

# NOTES FOR ENGAGING BODHICITTA CLASS

Ven. Jampa Dekyi  
Hayagriva Buddhist Centre  
January 2016

Greetings to you all. I have just realised these classes will have a two week break (Jan. 19th for Guru Puja and 26th for Australia day) and our last class on this topic will be on February 2nd, so we have ended up with only three classes to cover the Six Perfections. As there are some relatively new students in the class - this email will give you a very brief explanation of the goal of Mahayana Buddhism. (For our “newbies” - Buddhists who are following the Mahayana path, have as their goal the attainment of the state of Buddhahood. This state is reached not only for one’s own sake, but so that we can lead all others out of suffering as well. A person who is committed to this goal, is called a Bodhisattva. The altruistic wish to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all is called Bodhicitta. Buddhahood is a state of perfection. A Buddha has perfect love and compassion (perfect because this love and compassion encompasses all living beings). A Buddha also has perfect wisdom (omniscience) which means there is nothing that is not known to the mind of a Buddha, and perfect power - in the sense that there is nothing whatsoever that can hinder a Buddha’s ability to benefit living beings (except the beings themselves).

I think it is fairly easy to see how these qualities are absolutely necessary if we are to effectively lead others out of suffering. So we begin by wishing to attain the state of enlightenment for the benefit of all (aspiring Bodhicitta), and then take the Bodhisattva vow, meaning our Bodhicitta has moved to a practical level (engaging Bodhicitta). The Six Perfections fit into the Lam Rim (stages of the path to enlightenment) where we enter the Mahayana - and specifically once we have taken the Bodhisattva vows and are committed to “engaging bodhicitta.”

These teachings were primarily aimed at students who have taken Bodhisattva vows, but of course are open to anyone who is interested in understanding the Dharma (teachings of the Buddha).

So if we have taken the vow to become enlightened, how are we going to do this? We have committed ourselves to the path, and understand the inner work that needs to be done. So now comes the “nitty gritty” of doing the work!

We are now engaging with the Six Perfections:

Generosity. Ethics (Morality), Patience. Enthusiastic Perseverance (or Joyous Effort), Concentration and Wisdom.

The definition of **Generosity** is, “Those actions of body, speech and mind, **motivated by the virtuous thought to give.**” So once again we find there is that emphasis (surprise, surprise!), on what is happening in our **minds**.

Some people may feel that if generosity were perfected, there would be no more poverty in the world – but of course this is not what it means. When we practice the six perfections it is also said that we need to practice them “in tandem” - so our practice of generosity for example, needs to be accompanied by ethics, patience, joyous effort, concentration and wisdom. The wisdom referred to here is the wisdom realising emptiness. So – it means remembering the “three spheres” - of **agent, action and object**. In the case of generosity, recalling the fact that the **agent** (the giver), the **action** (of giving) and the **object** (recipient) are all empty of true existence. The same “three spheres” need to be applied to all actions.

There are four types of generosity. Giving **material things**, giving **Dharma**, giving **protection** and giving **love**. What is of importance here is not the value of the object that we give, but our motivation for giving. If we give with the thought of getting some kind of reward or recognition, that is not pure generosity. Furthermore, if we give something and later regret having given, that cannot be said to be pure generosity either.

**Giving material** things requires no explanation. However, it is useful to know the benefits of practicing material generosity. It counters miserliness (which we know can result in lower rebirths) and insures that we will be materially prosperous in our future lives. We can then use this prosperity to benefit others. And being wealthy means that we can easily take time off to attend retreats and teachings. It is not necessary to be wealthy to practice generosity. The yogis living in mountain retreats had no possessions, so they practiced mentally – giving the merit of all their practice (dedicating it) for the welfare and eventual enlightenment of all beings. They also visualised all kinds of beautiful objects which they offered to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

**Giving Dharma** doesn't cover simply giving formal teachings, transmissions, or lessons on constructing mandalas, or thangka painting, but also means any speech which conveys the meaning of the Dharma – this can be done without using Buddhist terminology at all. Giving of Dharma includes the written word, and in this day and age, CD's and DVD's. There is a very wonderful text which is studied regularly called “Nagarjuna's Letter to a Friend” This was actually a letter which the great pandit Nagarjuna composed for a king, who had become his disciple. There are many benefits of giving Dharma – it brings all happiness to be found in cyclic existence, and the happiness of liberation. Your mind improves continuously and in the future you will easily gain realisations.

**Giving protection:** This covers protecting others from danger, and helping others overcome fear and anxiety. So rescuing people from life threatening situations, saving people from execution, working to free political prisoners, rescuing animals who are about to be slaughtered, protecting lives by providing medicine, or advice on how to keep healthy and so on. As a result of this, you yourself will have a long

and happy life and be free of anxiety and fear. You will be able to help many living beings.

**Giving love:** This means looking at all beings with the thought “May you be well and happy.” As a result of practicing this form of generosity – you will experience continuous happiness yourself, and easily be able to make others happy. Therefore, we can safely conclude that the practice of generosity benefits ourselves and others in. There are said to be three supreme qualities which we can bring to our virtuous actions – firstly, making sure that they are motivated by **bodhicitta**, secondly remembering the three spheres (of **emptiness**) and thirdly, **dedicating** the merit to the enlightenment of all beings.

**Ethics:** The definition of ethics is: The virtuous thought to abandon both harming others and the thoughts that are the basis of harming them. Again, if we think that the perfection of ethics means that there is no more harm in the world, we have misunderstood – ethics is the complete development of a state of mind that refrains from harming others. There are three divisions of ethics: Ethics of **restraint**, of **gathering virtuous dharmas** and of **benefiting living beings**. The ethics of **restraint** has itself various levels – the fundamental level, upheld by lay and ordained includes the avoidance of the ten non-virtues. On the next level are the vows of monastics, which include **proscribed** activities, like not eating after midday, not being alone with a member of the opposite sex and so on – actions which are not 'naturally' negative. Then there are further vows that can be taken as we move along the path – the vows of Bodhisattvas and practitioners of Mantra. Ethics of **gathering virtuous dharmas** includes all virtuous actions.

The ethics of **benefiting living beings** involves engaging in deeds to help others, because while you are doing this, you are naturally *restrained from harming*. Ethics is likened to the earth. Just as the earth is the base from which all good things grow, ethics is the foundation from which all spiritual realisations and attainments arise. No progress on the spiritual path can come about without the foundation of ethics. The Buddha said that wishing for liberation but creating non-virtues is like a blind man looking in a mirror a - pointless exercise. Here are a few points that the Buddha made about the benefits of the practice of ethics: The person abiding in pure ethics is without negativity or violence. His physical actions do not give harm, his speech is gentle and considerate, and his thoughts are not bound by malice, covetousness or wrong views. This person is truly beautiful to the gaze of others. People are drawn to the person with pure ethics, like a bee to honey. His pleasant appearance, relaxed and open behaviour and lack of malice make others feel very comfortable. They feel safe because of his lack of harmfulness. His presence and ambience are attractive and comforting. The person who keeps the practice of ethics purely is always happy, unstressed and at ease. This is because he has no underlying sense of guilt or regret and nothing to hide.

Many of the above points have been extracted from Geshe Loden's “Meditations on the Path to Enlightenment.” Having examined the faults of the ten non-virtues when we looked at the results of negative actions – and here examining the benefits of avoiding them by practicing pure ethics, we should have no difficulty in deciding to

do our very best to practice living an ethical life for the sake of ourselves and “all our kind mothers!”

**Patience** is the third of the Six Perfections. It is the antidote to anger – a support for perseverance and a wonderful companion on the path. Let's take a look at the definition of Patience, as stated in the Lam Rim Chen-mo (The 'Great' Lam Rim). Patience is:

1. Disregarding (or not retaliating to) harm done to you.
2. Accepting the suffering arising in your mind stream.
3. Being certain about the teachings and firmly maintaining belief in them.

So, as with many words in the context of Buddhism, the meaning is not the same as our everyday use of the word. A common dharma approach is to consider “benefits and faults.” If you practice patience, you will not have many enemies later on or separations from those to whom you are close. You will have much happiness and contentment – no regret at the time of death, and take a higher rebirth.

Patience is also the cause of a buddha's (form) body. When patience is properly developed, we never turn away from benefiting others – think about this a little – when we are angry with someone we wouldn't even consider helping them in any way, so anger definitely stops us from having the bodhisattva wish to 'benefit all beings' therefore, it obviously prevents us from becoming enlightened as well as having many other undesirable results. When we looked at the faults of anger, the main emphasis was on the visible results it brought about – but anger also has a 'hidden' result – and this is that it destroys our positive karma or causes the ripening of this to be delayed. So the more we become angry, the slower our progress on the spiritual path.

Furthermore, the worst thing an enemy can do to us is to take our life. Being controlled by anger, on the other hand can cause us to act in ways that will give rise to rebirth in a hell realm, where we will be killed over and over again for an inconceivably long period of time. A human enemy can only kill us once! Therefore, as aspiring bodhisattvas, we need to not retaliate should we be harmed by others. On a worldly level this doesn't seem to make sense. That's because 'worldly' beings have a very limited, shallow view. Though a growing number of people agree these days that “an eye for an eye makes everybody blind,” and that to counter violence with violence gives rise to more and more violence. They know that this doesn't solve anything and only creates more and more suffering. From a dharma point of view, let's examine the reasons why it is inappropriate to respond to harm with anger.

First of all – if someone harms us, they are simply the condition for our suffering – they are, so to speak – delivering the pizza that WE ordered. The actual cause of our suffering is the seed of the negative act we performed in the past – not the 'delivery boy' (or girl). We also believe that when someone harms us – they are in complete control of themselves – but if we look deeper, they are controlled by one or more delusions. It is the delusions that give rise to negative actions. A person with no delusions would definitely never harm anyone – so the problem is the

delusion in that person's mind. We can even generate compassion for the harm doer, because we know that they just put in an order for a “suffering pizza” in the future – all the while believing that harming us will make them feel good and bring them happiness! How sad. We remember too, that this person, has been our kind mother, our best friend and so on. Overwhelmed by anger, they are out of control – at such a time if we too become angry what use is that? Again and again, we need to recall that the problem is the delusion, not the person.

If someone is hitting us with a stick, we don't become angry with the stick do we? We know the stick is controlled by the person – in exactly the same way, the person is controlled by their anger. This is not saying that therefore it is okay to get angry – the point here is to look deeper into the actual cause, so that we can respond skillfully. Of course, we need to remember that not retaliating doesn't mean that we don't defend ourselves – or that we just sit there meekly and allow someone to beat us. If we have to take defensive action – we need to do this with an attitude of caring for the other person. For their sake as much as our own, we do not want them to engage in negative actions. So we do our best not to harm them as we defend ourselves. Again, the most important point here – is the motivation behind our actions. If someone is trying to stab us, we can break their wrist with a karate chop and a mind thinking “serves you right!” - or we can be thinking “I don't want to hurt you, but this is the only way to prevent you harming both of us.” It takes a long time and a lot of work to have our mind automatically think in the second way. This can only happen if we sincerely take on board the instructions of listening, studying and meditating. An intellectual understanding, while important, is just the beginning of the process. If this alone were enough, as we already understand the principles of the path, how come we still act in unskillful ways? How come we haven't reached Nirvana? How come we are not enlightened? It is only with training that our minds will change – there is no quick fix. If we don't put in the effort, it is impossible to expect the result. We need to become so familiar with the dharma that we become wisdom and compassion. Once this happens, we can only respond to any situation with wisdom and compassion.

Another point is that it is only those who harm us who give us the opportunity to practice patience. HH Dalai Lama has said “Mao Tse Tung was my greatest teacher, he taught me patience” and he meant it. When Mao died, HH reminded the Tibetans of the danger of “negative rejoicing” and asked the monks in all of the monasteries to pray for Mao – as he had created so much negative karma. We can see how HH embodies the teachings and encourages us to do the same. We also bring to mind other positive things about the suffering we experience because of others harming us. We can rejoice that that particular negative seed has ripened – and remind ourselves of the results of negative actions – so we are motivated to avoid non-virtues. Wonderful indeed.

The second point of accepting the suffering that arises in your mind-stream is a bit closer to what we may think of as patience in everyday life. So being patient with discomfort – when it's too hot or too cold – when we are sick – sad – lonely, when things don't work out as we hoped and planned - or whatever. Here, acceptance does not mean resignation or despondency. It's more like accepting the cards in our

hand (which we dealt ourselves, anyway, even if we don't remember doing so) and looking at how best we can use them instead of putting all our energy into wishing that we had different cards and thereby wasting our energy and stalling our progress. We cannot change what has already occurred. Acceptance allows us to move forward, by working with whatever happens - making it grist for our spiritual mill.

Another very useful technique is the practice of “Tong Len” - taking and giving. This is a mental exercise, where we imagine taking on the suffering of others, and giving them every happiness. When we are sick for example, we can imagine taking on the suffering of everybody who has the same illness. We imagine giving them perfect health and rejoice that they are no longer suffering. This is a very powerful mind training practice. So, when we know how to handle them, even terrible things can be used to help us grow spiritually. This is really what the third point is all about – in order to have faith in the teachings, again – we have to study, have to contemplate and meditate. Then, no matter what is happening, no matter how difficult it may be, we continue to practice the teachings – recalling them again and again in every situation. Eventually we will practice when we are happy, when we are sad, when we are sick. It will no longer occur to us to not practice. So rather than being something we avoid at all costs, suffering, when it arises, will become a wonderful opportunity. Remember, practice is what we are doing in/with our MINDS – so it is not confined to what we do with our bodies – sitting in meditation – offering water-bowls, going to teachings - in fact we can do all of the above with pride and arrogance – which means we are in fact NOT practicing! If what we are doing is helping to change our minds, it is Dharma – otherwise, regardless of how “holy” it may look, it isn't.

**Joyous Effort** is the fourth of the perfections, and a very important mental factor to develop to support our practice – in fact without joyous effort, we may hardly practice at all! The definition of joyous effort is: “a mental factor taking delight in objects of virtue.” It is important to look at the fact that in the context of the Dharma, there is the specific mention of virtuous objects – after all a clever criminal could make a very joyful effort planning a crime – but this person's joyous effort could not be included in the Six Perfections! Joyous effort gives us the capacity to practice continuously and steadily. To develop a great rush of enthusiasm and practice intensely for a while, and then collapse in a heap would not be joyous effort. Joyous effort is vital if we want to achieve any realizations at all – and if we want to be able to progress on the path. Joyous effort comes when we understand the value of practice. We can see too, that joyous effort (sometimes translated as enthusiastic perseverance) is needed in worldly activities too. Then, we need to make sure that we are aware of the hindrances to joyous effort – in order for them to not obstruct our practice.

They are what is known as three types of laziness – here again there is a specific meaning for laziness in the context of the teachings.

The first is the laziness of procrastination. Here, we have a willingness to practice, but a sense that there is no time to practice now – and we are constantly postponing our practice with countless excuses. I have such a demanding job, so I'm exhausted when I get home, I will practice when I retire, or, when the kids have left school, or after I have saved \$100,000, or after I have travelled the world and so on and so on. The way to overcome procrastination is to reflect on impermanence – we have a precious human rebirth, but how long for? As we have no idea how long we will live, NOW is the only time we are certain of. Tomorrow may not be an option!

The next laziness is the laziness of attraction to meaningless activity. This means being attracted to any activity motivated by non-virtue. So it includes engaging in hunting or fishing, or gambling – cheating in business and so on. Spending hours watching TV, playing sport or engaging in business without a clear purpose or good motivation become obstacles to joyous effort. Watching TV with the intention of relaxing for a while before engaging in more study or practice is therefore not a form of laziness. Neither is watching the news to broaden your knowledge in order to communicate with a greater range of people and help them. We can overcome this particular form of laziness by meditating on the faults of negative karma and benefits of developing bodhicitta, love, compassion and so on.

The third laziness is the laziness of inadequacy. Having this laziness will definitely stop us from having joyous effort. Geshe Loden says this laziness is characterized by the “too” syndrome. I'm too old, I'm too stupid, I'm too deluded – and so it goes on and on. We can see that this is laziness as we normally think of it, as thinking like this means we don't have to do anything!!

There are three divisions of joyous effort:

Armour-like joyous effort. This completely protects you from laziness. It is the kind of dauntless energy where you feel: “I will continuously work for others until all sentient beings are freed from suffering, regardless of how long it takes.” Then: joyous effort of gathering virtuous dharmas. So this is making the effort, to practice. Finally, there is the joyous effort of benefiting living beings. It is the energetic application of the ethics of benefiting living beings and happily turning every action – the worldly activities of body, speech and mind – into the path of cessation and the Bodhisattva's actions. Each week, review the topic covered in each class, and check how it accords with reality and with your own experiences. Then, try to see the difference in your life if you do your best to put the teachings into practice, as opposed to the time when you didn't know about the Dharma.

**Concentration/Meditation** and **Wisdom** are the fifth and sixth Perfections. Concentration is a particular kind of meditation often referred to as “Single Pointed Concentration” or “Calm Abiding.” Without some attainment of calm abiding it is impossible to engage in the practice of special insight. Special insight, is where, having attained calm abiding one engages in a particular form of analytical wisdom that induces the bliss of pliancy and with that, analyses to discern the nature of the

object of meditation. So to have a perceptual realization of emptiness (or we could say to have a direct non-conceptual experience of reality) we need the union of calm-abiding and special insight. Special Insight is the direct opponent of all the delusions, but it is powerless unless it is combined with calm abiding.

The wisdom cognizing emptiness is very difficult to acquire because its object, emptiness is very deep and extremely subtle. Without perfect concentration it is impossible to penetrate this deepest level of the nature of reality. To attain calm abiding one needs some very important prerequisites: A suitable place, little desire, contentment, abandoning multiple activities, pure ethics and finally abandoning disturbing conceptions. Before practicing calm-abiding you need to have meditated on the path up to the fifth perfection. You also need to have complete and correct instructions. There are five obstacles to calm-abiding. They are Laziness, Forgetfulness, Laxity and Excitement, Non-application and Over-application. There are eight antidotes to these obstacles: Faith, Aspiration, Effort, Pliancy, Mindfulness, Awareness, Application and Equanimity. As this is quite a complex topic which needs to be covered in great detail before one begins to engage in calm-abiding, I am just giving a very basic coverage here.

There are nine stages of calm-abiding: Placing the mind, Placement with continuity, Patch-like placement, Close placement, Controlling, Pacifying, Complete pacification, Single-pointed concentration and Placement with equanimity. Once you reach this level, your mind is now laser-like sharp, is never distracted by laxity or excitement and you are able to meditate for as long as you wish (you have perfect pliancy of body and mind at this point). With this mind and body, you are capable of realizing emptiness.

The Sixth Perfection is the Perfection of Wisdom. This is often referred to as the "Wisdom Realizing Emptiness." What is "emptiness"? It is a Buddhist term which definitely doesn't mean "nothing" or "non-existence" (which would be nihilism), but refers to "emptiness of inherent existence." If something exists inherently, this means that it exists independent of parts, causes, conditions and labels. Nothing exists in this way. You could say that understanding emptiness is understanding how we actually exist, as opposed to how we think we exist. For example, the self or I exists, by being merely imputed onto its base, the parts of a person, which are the five aggregates, or more simply, the two aggregates of body and mind.

This self exists conventionally, by way of label, or as a dependent arising, but it does not exist ultimately. It exists conventionally because it performs the function of that suitable to be labeled a person, and serves as the referent spoken of in 'I will eat. I will go out now. I am reading. I will meditate.'

What we need to refute is an I, which is cognized by the imposition of inherent existence on the relative/conventional self. Without even realizing it, we superimpose inherent (or [in Buddhism] true) existence onto everything (not just the I or self). By doing this we reify (make concrete) ourselves (and everything else). Once we have a sense of a solid concrete, permanent self, then there is 'self' and 'not self' then we struggle to make this 'real' self happy. Driven by ignorance, we

generate attachment to situations and people that make us happy and anger and aversion to those who harm me (or mine). All the other delusions like jealousy, pride, malice and so on, also arise in dependence upon this false view. By allowing these delusions to take control of our mind, we create negative karma, which causes suffering. If we do not remove the cause of suffering (delusions – and in particular the root delusion of ignorance of the actual nature of reality), we will die under the control of karma and delusion and be reborn under the control of karma and delusion again and again. So in order to escape from Samsara, we need to realize emptiness.

This will take quite some time (we won't manage it in a weekend workshop) and requires a firm foundation of ethics, study, contemplating and meditating. But our reward is perfect peace, Nirvana. This peace can never be destroyed. As Mahayana practitioners however, we do not stop there - having achieved our personal goal of perfect freedom, we then continue to practice until we achieve omniscience, perfect complete enlightenment. From this state, we will be able to work effortlessly, with perfect compassion, wisdom, capability and loving kindness to free 'all our kind mothers' from the swamp of Samsara, and so achieve our Bodhisattva goal.

©Jampa Dekyi (all errors are my own).