

3. Loving others over ourselves

Through the long-term practice of equanimity and exchanging others with ourselves, our self-grasping will become considerably weaker, and our mind will become expanded immeasurably. Our loving-kindness and compassion will become more and more profound. When this happens our practice of Bodhicitta, of benefiting others over ourselves, will have improved.

Imagine yourself in samsara or falling into the hells. No matter whether you meet up with sickness or suffering or you are facing death, even if you are enduring disasters and other inauspicious events, you are able to bear them all. In addition, you wish that all the suffering and inauspicious events experienced by all sentient beings are borne by you, only to help them attain liberation. Truly, I would rather remain in samsara continuously, as a substitute for all suffering sentient beings. One of the main reasons we are not able to give rise to cherishing others over ourselves is that we are fearful. In one respect, our self-cherishing is very strong, so that we are always concerned that if we try to benefit or consider others with all our heart, then maybe we ourselves will be disadvantaged and suffer. In another respect, our very strong habit of attachment to this illusory world is very real, we are afraid to undertake suffering and hardships for the benefit of other people, and then we ourselves forego happiness.

Shantidiva said, "The source of every hardship, disaster, and fear results from attachment to this 'I' that does not truly exist. Sentient beings possess very strong attachment to 'I' and as a result produce desire, hatred, and ignorance – the three poisons – consequently they create incalculable negative karma. The result of these negative karmas is suffering, disasters, and fear." This attachment to 'I' is the source of our descent into the suffering of samsara. The purpose of the 84,000 Dharmas is to do nothing else but to remove our self-grasping mind, of attachment to oneself, and to remove this gross habit of attachment to 'I'. The best method is to practise Bodhicitta, loving others above ourselves. Bodhicitta represents the broadest mind, which will help us to accumulate vast positive karma.

When we are reluctant to let go as a consequence of our aversions, our positive and negative circumstances are not going to change. We might as well make the most of the situation to develop our affirmative qualities and accumulate positive karma. When we experience our reluctance to let go of happiness, when it has come to an end we find that we have wasted this opportunity to cultivate affirmative emotions and accumulate positive karma. Similarly when hardships, suffering and inauspicious events occur, if we can utilise this opportunity to practise cherishing others above ourselves and cultivate affirmative qualities, then these negative circumstances become our opportunity to accumulate positive karma. Then we will not have experienced this suffering in vain.

The unbearable suffering of many different kinds experienced by sentient beings produces a very strong wish and the great determination to take this suffering upon ourselves, and thereby liberate all sentient beings! How is this going to help sentient beings to become liberated from suffering and thus to change their destiny? The peace, happiness, and help of this world will not enable us to attain permanent benefit. Once we have finished eating, once we have finished wearing our clothes, the merit is gone and after our health has recovered, we will likely become sick again. We can help sentient beings to understand cause and effect, impermanence, and suffering inherent in samsara. This understanding can lead them to practise

conscientiously according to the teachings of Buddha. In this way, they can be completely liberated from the sufferings of samsara and attain permanent happiness. This naturally gives rise to perfect Bodhicitta: in order for all sentient beings to be free of all suffering and hardships they must all attain true Buddhahood.

Beginners must rely on the prescribed practices for giving rise to Bodhicitta and practise according to the Bodhisattva precepts received before your teacher or taken in front of the refuge field. Once you have received the Bodhisattva precepts from a teacher from an uninterrupted, pure lineage, you should increase your Bodhicitta. In order to continuously expand your Bodhicitta, wherever you are, maintain your Bodhisattva vows, recite mantras and make aspirations, "Bodhicitta, this immaculate treasure, where it is not may it arise, where it is may it never decline, consistently growing for ever and ever." Through continuously reminding yourself, the concept of Bodhicitta will be embedded deeper and deeper into your mindstream, so that in future your aspiring Bodhicitta will become Bodhicitta in action, and you will be able to maintain the Bodhisattva path. On this correct path to liberation accumulate vast merit until you attain the qualities of a Bodhisattva. In the next life, as a consequence of the power following the results of your previous practices of Bodhicitta, it will again naturally arise and, in addition, life after life you will never fall off the correct path of Mahayana Bodhicitta.