating merit, making confessions, offering tormas to gods and demons, and offering tormas to the dakinis and dharma protectors.

Questions

Question: It seems there are situations in which it is better to say something to others and to stop being angry than to absorb the anger. Is this teaching sometimes more a mental practice than a practice actually carried out?

Rinpoche: It is okay if you can say something. What I was referring to is your mental attitude, that you should not say something angry back. If you get angry in return, then things will become worse.

Question: It is said that anger is the worst of the disturbing emotions. I never really understood why anger is worse than passion or stupidity.

Rinpoche: The other disturbing emotions, such as passion, pride, and jealousy do cause harm, but it is more gradual. For instance, if you have attachment and only think about pleasure and good things, it will eventually become a cause of suffering. The same thing with pride, with thinking, “I am so great!” Right then and there nothing terrible is happening, but eventually it will become the cause of suffering. However, anger and hatred are immediate. The worst part is the actual harm done to the self and others. Anger and hatred that do not cause outright actions such as hitting and harming others, but cause the thought, “I would like to destroy him or her,” constitutes what we call a “black mind.” This black mind is more immediately negative than other disturbing emotions and is therefore said to be the worst.

Question: I’ve heard that some illnesses can be caused by external forces. In that case, is it true that these forces can be pacified? What is torma and how can a lay person like me actually offer a torma?

Rinpoche: Some illnesses can be caused by demonic forces; it is also said that *nagas* can cause sickness. A good way to pacify them is by offering torma, but the chod practice visualization is best. Visualize the demon and imagine that you

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are offering your body. It may appear to be superstitious, but it really helps.

Question: What if a friend has a serious illness? What can be done actually to help a person with cancer or some other life-threatening disease?

Rinpoche: Sometimes one can help, but there are cases where nothing can help, just as doctors cannot cure everything. Sometimes mantras, medicine, and visualizations can help; sometimes they don't at all.

I guess you can never tell. My father passed away when I was twenty-five years old, and shortly afterwards my mother became very ill. She looked really very bad and her tongue swelled up terribly; it truly seemed that she was going to die. It was terrible for me to think that my mother would die so shortly after my father. We tried many things, many doctors, much medicine, and nothing worked. Then somebody suggested that a particular practitioner who was really good with mantras should come and help. So we called this man, but I didn't think anything would happen because he didn't look like he had any realization or meditation experience. All he did was say a few mantras and blow on my mother. But the next day she started getting better.