

Accumulating Merit - bSod-nams-bsags-pa, Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso Rinpoche, Translated by Ari Goldfield

Before listening to Lord Buddha's teachings, I want to ask you to give rise to supreme bodhicitta. Supreme bodhicitta is developed and increased by first thinking of one's father and mother in this life and then extending the gratitude and love one feels for them to all sentient beings, even to one's enemies. We want to attain the state of complete, perfect, and precious enlightenment for their sake. We know that in order to be able to benefit all sentient beings, we need to listen to, reflect, and meditate upon the genuine Dharma teachings with all the enthusiasm we can muster in our hearts. Please give rise to supreme bodhicitta when you listen attentively.

We think of our parents first because our opportunity to practice the Dharma in this lifetime is due to the immense kindness they have shown us. We think of our enemies, too, because they were the ones who gave us the exceptional possibility to practice patience when they were unkind and hurt us. Furthermore, there is not a single enemy who was not our caring father or mother at one time in the past, so that is why we remember them with gratitude. We think of the nature of the minds of the people we are associated with - our friends, our enemies, and all sentient beings. We know that the nature of the mind of every single sentient being is clear light, the enlightened heart that is the Buddha nature. Since we have the Buddha nature, we can be sure that we will benefit others immensely. Just as the nature of our own mind is clear light, the nature of our parent's mind is also clear light. Likewise, the nature of mind of all our friends and enemies is clear light. The nature of mind of every single sentient being is clear light.

“Realizing the true nature of reality, Mahamudra, depends upon accumulating a vast amount of merit.” - Khenpo

In order to realize the true nature of reality, Mahamudra, it is necessary to accumulate merit that accords with the teachings that Lord Buddha presented a long time ago. Arya Maitreya taught how to accumulate merit in the text entitled, *Madhyantavibhanga – Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes*.<sup>1</sup> He taught that the ten ways to accumulate limitless merit are: (1) to write down the words of the Buddhadharma, (2) to make offerings to the objects of refuge, (3) to practice generosity, (4) to listen to the precious teachings, (5) to read the invaluable instructions, (6) to memorize the sacred texts, (7) to explain them to others, (8) to recite them, (9) to reflect their meaning, and (10) to meditate them.

We will start accumulating merit by writing down the verses I will read to you and in that way you will purify negative actions that you have done with your hands. We have written down a lot of letters and words out of attachment and aversion, and all of that has been very negative. Now it is time to do something positive. The way to go about this is to write down the verses of the Dharma with the good motivation of faith and devotion and with a pure objective. When you write down the truth of the precious Buddhadharma, then the merit you accumulate is limitless. So do write down the verses that I will read to you.

The first verse reads: "It is explained that by abandoning the belief in a self, mental afflictions, difficulties, and suffering, one can attain peace. However, since these are all primordially empty of essence, where are the fabrications of abandoning and of not abandoning?"

Now that you have written down the words of the first verse, we will recite it, which is the accumulation of merit that purifies all negative words that you have spoken out of attachment and aversion, and all of that has been very negative.

Please recite the following verse: "Thoughts of abandoning, non-abandoning, and so forth have never been seen to come or go. Therefore, they are said to be non-existent. Thoughts have never been seen to come or go." Translator: I made a mistake. Khenpo Rinpoche: Mistakes don't really exist. In the chapter entitled, An Examination of Mistakes, the Protector Nagarjuna proved that mistakes do not really exist. So: "The variety of doubts neither arises nor ceases." Please continue by reciting the next verse too: "Neither bondage nor liberation have ever been perceived with regard to it. However, like bondage and liberation in dreams, bondage and liberation are merely mind's imputations."

The next verse we want to recite is: "The essence of the self held prisoner has never been seen, and the doubts that bind are free of arising and ceasing. Therefore, bondage and liberation are dependently arisen, mere appearances. Let clinging to them as being real dissolve into the unborn expanse." We should recite the next verse three times, which is: "This life is appearance-emptiness, like a water-moon. So, past and future lives are also appearance-emptiness, like water-moons. Therefore, feelings of joy and pain are dream-like. Know this well, and your view will be profound."

If you reflect the meaning of the words in the verses while reciting them, then you are practicing profound analytical meditation. We are

not going to practice meditation separated from recitation because reciting and analysing is meditation - yes. Sometimes one needs to take a break and rest. So when you get tired of writing down the precious Dharma, then recite the verses, and when you get tired of reciting them, then just let go and relax.

We continue reciting, reflecting, and meditating: "These are the ways that the relative is empty of a very essence and the genuine clear light, the enlightened nature of mind, is empty of the stains of relative fabrications and of all concepts of conventional terms. Therefore, this is known as 'the empty of other,' the great middle-way." Let us recite this verse together three times: "In essence, it is originally and perfectly pure and free of the fleeting stains of conceptual fabrications as well, and therefore the enlightened essence of the stainless result is called 'the transcendent perfection of genuine purity.'" Let us recite this verse together three times, too: "Since it is beyond the self that ego-clinging mind believes to exist and beyond the selflessness ascertained through analysis of inference, therefore it is called 'the transcendentally perfect, genuine self.' Where are the thoughts of self's filthy clothes?"

We continue by reciting the following verses three times: "Samsara and nirvana are imagined to exist in dependence upon each other and therefore neither the one or the other has an essence. Realizing reality of samsara and nirvana's equality is explained to be transcendentally perfect, genuine permanence."

"Joy and pain are just dependently existing concepts. Their lack of an essence is the way relative things are empty. When the reality of joy and pain being equal is realized, this is called 'transcendentally perfect, genuine bliss.'"

"The way the relative is empty of its own essence, the way the genuine is empty of other, and the reality that is pure self, bliss, and constant - may precise knowledge realizing these three increase."

Now let us recite them all and practice recitation-meditation. If you do recitation-meditation, you won't get tired of meditation - your meditation won't fall into dullness or stupor. Getting tired of meditating can be very dangerous. If you get tired of working, you can rest. If you get tired of studying, you can meditate. But if you get tired of meditating, that's dangerous. That's why analytical meditation is excellent.

"It is explained that by abandoning the belief in a self, in all

afflictions, difficulties, and suffering, one can attain peace. However, since these are all primordially empty of essence, where are the fabrications of abandoning and not abandoning? Thoughts of abandoning, not abandoning, and so forth have never been seen to come or go and therefore they are said to be of the nature of primordially empty space. The variety of doubts neither arises nor ceases. Neither bondage nor liberation has ever been perceived with regard to it. However, like bondage and liberation in dreams, this bondage and liberation is merely mind's imputation. The essence of the self held prisoner has never been seen, and doubts that bind are free of arising and ceasing. Therefore, bondage and liberation are dependently arisen, mere appearances. Let clinging to them as being real dissolve into the unborn expanse.”

“This life is appearance-emptiness, like a water-moon. So past and future lives are also appearance-emptiness, like water-moons. Therefore, feelings of joy and pain are dream-like. Know this well and your view will be profound.”

“These are the ways that the relative is empty of its very essence and the genuine clear light, the enlightened nature of mind, is empty of the stains of relative fabrications and of all concepts of conventional terms. Therefore, this is renowned as 'the empty-of-other,' the great middle-way.”

“In essence, it is originally and perfectly pure and free of fleeting stains of conceptual fabrications as well. And therefore, the enlightened essence of the stainless result is called 'the transcendent perfection of genuine purity.' Since it is beyond the self that ego-clinging mind believes to exist and since it is beyond selflessness ascertained by means of analysis and inference, therefore it is called 'the transcendentally perfect, genuine self.' Where are the thoughts of self's filthy clothes?”

"Samsara and nirvana are imagined to exist in dependence upon each other and therefore neither the one or the other has an essence. Realizing the reality of samsara and nirvana's equality is said to be transcendentally perfect, genuine permanence.”

“Joy and pain are just dependently existing concepts. Their lack of any essence is the way relative things are empty. When the reality of joy and pain being equal is realized, this is called 'transcendentally perfect, genuine bliss.'”

“The way the relative is empty of its own essence, the way the genuine is empty of other, and the reality that is pure self,

bliss, and permanence - may precise knowledge realizing these three increase."

In the next teaching I will explain some important verses from the text called The Ocean of Definitive Meaning of Mountain Dharma by Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen.<sup>2</sup> There will be time for questions and answers after further teachings. It is important to leave time for questions at the same time that doubts arise. If we take time for questions before doubts arise, then that doesn't help very much.

Let us continue now by singing the song called The Ultimate View, Meditation, Conduct, and Fruition by Jetsun Milarepa. In this song, Jetsun Milarepa teaches the view of Shentong, the empty-of-other school, so it is very good for us to sing. Everyone needs to analyse and judge for himself and herself, so we should reflect and ask ourselves, "Is this song really in harmony with the view of Shentong or not?"<sup>3</sup> The Buddha himself said, "Just like a merchant examines gold by rubbing, burning, and melting it, so you should examine my speech. Accept nothing on blind faith." These are Lord Buddha's own teachings, and we must examine the words for ourselves. Translator: I will sing one verse and then we can sing it together.

"The Ultimate View, Meditation, Conduct, and Fruition" by Jetsun Milarepa

"The view is original wisdom which is empty,  
Meditation clear light, free of fixation,  
Conduct continual flow without attachment,  
Fruition is nakedness stripped of every stain.

This view, the original wisdom that is empty,  
Risks getting lost in just being talk and no more.  
If certainty which is in touch with what's meant does not follow,  
The words will not manage to free you of clinging to self,  
And that's why definitive certainty means so much.

The meditation clear light, free of fixation,  
Risks getting lost in just being settling.  
If original wisdom does not emerge from within you,  
You might settle steadily, but this will not set you free.  
But wisdom does not come of dullness and agitation,  
And that's why non-wandering mindfulness means so much.

This conduct, continual flow without attachment,  
Risks getting lost in only being a pretence.  
If the view and meditation are not included,

The eight worldly dharmas may mix with your yogic pursuits,  
And that's why freedom from clinging and veils means so much.

Fruition as nakedness stripped of every defect  
Risks getting clothed in the garments of attributes.  
If delusion is not overcome from its source on the inside,  
Your practice may aim very far but fall very short,  
And that's why correcting delusion means so much."<sup>4</sup>

Gyume Khensur (Lobsang Tenzin) Rinpoche spoke to students at Maitripa Institute in Portland, Oregon in late 2006. One of the students, frustrated by how the term "merit" seemed to be loosely thrown around in Buddhist circles, asked Rinpoche the following question ...

Question: What exactly is meant by the term "merit"? For example, if I practice the merit of generosity, is it considered merit because it lessens my karmic tendency toward greed, or does it actually change the conditions of my life in some way?

Answer: Merit, in general, means everything which is virtuous. And you can have all kinds of virtue. When we talk about the result of happiness in our life, you can have all kinds of happiness or well-being. For example, when we talk about being very affluent in one's material resources, when we look at what is the specific meritorious cause for that, it is the virtue of generosity. Again, when we talk about generosity, that doesn't mean that we have to have something to give. Generosity is a wish to give – that is generosity. The more we empower, enhance this mind, wishing to give, wanting to give, that is the merit of generosity. But on the other hand, it doesn't mean you think, "Oh, generosity is just my wish to give, but I'm not actually physically going to give anything." The mind has to be applicable.

On the other hand, the teachings say that if you get rid of miserliness in one's way of thinking or action, this does not complete the perfection of generosity. What is miserliness? Miserliness is an afflicted state of mind, an obscuration of delusions or afflictions. When you look at the Arhats who have rid themselves of the obscuration of delusions and therefore have rid themselves of miserliness, they haven't achieved the perfection of generosity. In the practice of the perfection of generosity, you have generosity of one's body, one's possessions, and one's merit – one's roots of virtue. These are the substances that we can give away in general, but the important thing is enhancing that mind which wishes to give.

When we look, we find four types of giving: the giving of material

things, the giving of dharma teachings, the giving of love or kindness toward others, and the giving of protection from states of fear. If we can embody all these types of giving, then that is great. In order to be blessed with material resources in future lifetimes, never to be in lack of material resources, what is the merit that ensures that? It is generosity. That is, the specific merit that brings forth that result. In order to attain higher rebirth, what is the specific merit? It is ethics. And then also, there is merit which is accumulated through the substances that we give, such as the building of temples and monasteries, the printing of scriptures, through enabling learning, enabling positive qualities in others; based on [and relative to] these items or substances, you have the merit of generosity.

Gyume Khensur (Lobsang Tenzin) Rinpoche is one of the most respected scholar-adepts in the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. He is the retired Abbot of Gyume Tantric Monastery in South India. Rinpoche currently serves as one of the primary teachers at Sera Monastery, where he has thousands of disciples, and has taught in the United States and Europe.

[www.mandalamagazine.org/archives/mandala-issues-for-2007/august/ask-a-lama-what-is-merit/](http://www.mandalamagazine.org/archives/mandala-issues-for-2007/august/ask-a-lama-what-is-merit/)

### The First Cause: Accumulating Merit

So now in regards to that you may have the idea that you have devotion, faith and inspiration to take rebirth into the pure land of Amitabha. But just having that alone (is not enough). You actually need the cause, you need something that's going to bring that about. So what brings that about of course is that you accomplish virtue, you accomplish positive activity, and you purify your negative habit patterns. Now what might be the way to purify negativity, what might be a way to generate the positive qualities? Well actually it's said the easiest way is to just abandon the ten non-virtues and to accomplish the ten virtuous actions.

### Wisdom

Also now of course, in doing this what you do is you create a great sense of positive energy and attitude around the material world. And this is called the accumulation of merit. And in doing so then it establishes you in a very positive manner. Now of course you also need to develop what's called the accumulations of wisdom, understanding the nature of reality. And that of course is whether you study within the Mahamudra tradition, or the Great Completion tradition, or the central path tradition. Whatever style of wisdom that you're relying

upon to generate those (merit and wisdom). Now that of course is very good to work with those, but it's sometimes difficult. So it's actually said though if you first work on technique or on skillful means, which is developing a very generous attitude and a very positive attitude in relation to the world, the quality of your being increases a great deal. And then it is very easy to gain realizations in the nature of wisdom. So also, if on an outward level of expression in your activities, you always have a very powerfully positive attitude and such, it makes your life much easier. In that regards then, it makes it more easy to work within the realm of being a spiritual person, because everything is facilitated for you because of your great positive energy. In this manner then you can develop on that side, and then the development of wisdom is easy.

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