

1. Give a short explanation on equanimity and why it's the foundation of developing bodhichitta.

Equanimity is seeing all beings – friends, enemies, strangers – as equal in wishing to have happiness and to avoid suffering. It is a foundation to seeing all beings as no different oneself, as equally important to oneself and then by the sheer numbers of 'others' versus 'self' to see their happiness as more important than one's own. Without equanimity, there is no basis for developing the intention to take on the responsibility to bring all sentient beings to the state of enlightenment.

2. What is bodhichitta? Why is it important to develop this mind?

It is a mind that wishes to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Without bodhichitta one cannot achieve the full enlightenment of buddhahood – the perfection of the 2 wings, compassion and wisdom. Without complete enlightenment one cannot benefit all others without error.

3. Describe the steps of the Seven Fold Cause and Effect practice.

Foundation – Equanimity

1st step – seeing all beings as our mother

To get this feeling that we haven't always been who we are now. We've been other people and other beings have also been other people, and we've had different relationships with them. Everyone has been our principal care-giver and life-giver, somebody like our mother. When we start looking at others in this way they stop seeming distant, cut-off and unrelated.

2nd – recalling their kindness

To recognize our interdependence with others. Remembering all the adjustments caregivers made for us so that we would have food, clothing, shelter, education, medicine, etc. Without them we would not be here now. We would not be able to function in the world.

3rd – wishing to repay their kindness

By recognizing that all of our happiness comes from all these beings who have been kind to us at one time or another in our infinite lives, the wish to give something to them in return naturally arises. Not seeing caring for others as a burden, but as something that we really want to be able to do.

4th – cultivating loving-kindness

A natural feeling of affection for others, wanting to care for them as if they were our children. Not like a sacrifice. It's just what we want to do. Seeing others as beautiful and appealing as a parent sees their children.

5th – generating great compassion

Great compassion is an understanding of the different kinds of sufferings in cyclic existence, finding it unbearable for oneself, seeing all others as in the same situation, finding that unbearable, thus, wishing all sentient beings to be utterly free of it and its causes.

6th – generating the highest aspiration

The willingness to involve oneself in the actual process of liberating others. With great compassion, we wish all others to be free of suffering and its causes, but with the highest intention, we are going to do something about it. It's the difference between standing at the edge of the swimming pool, saying, "They're drowning! I wish they could be saved from drowning," and jumping in to save them yourself.

7th – result is bodhichitta

Due to the force of great compassion and the highest intention, the wish to become enlightened in order to benefit all sentient beings arises.

4. Discuss the disadvantages of self-centered mind and the advantages of cherishing others.

Self-centeredness makes such a big deal out of 'I, me, mine' that it becomes totally impossible to be satisfied. We run after sense pleasures one after another, again and again. There's no end to it. All the self-pity, "Poor me. Poor me." It thinks, "I can be unhappy because this person did this; I can be unhappy because that person doesn't appreciate me; I can be unhappy because this person makes me feel like I don't belong; and I can feel unhappy because this person insulted me. All because of self-centeredness.

Wealth, wonderful experiences, a good heart, liberation, enlightenment is the result of cherishing others. If we have this attitude that cherishes, respects and cares about others, we are going to be able to be happy wherever we are and whomever we are with. When somebody asks you for help and you really do not want to do it, the mind is totally miserable and the other person senses this and feels lousy too. Cherishing others changes our attitude, we can feel: What an incredible opportunity it is to help another who wants to be happy just as much as I do. It's an opportunity to create all this positive potential that is going to get me closer to enlightenment. It's a chance to repay the kindness of a being that has done so many things for me again and again.

5. What are the steps in equalizing and exchanging self and others?

1st – equalizing self and others

2nd – contemplating the disadvantages of self-centeredness

3rd – contemplating the benefits of cherishing others

4th – actual practice of exchanging self and others

result is bodhicitta