Chapter 22 The Attitude of a Person of Intermediate Scope

b) The measure of having produced the attitude of a person of intermediate scope

The previous chapters have described in detail the **actual trainings of the being of intermediate scope**. We now turn to **the measurement of that thought: the qualities of mind that must be developed in order to say you are a being of intermediate scope. The essence of this attitude is the thought of renunciation, the determination to achieve complete emancipation from the suffering of cyclic existence. To achieve this thought of renunciation you need to gain a clear and detailed understanding of the truth of suffering and the truth of the cause of suffering, as well as the way beings cycle through samsara by means of the twelve links of dependent origination. Once you have that understanding, the desire will arise to cast away suffering along with its causes, together with the desire to obtain the peace that comes with emancipation. When that desire to abandon all of cyclic existence and to attain the highest peace arises, is that enough? Is that the final goal of this training? No, that still is not sufficient. The mere thought of renouncing samsara that arises once, or arises for a short time, is not enough.**

As Candrakīrti says in his *Commentary on the "Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning"*:

> By realising how living in the blazing fires of the three levels of impermanent cyclic existence is just like being caught in a house that is engulfed in flame, you desire to escape it.

Once you see that the situation you are in is extremely dangerous, a powerful desire to escape as soon as possible spontaneously emerges. With that desire comes an urgent need to know what method will get you out of those circumstances without delay. That kind of spontaneous, effortless, and urgent desire to escape from cyclic existence is the genuine, uncontrived thought of renunciation. It is a pressing need that emerges naturally, instinctively out of the realisation of just how desperate your circumstances are. That is the real goal of these practices, the true "measure of renunciation." Once that thought develops, all your energy and everything you do is turned toward getting out of cyclic existence. Before that thought develops, you must apply effort to generate an attitude of aversion toward cyclic existence, and you do that by **practicing these meditations**. But **once that true thought of renunciation arises, your determination to get out of samsara will be effortless and spontaneous.**

Here Tsongkhapa revisits a quotation he cited from Atiśa text, the *Concise Method of Achieving the Mahayana Path (Mahāyāna-patha-sādhana- varṇa-saṃgraha)*, which says:

> When the chance suddenly turns up
> For a prisoner to escape from jail,
> He will consider the chance to flee that place
> As more valuable than any other prize.
> Just like that, when opportunities arise
> To pass beyond this great ocean of samsara,
> It is incomparable to any other attraction:
> You should escape from the house of cyclic existence.

Like a person caught in a burning house, a prisoner in jail will escape whenever an opportunity arises. There is no inducement you could offer that would be more appealing than escape. **That should be your attitude toward cyclic existence; it should appear to be the worst kind of prison, and you should feel an urgent, single-minded need to get out of there at the earliest opportunity.**

The great Kadampa Geshe Sharawa used a very Tibetan image to describe the superficial thought of renunciation. He said it was like the barley powder sprinkled on top of a cup of beer; it will always float on the surface and never sink in. In Tibet, people generally did not drink plain water; most laypeople drank a form of beer called *chang*, and everyone drank tea. Many people drank beer all day long, and in order to make the beer more filling and more nutritious some

of them would pour a little of bit of tsampa into their chang. *Tsampa* is roasted barley flour and this was the staple food of Tibet. People would have their favourite ways of mixing the tsampa into the chang; sometimes they would pour the chang over the tsampa, sometimes they would sprinkle the tsampa into the chang and then stir it together. And sometimes they would just sprinkle the tsampa onto the chang and drink it without stirring. When you sprinkle tsampa powder on top of chang it just sits there on the surface and does not penetrate into the drink.

Sharawa is comparing the thought of escaping cyclic existence to tsampa sprinkled on top of beer. **You meditate on the sufferings of samsara or on dependent origination and for a short while you feel inspired to seek emancipation. But that attitude only lasts a short while, and it just floats on the surface of your mind, never penetrating deep down into your heart. If you cannot generate a realisation that goes beyond this superficial level, then your interest in pursuing emancipation, which finally brings an end to all the sufferings of samsara, will also remain superficial and short-lived. If your motivation remains superficial, your actual practice of the path will become mere words, and it will never penetrate deep into your mind.**

If your practice is mere words, with no real depth of feeling or understanding, then there will be no way to generate great compassion for other beings who are also suffering the miseries of cyclic existence. If compassion remains only on the surface and does not rise from the depths of your heart, then genuine bodhicitta, the real Mahayana attitude (the spontaneous, uncontrived determination to obtain buddhahood for the sake of other sentient beings) will not arise. In that case your Mahayana practice (the so-called "great" practice) will be nothing more than an intellectual understanding of mere words.

Therefore, you should recognise these trainings, which are common to the being of intermediate scope, as **being fundamental and essential to the entire path leading to liberation and to buddhahood. Until you fully develop this quality of mind that seeks, night and day, to be free of the sufferings of cyclic existence, you should cherish these teachings and apply yourself to these trainings.** You should not make the mistake of viewing these meditations as purely Hinayana practices and think, "I want higher teachings." Too often we are hungry for the "highest teachings," but we **neglect those that can really transform our practice and put us squarely on the path to liberation**.

Meditation on the sufferings of samsara and the twelve links of dependent origination lead to the genuine thought of renunciation. That thought is the cornerstone of the path to liberation. Once you have achieved that thought according the measure we have just described, we say that you have "entered the path." As soon as that spontaneous, uncontrived determination to be free of cyclic existence arises, you have passed through the gate and entered the path to liberation. From that point on, whatever you do that is virtuous becomes part of the path. Because all of your actions are dominated by this thought, so they naturally become causes of emancipation rather than causes of future cycling in samsara. Therefore, this thought is most important; it is the gateway to emancipation.

c) Clarifying Misconceptions

Now we try to clear up certain misunderstandings that can arise regarding these practices. Some may say that cultivating disenchantment with cyclic existence is appropriate for the Hinayana practice of the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas because their goal is to selfishly obtain their own freedom from samsara. But, they say, it is not suitable for a Mahayana practitioner because if you generate a strong sense of disgust toward samsara you may fall into the *extreme of peace*, wanting to have no further involvement in any aspect of cyclic existence. Therefore, the bodhisattva should not engage in meditations that lead to a complete renunciation of cyclic existence. In support of this view we can cite the *Sutra of Showing the Tathāgata's Inconceivable Secret (Tathāgatācintya-guhya-nirdeśa-sūtra)*:

> Bodhisattvas, who hold the ripening of sentient beings as the primary goal, view cyclic existence as beneficial, but not their own great nirvana.

Since the main concern of bodhisattvas is to ripen other beings, samsara is the very place where bodhisattvas work. Therefore, they should not become preoccupied by the faults of cyclic existence, but rather should view samsara as a beneficial circumstance for helping others. In fact, in order to continue to benefit other beings, bodhisattvas should strive to be born into samsara, rather than to escape from it. The same text says:

> If bodhisattvas were afraid of involvement in the activities of cyclic existence, they would fall to a place devoid of bodhisattva activity.

Cyclic existence is the field of activity where bodhisattvas carry out their work of leading sentient beings out of suffering. If bodhisattvas were afraid to enter such a place to undertake that work, they would fall to the extreme of peace, a place of quiescence for themselves, but a place where they could not do any benefit for other beings. That text also says:

> Bhagavan, śrāvakas fear involvement in the activities of cyclic existence, but bodhisattvas hold cyclic existence as a place to take rebirth innumerable times.

On the surface, these quotations seem to be saying that these meditations are only for Hinayana practitioners and not for those on the Mahayana path. This is a common misconception. Many **people who have studied a little bit of Buddhism think that Mahayana practice means that you should *enjoy* samsara, and that seeing just its faults is only for those on a lower level of practice. However, this is a wrong understanding of the meaning of this sutra and of the purpose of these practices.**

When the sutra says that "bodisattvas should not become disenchanted with cyclic existence," it is not saying that they should not feel disgust over the helpless condition of wandering in samsara under the power of karma and afflictions, and dismay over having to experience the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death. **The sutra is *not* teaching that the bodhisattva should avoid meditating on these sufferings. Bodhisattvas are utterly opposed to this miserable condition and they *do* meditate on this. In their meditation they *do* produce disenchantment, disgust, and dismay over this condition; in fact, to a greater degree than even Hinayana practitioners do. Seeing so vividly how miserable and powerless sentient beings are, bodhisattvas resolve not merely to liberate themselves but to lead *all* living beings out of this condition.**

It is the work of guiding other beings out of cyclic existence for which bodhisattvas feel no disgust or dismay. Regardless of what adversity they must undergo themselves, bodhisattvas take great pleasure in working for the benefit of other sentient beings. As long as there is a benefit to others, they never turn away from any action, no matter where they have to go or what pain they must experience. Bodhisattvas take on the activities of samsara with joyous perseverance because they are doing it for the benefit of others. That is the meaning that this sutra is trying to express.

After bodhicitta arises, when you become a bodhisattva, your foremost objective is to help sentient beings by leading them to freedom from cyclic existence. You take the *Mahayana vow* never to give up sentient beings until the very end of cyclic existence; that you will never waver from that great bodhisattva activity. Taking this vow with a firm conviction is called "putting on armour." When an army goes out to fight its enemy, the troops put on whatever equipment is necessary (in the old days it was armour) and carry weapons needed to accomplish their task. These soldiers are not concerned with their own welfare and enter the battlefield with courage; they feel that even in face death or mutilation, they will carry on until they defeat the enemy. In the same way, **bodhisattvas put on the armour of their vow, and they remain steadfast in their determination to help others, never deterred or disenchanted by the sufferings they see or the sufferings they themselves must undergo.**

Even if all the misery of all sentient beings were gathered together and dropped upon the bodhisattvas every moment, still they would feel no fear or discouragement, because **bodhisattvas are protected by the courage of their mental armour, their commitment to help other beings. They will only be more inspired to persevere with joy in the great undertaking in which they are engaged. That is the meaning of the teaching that "bodhisattvas**

should not become disenchanted with cyclic existence." That is the point of this sutra. This is confirmed by a quotation from Candrakīrti, which says:

> Even if all the sufferings of sentient beings brought injury to their body and mind every moment until the end of cyclic existence, the bodhisattvas would not be afraid. Taking on the sufferings of all sentient beings simultaneously until the end of cyclic existence, bodhisattvas carry on with joyous persevering effort. Every moment of that joyous perseverance becomes the cause that produces the boundless accumulation of the treasure of merits that will bring omniscient buddhahood to all beings. Understanding this, they are willing to take rebirth in cyclic existence hundreds of times.

To support his statement, Candrakīrti cites the same quotations that were just referred to as representing the contradictory view.

In fact, this same sutra, the *Sutra of Showing the Tathāgata's Inconceivable Secret*, says that the **reason for viewing cyclic existence as a place of benefit is that bodhisattvas feel happiness to the extent they are able to work for the welfare of other beings.** Again, this indicates that the meaning of not becoming disenchanted with cyclic existence is that bodhisattvas do not become disenchanted with acting for the benefit of suffering sentient beings, but **actually enjoy that effort.** This is how we should understand this sutra.

When you are forced to wander helplessly in cyclic existence, constantly assaulted by innumerable types of suffering, completely under the power of karma and afflictions, you cannot even do anything to help yourself, so how could you possibly do anything that would benefit others? This helpless entrapment is the door through which all the troubles of all beings arrive. Seeing this, the bodhisattva should actually develop a far more intense feeling of disenchantment toward cyclic existence than even a Hinayana practitioner does, and should resolve to bring an end to these conditions.

Bodhisattvas take rebirth in cyclic existence by the special of power of their compassion and the willed direction of their aspirational prayer. They take rebirth with the express purpose of helping those who are still cycling through suffering states without any control. There is a big difference between entering samsara in this way and wandering helplessly under the control of karma and afflictions. Bodhisattvas are *choosing* to take rebirth in order to benefit others, and it is that opportunity to assist beings who are trapped in samsara that they enjoy; that is what the sutra means when it says **bodhisattvas enjoy being reborn in cyclic existence. Bodhisattvas clearly see the sufferings of samsara, and they abhor what they see. But they have nothing to fear in taking rebirth because they do so with an altruistic purpose. It is important to understand this distinction.**

If you have taken the bodhisattva vows but fail to make this distinction, and you hold the position that bodhisattvas should not see cyclic existence as a suffering condition, and should *not* cultivate the thought of renunciation, then you are committing an infraction of the bodhisattva vows. This point is fully explained in Asaṅga's *Bodhisattva Levels*, but Tsongkhapa says he will not go into it any further here.

Actually, it is marvellous and amazing that bodhisattvas, who see so vividly how miserable cyclic existence truly is (who produce such a powerful thought of renunciation) still do not abandon their willingness to reenter samsara. This is an indication of just how strong their love, compassion, and wish to help other sentient beings really are.

Some people claim, "I am a Mahayanist. I am a great helper to others. I must stay here in samsara because I am benefiting other sentient beings." But, instead of cultivating the thought of renunciation, they are indulging without hesitation in samsaric wonders like wealth, fame, pride, and sensual pleasure. Though they proclaim that they are working for the benefit of other beings, in fact they cannot give up samsara because they are incurably attached to its illusory pleasures. That is the real reason they do not want to renounce samsara. Such people view cyclic existence as if it were a celestial mansion, and their attachment to it never diminishes even a little bit. That is the opposite of the courageous commitment of the bodhisattva, and wise people are not fooled by such hypocrisy.

Bhāvaviveka says in his *Heart of the Middle Way (Madhyamaka-hṛdaya)*:

> Because they see its faults, they do not abide in cyclic existence.
> Because of compassion, they do not remain in nirvana.
> In order to accomplish the goals of others, they undertake the courageous conduct
> Of remaining in cyclic existence.

Bodhisattvas do not remain in samsara out of attachment because they see the disadvantages of cyclic existence with the eye of wisdom. Because they have great compassion for all suffering beings, they do not remain in the peace of nirvana, even though they have the power to stay in that blissful state. Even though they see its faults, bodhisattvas have the courage to remain in cyclic existence in order to help other suffering beings. It is their own wish to remain, born out of the power of their compassion and wisdom.

To say that bodhisattvas do not become disenchanted with cyclic existence is also contradictory to the very method they use to cultivate great compassion for all beings. They contemplate the measureless miseries of beings in terms of the one hundred and ten sufferings described in the *Bodhisattva Levels*. **This generates an empathy for the pain of living beings that is almost unbearable, and gives rise to a powerful and enduring unwillingness to tolerate such wretched circumstances.** Since this is the method they use to generate the altruistic thought to benefit others, it is absurd to suggest that they do not develop aversion toward cyclic existence in even the tiniest way.

In *Four Hundred Stanzas*, **Āryadeva points out that the path of the bodhisattva consists of developing a powerful attitude of aversion toward cyclic existence by looking into the innumerable sufferings of beings who are caught in its web. You then see how all these suffering beings are your dearest friends and closest relatives, and it is for their sake that you enter into the ocean of samsara. It is out of the determination to help those other beings that bodhisattvas are freely reborn many times, in many different forms, in that samsaric cycle.** Candrakīrti made this clear in his commentary on the *Four Hundred Stanzas*:

> By explaining the faults of cyclic existence, beings become frightened and want to be freed from it. In order to lead such trainees to the Mahayana the Buddha said, "O monks, among sentient beings who have been cycling for a very long time in samsara, among all the many types of beings, there is not one being who has not been like a father, mother, son, daughter, relative, or some type of step-relation to you."

And he goes on:

> Understanding this teaching of the Bhagavan, bodhisattvas are able to jump into the ocean of cyclic existence in order to carry to freedom, on the great vessel of the Mahayana method, all those beings who have been wandering helplessly since beginningless time through cyclic existence without protection; beings they see as their mothers, fathers, friends, and so forth.

Just as a mother is able to bear any hardship in order to save her children when they are in danger, **the bodhisattva sees all beings as close relatives, and is able to bear the hardship of repeatedly jumping back into the ocean of samsara in order to pull them up onto the vessel of freedom**, the Mahayana path.

And it is not only the sutra path of the Mahayana that requires this way of thinking. Even in the highest Mahayana practice, the Vajrayāna method, it is necessary to develop this attitude. Āryadeva says in his *Lamp That Is a Compendium of Deeds (Caryā-melāpaka-pradīpa)*:

> By these steps you should engage in these practices without elaboration. These steps are as follows. First of all, practitioners should recollect the beginningless sufferings of cyclic existence. Then, with a desire for the bliss of nirvana, they should completely abandon the distraction of worldly pleasure, and cultivate the understanding that even the ruler of empires is suffering.

For those who are going to engage in tantric practice, referred to here as "practices without elaboration," the instructions are the same: **recollect the sufferings of cyclic existence and, based on that, generate an all-encompassing thought of renunciation, and a powerful de-**

termination to be free of the faults of samsara.

This final quotation of this section clears away the misconception that the tantric practitioner does not need to produce the thought of renunciation. As this entire section has made clear, the Mahayana practitioner must have an even sharper realisation of the sufferings of cyclic existence than the Hinayana practitioner. This quotation makes clear that without the thought of renunciation there is no way to achieve the tantric path.

In fact, within tantric practice, when you think of the mandala (the representation of the abode of the meditational deity), its outer circle is visualised as a cemetery; this is a reminder of death and impermanence, a symbol of the thought of renunciation. The passage into the mandala starts there; you cannot enter the practice of the deity without passing through the cemetery reminding you of the true nature of cyclic existence. All paths follow this same route.

Now we can see that there is no contradiction when these sutras say that bodhisattvas, the great Mahayana saints, find joy in entering cyclic existence. In fact, **they realise better than anyone else just how adverse the conditions of samsara truly are. Their enthusiasm is directed purely at the endless opportunities they take to lead unhappy living beings out of that helpless condition and onto the path to liberation.**