

Chapter 3

Bodhichitta

TOPIC I. THE KNOWLEDGE OF ALL PHENOMENA¹¹

A. THE FIRST CONDITION: BODHICHITTA

The Prajnaparamita has eight main topics and the first topic deals with the knowledge of phenomena. There are ten subtopics in this first topic, the causes or conditions for attaining Buddhahood.

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BODHICHITTA

The first condition needed to attain Buddhahood is *bodhichitta*. The topic of *bodhichitta* is divided into two main subtopics: the characteristics of *bodhichitta* and the categories of *bodhichitta*.

The characteristics of *bodhichitta* are having the highest motivation. This motivation has two aspects. The first aspect is the wish to help all other beings. This doesn't mean helping just one person or a hundred or a thousand, but it means being concerned with helping absolutely all beings from the beginning of time throughout time and space. What happiness do we wish to give these beings? We realize that no one wants to suffer and that everyone wants happiness, but no one has it. So we wish to give all sentient beings the very best happiness and this is the state of perfect Buddhahood. So helping absolutely all beings and helping them reach Buddhahood creates the highest motivation which is a characteristic of *bodhichitta*.

We can also look at the characteristics of *bodhichitta* in terms of wisdom and compassion which must be present for there to be true *bodhichitta*. Compassion is being concerned with not just one's friends or relatives, but being truly concerned with the happiness of all sentient beings throughout space and time. True compassion is

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also being aware that all sentient beings want to be free from suffering and that they all are trying to achieve happiness. Compassion by itself is not enough because the kind of happiness that beings seek and the way they choose to eliminate their suffering is often very limited. It is through wisdom that we begin to understand that true and eternal happiness is only achieved by reaching Buddhahood. With wisdom we realize that without achieving Buddhahood there is no permanent happiness. So wisdom is the second characteristic is the focus upon enlightenment. We can only definitely help sentient beings when we ourselves achieve enlightenment. Therefore we must wish for enlightenment.

Maitreya in his root text says that the sutras explain in both very concise and also in very detailed ways how all sentient beings can achieve Buddhahood. When the Buddha taught, he sometimes found it was necessary to elaborate on a subject very extensively so that people understood and at other times he taught in a very concise way. The function of the Buddhist commentaries is to show in a very concise way things which are very vast and profound. Commentators also sometimes expanded very concise sayings of the Buddha so that we can comprehend them better. That is why it is very useful to study not only what the Buddha taught, but also the Buddhist commentaries.

2. THE CATEGORIES (SIMILES) FOR BODHICHITTA

A more detailed explanation of the various of types of bodhichitta is made through twenty-two similes. These similes are arranged according to the gradual development of bodhichitta.

The first simile is an example of earth. When we first awaken our bodhichitta, we need a great longing and wish to achieve Buddhahood. When we desire to help others, our bodhichitta will flourish. If that aspiration is lacking, then it will be extremely difficult for us to make spiritual progress. So aspiration is the first quality of bodhichitta. This is compared to the earth because upon the earth one can build houses, plants can grow in it and so on. If there is no earth, then there is no foundation for these things to appear and be stable. When bodhichitta is accompanied with very good aspiration, then we can think of it as being like the solid earth.

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The second simile shows us how this initial aspiration to help beings achieve Buddhahood needs to become firm, very stable and present all the time. This stability is compared to gold. We need to make our aspiration into something which will never change from now until Buddhahood. We cannot be very concerned to help everyone one day, and the next day forget all about this. We cannot even practice one year and the next year not. Instead we need to have a very good, continuous motivation which is much deeper than our initial aspiration. This motivation is compared to gold because gold has a quality of immutability, of changelessness. When gold is still in the ore, it has a golden luster. When it is mined and polished, it still has its golden luster. Gold is not like brass or other metals which blacken and tarnish with exposure. Because gold has this changelessness, it is compared to this very stable, healthy continuous aspiration.

The third simile concerns this bodhichitta motivation becoming even deeper. But one needs to make it much deeper, richer, more powerful. One does this through great diligence in our practice and improving the quality of our aspiration. Making this refinement and improvement of bodhichitta is compared to the waxing moon. The very new moon from the first day has a very fine crescent. Then each day it gradually grows and grows until it reaches a full moon. This is similar to our motivation which can become better and better all the time.

When we remove obstacles in particular the negativity of bad relationships and feelings towards others people by reducing our aggression through practice, then we can truly progress. This fourth simile compares removal of a fire that consumes everything placed in it. We should use our bodhichitta to work upon ourselves to remove all our obstacles.

The fifth through tenth similes are concerned with the six paramitas. The first four similes deal mainly with what inspires us to practice, the inspiration of achieving the good of beings using the examples of earth, gold, and the moon. Just removing our obstacles is not enough. We need to act and practice so that the wish to help all beings become a reality through the development of the six perfections or *paramitas*. The first paramita is generosity which is compared to the fifth simile of a very great, inexhaustible buried

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treasure because when we practice generosity in the present, it will cause inexhaustible wealth and goodness that will benefit others in the future.

The sixth simile is for the second paramita of discipline or morality. The first paramita of generosity when combined with our bodhichitta helps us to give to others. The second paramita of discipline helps us to purify ourselves. It is through controlling and purifying ourselves that all of the qualities of our own existence will emerge in the future. It is therefore compared to a mine of jewels from which will spring great treasures.

The seventh simile relates to the paramita of patience. When patience becomes a factor in our bodhichitta it is compared to a great ocean. Patience is concerned with not being swayed by hardships and aggression against us which we may experience. The ocean is compared to this because the ocean is very stable, very large, and unperturbed. When we have patience we are like the great ocean which is unaffected by normally disturbing factors of aggression and suffering.

The fourth paramita of diligence is the very joyous perseverance in our cultivation of bodhichitta. This perseverance or diligence means that we are striving to improve our bodhichitta all the time. This paramita is therefore compared to a *vajra* (Tib. *dorje*) which has the quality of indestructibility.

The ninth simile concerns the fifth paramita of meditation. When we have the power of this samadhi meditation, our realization becomes very stable, unshakable, and therefore is compared to the king of all mountains, because of its great solidity.

The tenth simile concerns the sixth paramita of wisdom, which is compared to medicine. When we have wisdom, we have the necessary tools to remove suffering, to remove the obscurations blocking our mind, and our mental conditioning. Our blockages and incorrect thinking are like an illness and wisdom is the medicine which has the power to completely remove this illness.

The eleventh simile concerns the presence of the seventh paramita of *skillful means* (Skt. *upaya*).¹² Through wisdom we develop certain skillful means which enhances our spiritual practice and this benefits self and others. The simile for these methods is a

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our spiritual friend (Skt. *kalyanamitra*) from whom we also derive benefit.

The development of the union of wisdom (Skt. *prajna*) and skillful means (Skt. *upaya*) produces real power in our practice and this is achieved at the level of the eighth paramita or bodhisattva level. The presence of that power is compared to a *wish-fulfilling jewel* in the twelfth simile. When we actually have the ability to do what we would like to do to help beings, it is like having a wish-fulfilling gem which makes our dreams and aspirations come true.

The thirteenth simile concerns the ninth paramita of the power of prayer. There are two kinds of prayer: Prayers which are suitable because they deal with something that could happen and unsuitable prayers which deal with something that could never happen. For instance, if we were to pray that a flower would sprout from a table, then that would be a prayer that was an unsuitable prayer because this result is not possible. To make a prayer to help many others is a suitable prayer because it can actually come true. The power of prayer is compared to the sun because when the sun shines, it allows the flowers, the forests, the harvests, and so on to flourish. So when we pray for the development of our own virtue and wisdom, it is like the sun which makes things grow and brings them to their full maturation.

The tenth paramita, the completion of transforming *prajna* into *jñana*, deals with the fourteenth simile. When our *bodhichitta* is accompanied by the presence of this most excellent wisdom (Tib. *ye shes phun sum tshogs pa*), it is compared to a very beautiful melody because when there is a very beautiful song, everyone who listens to it feels delighted and pleased. When our *bodhichitta* is combined with the presence of this excellent wisdom, then whoever we meet becomes graced by our *bodhichitta* so our presence will always have a very beneficial and pleasing effect on those around us.

The fifteenth simile deals with combining our *bodhichitta* with the five kinds of extraordinary perceptions (Tib. *mngon shes lnga*) and the five kinds of visions (Tib. *spyen lnga*). When we possess these supernormal faculties, we can really accomplish exactly what we want to do. For this reason this is compared to a great king because a great king has the power and status to accomplish whatever he wants to do.

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The sixteenth simile is the combining of our bodhichitta with the power of tranquillity and insight meditation. When shamatha and vipashyana accompany our bodhichitta, it is compared to a king's treasury from which all wealth can be distributed.

The seventeenth simile is of a great highway. Our bodhichitta follows the path that has been followed by those who achieved realization before. This is the five-fold path of accumulation, junction, insight, cultivation, and meditation. By going along this path step-by-step the buddhas of the past have reached enlightenment and the present bodhisattvas who are becoming buddhas are also following this great path. In the future other beings will also find their way on this path to enlightenment because it is the one highway which leads to enlightenment.

The eighteenth simile is the combining very powerful compassion with our bodhichitta. When our compassion is completely unlimited and unbiased, then it is compared to a steed. It is like a very powerful, fast horse that carries us to our destination without straying from the path in the slightest degree. When we have this universal compassion, it is the mount which takes us unerringly to our goal of enlightenment.

The nineteenth simile concerns combining our bodhichitta with an excellent memory and being confident. When we are able to always remember the teachings that we have assimilated completely and when we have the confidence to pronounce these teachings at any time, then our bodhichitta is compared to a natural spring. A natural spring can provide nourishing water continuously without exhaustion. When we have perfected this memory of practice and this great confidence, we can teach properly forever.

The last three of these twenty-two similes deal with the state of Buddhahood whereas the previous nineteenth similes dealt with the development of a bodhisattva. The twentieth simile refers to the Buddha's speech and is compared to the music of a harp. The speech of the Buddha is concerned with helping sentient beings to mature and this speech is continuous.¹³ This is compared to a harp which is a highly respected instrument which brings a beautiful melody to everyone who listens to it. In a similar fashion the Buddha's speech helps all who listen. The twenty-first simile refers to the Buddha's body, which is compared to the flow of a river. Water always flows

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naturally along the lay of the land, doing this effortlessly and automatically along the contours of the land. The appearance of a buddha takes place effortlessly and his work flows effortlessly according to the needs and aspirations of the disciple. So that is why it is compared to the flow of a river.

The final simile refers to the Buddha's mind which is compared to a cloud because a cloud creates rain and this rain makes it possible for all things on earth—the flowers, trees, and food—to grow because of the natural activity of the cloud. The Buddha's mind with its inherent spontaneous motivation to help all beings is the very source from which all of the benefit which comes from Buddhahood flows. The individual raindrops signify the various manifestations of a buddha's activity to help other beings.

We can see that through these twenty-two similes we can progress from a beginner in dharma practice to being a buddha with our bodhichitta becoming stronger and stronger in this process. These examples also give us an idea of what we ourselves need to do as our bodhichitta grows.

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Asanga