
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

25 April 2017

While maintaining the motivation we generated during the prayers, we can now engage in our meditation practice. [meditation]

Now we can generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I'll listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.

3.2.4. Contemplating the difficulty of attaining a birth with leisure and endowment (cont.)

Last week we discussed the first two lines of verse relating to this heading. Next comes this argument:

It is not difficult to find opportunity to liberate oneself from existence because when one takes rebirth in the happy realms, then one can achieve liberation through such practices such as meditating on the truth, and faith in the Three Jewels and the like.

Then these two lines are presented:

161cd. *There are many wrong paths,
And it is difficult to contradict doubt.*

The answer to the argument is:

While taking rebirth in the happy realms there are many wrong paths that have fallen into the extremes of eternalism or nihilism, which are opposing conditions to generating the right view. There are false teachers that lead one on these paths, and it is difficult to contradict doubt with regards to the correct view because it is difficult to find the inner and outer conditions to cut that doubt.

We can relate *taking rebirth in the happy realms* to ourselves because we have been reborn with all the conditions of a perfect human rebirth. Yet even though we have this happy or fortunate rebirth now, we still find it hard to utilise these good conditions, because *there are many wrong paths that have fallen into the extremes of eternalism or nihilism, which are opposing conditions for the generation of the right view.*

The first argument is that *it is not difficult to find the opportunity to liberate oneself from existence, because when one takes rebirth in the happy realms, one can achieve liberation through practices such as meditating on the truth, and faith in the Three Jewels and the like.* If the thought, 'Even though I may not be able to practise Dharma fully in this life, I'll achieve all the good conditions in future lives, and then I can meditate on truth and having faith in the Three Jewels and be liberated' arises, then we need to immediately recognise this as the laziness of procrastination.

Although we have obtained a happy rebirth now, *there are many wrong paths of eternalism or nihilism, which are opposing conditions for the generation of the right view.* Then *there are false teachers that lead one onto these wrong paths.* So not

only are there wrong paths, but there are also those who propound the tenets of the wrong paths. Hence *it is difficult to contradict doubt with regard to the correct view because it is difficult to find the inner and outer conditions to cut that doubt.*

As explained in the teachings, it is hard to generate even a doubt about whether emptiness is valid.¹ However eliminating that doubt and moving towards an understanding of emptiness is difficult, because it is difficult to find the necessary inner and outer conditions.

This is followed by a further argument:

Although one may not find these conditions in this life, because one will find the virtuous teacher in the next life, and then practise.

The argument here is that *although one may not find these conditions in this life, it is acceptable because one will find a virtuous teacher in the next life, and then be able to practise.* This argument points out a false sense of certainty that we will definitely obtain a fortunate rebirth in the next lifetime, and be able to continue to practise the Dharma. The assumption is that, although one may not have all the conditions for practice in this life, one will obtain a good rebirth again in the next lifetime and be able to practise then.

The answer is that there is no certainty one will obtain a good rebirth in the next lifetime, as the causes are so difficult to obtain. So on a personal level this is an instruction to overcome the laziness of procrastination. We need to specifically relate this to the difficulty of obtaining a precious human rebirth with its eight freedoms and ten endowments, as presented in the next verse. It is also extensively explained in the lam-rim teachings.

The next verse reads:

162. *Finding freedom again is difficult
And the coming of a buddha is extremely rare to find.
It is difficult to abandon the river of afflictions
And, alas, weighed down by these one continually suffers.*

As the commentary explains:

Answer: If one does not strive well in this life, when one has found a virtuous teacher, then it will be difficult to find freedom again in the future, and since it is extremely rare for a buddha to come to the world, it is very hard to meet with a virtuous teacher.

Although one has met a virtuous teacher and already attained a wholesome basis with freedoms and endowments, if one does not strive well in conscientiousness, then it is hard to counter the river of afflictions. They will continue to pour down until one has attained liberation. 'Alas' contains the meaning of sadness and despondency because one continually experiences one suffering after the next, as well as experiencing extreme suffering. Although one may be free from one suffering, one falls into another suffering. Therefore, one should strive in contemplating the sufferings of cyclic existence while having attained freedom and endowments.

¹ Ed: As mentioned previously, this doubt is the positive doubt that maybe it really is the case that things do lack inherent existence.

This is an explicit explanation of the difficulty of obtaining a precious human rebirth, which is necessary to gain an understanding of the right view that realises emptiness. Of course, this applies in a broader sense as well; let alone realising emptiness, finding the conditions to practise Dharma is very difficult.

As specifically mentioned, it is even more difficult to find a teacher who presents the correct view of emptiness properly, because they are very rare. The significant point here is to *strive well in this life, when one has found a virtuous teacher*.

When the commentary says, *it will be difficult to find freedom again in the future*, it is referring to the conditions necessary for a precious human rebirth with its eight freedoms and ten endowments. Moreover *it is extremely rare for a buddha to come to the world*, which why it will be *very hard to meet with a virtuous teacher*. As explained in the lam-rim teachings, we are said to be living now in what is called a 'light eon', which is a fortunate eon where the Buddha has come and taught the Dharma. The 'light eon' is followed by a 'dark eon' when the Buddhist teachings have declined. If one were to be born in a dark eon, there would be no possibility of meeting with virtuous teachers, because the teachings of the Buddha would not be present.

So we have both the internal conditions of a precious human rebirth and the external conditions of the eon in which we are now living, where Buddha has come and taught in this world. Without these external conditions, *it is very difficult to meet with a virtuous teacher* who is able to present the unmistakable correct view.

When the commentary states that *although one has met a virtuous teacher and already attained a wholesome basis with freedoms and endowments*, it is referring to the argument which says that one will have all the necessary conditions to be able to practise in a future life. In simple terms it is saying, 'What makes you think that you'll be able to practise in a future life with all the necessary conditions, when you are not utilising the good conditions that you actually have right now?'

That is followed with *if one does not strive well in conscientiousness, then it is hard to counter the river of afflictions which will continue to pour down until one has attained liberation*. If we don't utilise all the perfect conditions that we have now by applying conscientiousness, then the afflictions will run rampant, and *pour down like rain*, meaning that we will be completely consumed by them, and have to endure suffering until we *have attained liberation*.

As the commentary further mentions, '*Alas*' contains the meaning of sadness and despondency because one continually experiences one suffering after the next, as well as experiencing extreme suffering. *Although one may be free from one suffering, one falls into another suffering*. Therefore, one should strive in contemplating the sufferings of cyclic existence while having attained freedom and endowments. The conclusion is that we need to reflect upon the fact that having obtained these good conditions now, we need to take the essence of this life and make it most meaningful by contemplating the correct understanding of emptiness, and engaging in the practice of Dharma.

Shantideva is really encouraging us here. Reflecting on these points is an impetus to practise Dharma and make our precious human life with its eight freedoms and ten endowments most meaningful.

There is nothing obscure about this. We can all relate to the comment that *although one may be free from one suffering, one falls into another suffering*. With our contaminated aggregates, we find that we might have a headache, but once we've cured the headache, we might start having aches and pains in our back, or our knees might start to give way, and then we have stomach aches. We find that we experience these sufferings one after another, again and again, in one form or another, which will be the case until we obtain liberation.

The main point that we need to understand here is that we will have to experience these sufferings again and again until we obtain liberation. And until and unless we gain an understanding of the correct view, the realisation of emptiness, we cannot possibly obtain liberation.

As explained previously, grasping at an inherently existent self is the very root cause of samsara. So until and unless grasping at an inherent existent self is completely reversed by applying the antidote of the wisdom realising emptiness or selflessness, there's no way we will be able to reverse the condition of being in cyclic existence.

Gaining the wisdom realising emptiness also depends on having a proper understanding of interdependent origination. Therefore, as presented in Lama Tsongkhapa's *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, which we covered in our Easter course, we need to strive to gain an understanding of interdependent origination. This is the crucial point.

It is important for us to incorporate whatever understanding we gain from other teachings into whatever subjects we are currently studying, as that will form a concise basis for our practice. There are so many different texts and different practices, and if we view each individual text or practice in isolation, it can be confusing. Rather, we need to try to combine whatever understanding we have from the different texts we study, and whatever practices we are doing, and then we will gain a comprehensive understanding.

3.2.5. That oneself and others are afflicted by the suffering of cyclic existence is suitable to be mourned

This refers to the ways and means of instilling feelings of love and compassion for sentient beings.

The first verse under this heading reads:

163. *Those who do not see their suffering
Despite suffering to the extreme,
They, submerged in the river of suffering,
'Oh dear', they are appropriate to be mourned.*

The commentary explains:

Sentient beings suffer to the extreme, they do not see that they are sinking in suffering by mistaking suffering for happiness, and they are submerged in a river of suffering. Having generated love for these sentient beings that sink in the mud of suffering, they

are suitable to be mourned with the thoughts of, 'Oh dear, how wonderful would it be if sentient beings were free from suffering' and the like. Therefore, one needs to strive in meditating on great compassion.

When the commentary states, *sentient beings suffer to the extreme*, we need to relate this to ourselves as well, as the heading indicates. We need to remember that these explanations apply to ourselves as well as other sentient beings, as we are all in the same lamentable and pitiful situation.

Sentient beings, including ourselves, endure extreme suffering. *By mistaking suffering for happiness they do not see that they are sinking*. This again is very true. A lot of suffering is mistaken for happiness and as a result sentient beings purposely engage in suffering. As I've mentioned previously, we need to be very cautious about creating negativities. We gladly and wilfully engage in some negativities rather than being hesitant about creating them; indeed, there are times where we become upset if we don't get an opportunity to engage in some negativities.

How can we call ourselves true Dharma practitioners if we behave like this? If we willingly engage in negativities and get upset when we don't get an opportunity to create negativities then we are indeed *submerged in a river of suffering*.

Understanding karma means recognising that if we engage in the causes of suffering, we are bound to experience the consequence, which is suffering. If we do not wish for suffering, we need to avoid creating the causes of suffering, which are negativities. Conversely, if we want to experience happiness, we need to engage in the appropriate causes for happiness, which is engaging in virtuous actions.

The commentary continues, *having generated love for these sentient beings that sink in the mud of suffering, they are suitable to be mourned with the thoughts of...* When we relate these sufferings to ourselves, they become a condition to generate renunciation. When we relate them to other sentient beings, then they become a condition for us to generate compassion. We need to understand that the difference comes down to the focus. If the sufferings relate to ourselves, they become a condition for us to generate renunciation. But when focused upon other sentient beings, then contemplating these sufferings and their pitiful situation becomes an impetus for us to generate compassion for them.

Therefore one generates the thought, 'Oh dear, how wonderful it would be if sentient beings were free from suffering' and so forth. This can be further elaborated into these three aspirations: *how wonderful would it be if sentient beings were free from suffering*; may they be free from these sufferings; and I will personally ensure that they are free from suffering. These thoughts are a very powerful way of generating compassion.

Then the commentary concludes with, *therefore, one needs to strive in meditating on great compassion*.

The next verse presents an example of mistakenly taking suffering as happiness.

164. *For example, some, after having washed repeatedly,*

Go into fire again and again.

*Thus, even though abiding in extreme suffering,
They project that they are happy.*

The commentary explains:

For example, some followers of outside tenets, that were deceived by misleading teachers, repeatedly wash themselves and enter the fire again and again. Although they abide with strong suffering due to the physical austerity, they project happiness onto it by holding it to be a method for attaining liberation.

The commentary explains that *some followers of outside tenets*, i.e. followers of non-Buddhist schools, who *were deceived by misleading teachers, repeatedly wash themselves* seeing it as a means to gain liberation. Just washing themselves again and again doesn't seem so severe, but then the next austerity the commentary mentions is entering a *fire again and again*. To this day, there are those who walk on fire, sleep on nails or thorns, and so forth, holding these severe and austere practices to be a means to gain liberation.

Bathing in the Ganges, however, is believed to have some benefit because the water is actually blessed by bodhisattvas, so it has some positive effect. But if we could gain liberation just by washing, then I guess we wouldn't be too far away from liberation, because we bath ourselves quite often!

It is quite misleading to say that these austere practices, in and of themselves, are a means to gain liberation. Actions such as enduring the pain of putting one's fingertips on fire, or enduring extreme heat and cold, or sleeping on thorns or nails, in and of themselves, cannot be a cause to achieve liberation, and so they are quite meaningless.

Nevertheless, *although they abide with strong suffering due to physical austerity, they project happiness onto it by holding it to be a method for attaining liberation*. In their minds, these followers think they're creating the causes for liberation, when in fact they have been misled.

As a personal instruction, it is not sufficient for us to point the finger at others and say they're meaninglessly enduring such sufferings by following strange practices, while we ourselves create more suffering for ourselves by willingly engaging in negativity. In both cases, the suffering is self-inflicted.

The understanding we need to derive here is that we need to avoid engaging in negativities as a way to stop the causes of our own suffering.

The advice in the next verse is again very pertinent advice for us:

165. *Thus those continually acting
As if without old age and death
Are first killed,
And then comes the terrifying downfall into the
lower realms.*

As the commentary explains:

In this manner, those that abide acting like arhats without death or sickness, are first killed by the lord of death without any means to stop or abandon him, and then come the terrifying sufferings of having fallen into the three lower realms.

In reference to those that abide acting like arhats without death or sickness, real arhats are of course free from

sickness, aging, and death, because they have abandoned the very root of the afflictions. When we, who are still in cyclic existence, fail to utilise our freedoms and endowments to engage in the practice of Dharma, then we are acting as if we are arhats.

We cannot afford to lie around lazily as if we are arhats with no need to free ourselves from cyclic existence, because our life is bound to end. If we fail to put time into practising the Dharma, there's no way to *stop the lord of death, and then the terrifying sufferings of having fallen into the three lower realms* will be upon us. Here the metaphor of being killed by the lord of death is being used as an exhortation to not lie around in a leisurely manner and waste our opportunity to engage in the practice of Dharma.

3.3. Showing the mode of apprehension of the aspect of great compassion

Basically, this is presenting an aspect of great compassion. The first verse reads:

166. *Thus may I become someone from whose
Clouds of merits rain of a well borne
Accumulation of happiness that pacifies those
Tortured by the sufferings of fire.*

The commentary explains:

Having contemplated the way they who experience terrifying suffering in their continuum in the way explained earlier, are afflicted by suffering, one should meditate on great compassion in the following manner, keeping in mind the sentient beings that are tortured by the fires of suffering:

'When will I become someone that pacifies the sufferings of the lower realms with medicine, food and the like? That which are parts of my collection of happiness, built up from clouds of merits built up by generosity and so forth. How wonderful would it be if sentient beings were free from suffering? May they be free from suffering. May I bring about that freedom.'

Meditate in the following way on great compassion:

Having contemplated the suffering of sentient beings, which have just been explained, *one meditates on great compassion in the following manner*. What are presented in the commentary as questions, are actually aspirational prayers.

Keeping in mind that sentient beings are tortured by the fires of suffering, one asks oneself, '*When will I become someone who pacifies the sufferings of the lower realms with medicine, food and the like?*' This rhetorical question is basically saying, '*May I be the one who pacifies the sufferings of the lower realms with medicine, food and the like?*' *That which are parts of my collection of happiness, built up from clouds of merits built up by generosity and so forth* refers to the accumulation of merit from practising the six perfections of generosity, morality, patience, joyous effort, concentration and wisdom.

With the merit gained from these practices one thinks, '*How wonderful it would be if sentient beings were free from suffering*'. From this arises the compassion that thinks, '*May they be free from suffering, and may I bring about that freedom*'. In other words, by reflecting on the suffering of sentient beings, the mind of compassion thinking, '*May I free them from all the sufferings*' will arise.

So, as the commentary says, *meditate in the following way on great compassion*.

This part of the text is specifically dedicating the accumulation of one's merit towards the alleviation of the suffering of sentient beings, and wishing them to be free from that suffering. Here, compassion is presented as an outcome of having generated merit.

The next verse relates this back to the need for wisdom:

167. *May I, by respectfully building up the
accumulation of merits
In the way that lacks focus,
Be able to show emptiness to those
Who are destitute because of having focus.*

The commentary explains:

'Dedicating as the cause for liberation from the sufferings of cyclic existence: When will I realise that all phenomena lack inherent existence, and respectfully build up the infinite accumulations of merit of generosity and so forth with the method of the objectless wisdom?'

When will I show emptiness to the sentient beings that are destitute in cyclic existence due to the object of true-grasping, to pacify their samsaric suffering? How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from the suffering of cyclic existence. May I free them from that suffering.'

It further mentions:

To fulfil the definition of great love and compassion that are contained in the Mahayana path one needs to wish to place sentient beings in the state of complete enlightenment that is endowed with all happiness, and which is free from all suffering.

Meditate in the following way on great compassion:

'Dedicating as the cause for liberation from the sufferings of cyclic existence: When will I realise that all phenomena lack inherent existence, and respectfully build up the infinite accumulations of merit of generosity and so forth with the method of the objectless wisdom? When will I show emptiness to the sentient beings that are destitute in cyclic existence due to the object of true-grasping, to pacify their samsaric suffering? How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from the suffering of cyclic existence. May I free them from that suffering.'

This is a dedication that serves as the cause for liberation from the suffering of cyclic existence. As related here, one dedicates the combination of one's extensive accumulation of merit and one's understanding of emptiness, referred to here as *objectless wisdom*, to liberating all beings from suffering. We need to develop the aspiration by asking ourselves, '*When will I realise that all phenomena lack inherent existence, and respectfully build up the infinite accumulations of merit of generosity and so forth?*'. Here *and so forth* refers to the other perfections. So the aspiration is, '*May I actually use these merits combined with the objectless wisdom - the wisdom realising emptiness - to be able to liberate sentient beings*'.

The following aspiration in the commentary has essentially the same meaning: *when will I show emptiness to the sentient beings*.

² Some translations use also 'the wisdom which lacks apprehension'

The next point is the main point:

To fulfil the definition of great love and compassion that are contained in the Mahayana path one needs to wish to place sentient beings in the state of complete enlightenment that is endowed with all happiness, and which is free from all suffering.

One realises that having generated strong love and compassion for sentient beings by contemplating all of the suffering they are experiencing, and instilling a strong sense of urgently wishing for them to be free from suffering and endowed with happiness is not sufficient in itself as a means of actually benefiting sentient beings. What needs to be added is what is called superior intention.

The superior intention that is indicated here is taking personal responsibility for implementing the wish to place them in the *state of complete enlightenment, that is endowed with all happiness, and which is free from all suffering*.

As I've also emphasised many times previously, we need to develop the strong impetus to generate love and compassion, and then engage in practices such as the tong-len meditation. This giving and taking practice is a powerful practice that incorporates the actual deeds of a bodhisattva – taking the sufferings of others on oneself, and giving them happiness.

As I mentioned earlier, these are really essential points that allow one to generate that strong mind of bodhicitta.

I place great emphasis on love and compassion and how practices like tong-len and so forth are a very strong means of generating that mind of superior intention as a way to generate bodhicitta. I have mentioned this again and again, and it is being backed up here by these teachings. This goes to show that I'm not just being a loud mouth, and that it is actually a significant practice!

As the commentary continues:

In short, one should meditate on the mode of abiding in dependence on calm abiding.

So, what is the point being made here by saying *one should meditate on the mode of abiding in dependence on calm abiding*?

Student: You need to have established calm abiding before you can meditate on emptiness.

This point was mentioned in the Mahamudra teachings. There are two specific systems: finding the right view through meditation, and finding meditation through the right view.³ What is being presented here is finding the right view through meditation, which specifically means developing calm abiding first, in order to achieve the realisation of emptiness.

Then the commentary explains:

Further, because the 'I' in reference to thinking of 'me' is established as merely labelled in dependence on the aggregates and does not exist inherently, it does not exist intrinsically, ...

As further explained, this 'I' does not exist intrinsically because:

... it is not established in the slightest in an independent mode. Therefore, the existent person is merely posited in name, it exists only as labelled and in a dependent mode.

So, as the commentary says:

Hence, take to heart, 'It does not exist inherently'.

What is being specifically emphasised here is that *the existent person is merely posited in name*. It exists only as a label that is imputed by the mind, and exists only in a *dependent mode*, meaning that it exists only interdependently. The conclusion that we need to keep in mind is that, for these reasons, the 'I' does not exist inherently.

Finally, the commentary says:

Meditate in the same way on all phenomena such as the aggregates and so forth.

Essentially, this is just a summary of how to meditate on emptiness.

Then the author of the commentary, Gyaltsab Rinpoche, adds these verses as a summary of the chapter:

I say this as summary:

For as long as one does not find a holy master
One will not even realise partially
The Middle Way of dependent arising that is free
from extremes
That can cut the root of existence.

Whatever well-spoken advice I receive
Is due to the kindness of the lama.
May this virtue become the cause
That my mothers meet a Mahayana guru.

Without realising the suchness of the Middle Way,
free from extremes
One cannot touch the state of a superior.
Hence, by deciding that dependent arising is the
meaning of emptiness
Strive accordingly in achievement.

That difficult to find even in a billion eons;
Because the pure school of Nagarjuna pronouncing
the two truths
Because they will disappear before long in this
realm
Those with intelligence will quickly generate joyous
effort.

The meaning of these words is quite clear. They cover many of the points that were presented in the chapter itself, so as we read these verses we can relate them to those points.

II. EXPLANATION OF THE TITLE

This is the ninth chapter called *The Perfection of Wisdom from the Introduction to the Actions of Bodhisattvas*.

This is the commentary on the ninth chapter called the Perfection of Wisdom, from the commentary on *The Introduction to the Actions of Bodhisattvas*.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
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Edited Version*

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³ See the teaching of 11 November 2008.

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

2 May 2017

As usual, let us spend some time in our regular meditation practice. [Tong-len meditation]

As I mentioned before, if time permits, it will be good for us to recite the dedication chapter together over the following teaching sessions on this chapter. This evening, we can specifically dedicate our recitation to the late John Frigo, who passed away few days ago, and also for Elvira's dad, who is has not been feeling well. With the bodhicitta motivation, let us recite these verses of incredibly powerful aspirational prayers and dedicate the merits accordingly.

If one has actually generated bodhicitta, then this chapter shows how the merits of bodhisattvas are dedicated. The rest of us who are inspired to generate bodhicitta, can at the very least generate the altruistic state of mind thinking, 'May I only benefit sentient beings, not causing the slightest harm to any living being'. Think, 'May all my virtuous deeds become a means for sentient beings to experience only happiness; it is for that purpose that I dedicate all my merits'. The way to dedicate every virtue we have created is explained in this text, which gives us the perfect means to dedicate our virtues.

As we go through explanations of the verses, you'll see how incredibly meticulous and extensive the dedications are. [Recitation of chapter 10]

[To explain the context of the next chapter we need to return to the subdivisions introduced in chapter 1.¹]

2. The actual explanation of the stages of the path

2.2. The method for taking the essence

2.2.2. Explaining the individual meanings²

2.2.2.2. The way of training in the practices of generating the two minds

2.2.2.2.2. The way of training in the actions, the perfections

2.2.2.2.2.1. The way of meditating on conscientiousness, the limb preventing the degeneration of the training in the mind of enlightenment³

2.2.2.2.2.2. Explaining the way of training in morality, by relating it to introspection and mindfulness, the methods for keeping virtuous dharmas pure⁴

2.2.2.2.2.3. Explaining the way of training in the remaining four perfections⁵

2.2.2.2.2.4. Explaining with the limb of dedication the training in the generosity of giving away body possessions and roots of virtue for others

CHAPTER 10: EXPLAINING WITH THE LIMB OF DEDICATION THE TRAINING IN THE GENEROSITY OF GIVING AWAY BODY POSSESSIONS AND ROOTS OF VIRTUE FOR OTHERS

The chapter is subdivided into two:

- I. Explaining the words of the chapter
- II. Explaining the name of the chapter

The commentary clarifies the difference between an aspirational prayer and a dedication, and this is often quoted in other texts.

Whilst the first chapter also presented the practice of generosity, the tenth chapter, as its title indicates, specifically presents the practice of generosity in the form of dedication. Within the six perfections, the perfection of generosity is presented here with the limb of dedication, which is done by dedicating one's body, possessions and root of virtue for the sake of all other mother sentient beings.

I. EXPLAINING THE WORDS OF THE CHAPTER

This first heading is subdivided into:

1. In brief: dedicating that all sentient beings may enter the bodhisattva trainings
2. Elaborate dedication
3. Prostrating by remembering kindness

1. IN BRIEF: DEDICATING THAT ALL SENTIENT BEINGS MAY ENTER THE BODHISATTVA TRAININGS

The brief dedication for all sentient beings to enter the bodhisattva trainings is presented with the first verse.

The verse reads:

1. *By any virtues of my writing the Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Actions May all migrators Enter the bodhisattva's actions.*

Gyaltsab's commentary explains:

The author of the treatise is saying: By any virtue derived from composing this detailed exposition on how to enter the action of bodhisattvas by completely practising the paths of the three beings, the path for one person to attain enlightenment, which is the purpose of all the teachings, and by the virtue derived from explaining, listening to and contemplating the meaning, may all migratory beings practice the bodhisattva trainings accordingly.

Here the commentary highlights that the purpose or essence of all the Buddha's teachings is presented as an entire path for an individual to attain enlightenment through practising the paths of the three scopes. Furthermore, it explains how to dedicate the virtue one derives from explaining, listening and contemplating the meaning of what is presented with the aspiration, *may all the migratory beings practice the bodhisattva trainings accordingly*. This is quite clearly explained as the essential purpose of engaging in virtuous deeds.

As you can see from the dedication, dedicating for the benefit of all other sentient beings is not sullied with even an atom of self-cherishing mind. This is the extent of the altruistic mind that one should develop for an ultimate dedication.

The commentary then quotes from the *Sutra Requested by the Ocean of Wisdom*.

¹ See the teaching of 26 March 2013

² Introduced in the teaching of 2 July 2013

³ Covered in chapter 4, introduced on 25 February 2014

⁴ Covered in chapter 4, introduced on 20 May 2014

⁵ Covered in chapters 6 to 9, introduced on 23 September 2014

From the *Sutra Requested by the Ocean of Wisdom*,

Just like a drop of water fallen into the great ocean
Does not exhaust for as long as the ocean does not
dry up,
The virtue that is thoroughly dedicated towards
enlightenment
Does not exhaust until enlightenment is attained.

The quote from this sutra is presented in many other teachings as it clearly states that even the smallest virtue you accumulate can be dedicated towards enlightenment. The benefits of dedication are presented in the verse with the analogy of *a drop of water fallen into the great ocean*. It *does not exhaust for as long as the ocean does not dry up*. This illustration highlights that even when just one small drop of water merges into the ocean, we cannot possibly say that this particular drop is exhausted until the whole ocean has dried up. Similarly, even the smallest virtuous deed that you accumulate, when dedicated towards the ultimate state of enlightenment, will never be exhausted or wasted.

The commentary further explains:

Upon contemplating the benefits mentioned above, such as that virtue that would otherwise be exhausted in the interim if undedicated, does not become completely exhausted and rather is increased, and that even small virtue brings forth a great result.

This passage shows the importance of dedicating even the smallest virtue that you may have accumulated towards the end of achieving enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. If you were to dedicate your merits only for a certain length of time e.g. 100 years, then when that period is up the accumulated merit would be exhausted. But by dedicating the merit to the highest enlightenment it will never be exhausted. By contemplating its incredible benefits, you'll be motivated to engage in the practice of dedication.

The commentary then quotes from another sutra:

From the *Sutra of the Wisdom Gone Beyond*,
Dedicate all roots of virtue only for omniscient
transcendental wisdom,
And not for the Hearer and Self-Liberator grounds.

This clearly states that whatever virtues you accumulate need to be dedicated only towards the ultimate goal of omniscient transcendental wisdom. While it is a great achievement on a personal level to attain the hearers' or self-liberators' ground (i.e. liberation from cyclic existence just for oneself), dedicating your merits to this end will only assist you achieve that goal; it will not become a source of merit that causes you to achieve omniscience and the highest state of enlightenment. Hence dedication to a lesser goal actually obstructs the virtues from becoming merits that serve as a cause to achieve the ultimate goal of enlightenment. That is why not dedicating to a lesser goal is mentioned here.

To take this instruction on a personal level, whenever we accumulate virtues, we must be mindful not to dedicate them towards our own personal goal of liberation, but rather dedicate all merits towards achieving the ultimate state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. These are profound instructions to keep in mind.

The commentary then states:

These virtues need to be dedicated by being held by the wisdom realising the lack of true existence of the three circles.

This explains the need to ensure that the dedication you make is also held by the wisdom realising emptiness. Whatever merits you accumulate need to be complemented with both accumulations i.e. method, which is the bodhicitta motivation, and wisdom, which is the correct understanding of emptiness.

The commentary then presents the distinction between aspirational prayer and dedication:

Although there is no big difference between dedication and aspirational prayers, a prayer is characterised by an aspiration to obtain a result for that which is aspired for.

While:

A dedication is characterised by an aspiration that transforms a causal virtue into a cause for the desired result.

Apparently this clarification is not presented in many other texts, which is why this passage is often quoted when explaining the difference between dedication and an aspirational prayer. The main point is that aspirational prayers do not necessarily need to be accompanied by actual deeds, i.e. actual virtues one has created. Whereas for a dedication, one needs to have actually engaged in virtue and accumulated merit for it become a cause to obtain a particular goal. Another way to understand the distinction is that whilst all aspirational prayers are not necessarily a dedication, all dedications are by nature aspirational prayers as well.

2. ELABORATE DEDICATION

This is subdivided into three:

- 2.1. Dedication for the purpose of others
- 2.2. Dedication for the purpose of self
- 2.3. Dedication for the increase of the Dharma, the source of happiness

We can feel moved by the very presentation of this outline, as it presents dedication for the purpose of others, dedication for the purpose of oneself and dedication for the increase of the Dharma, which is the source of all happiness. When presented in this way we can see that the outline of the material itself is very inspirational and we can derive a lot of meaning just from going over the outline itself. Indeed Gyaltshab Je, the author of the commentary, was a great master in his own right and we can see his eloquence in his presentation.

2.1 Dedication for the purpose of others

This is subdivided into two parts:

- 2.1.1 Dedicating of the purposes of the world
- 2.1.2 Dedicating for purposes having gone beyond the world

2.1.1 Dedicating of the purposes of the world

This section is further subdivided into four parts:

- 2.1.1.1 Pacification of sufferings such as sickness
- 2.1.1.1 Pacification of sufferings such as sickness
- 2.1.1.3 Dedicating for happy migrations
- 2.1.1.4 Dedicating in a summarised way for the purpose of all sentient beings

2.1.1.1 PACIFICATION OF SUFFERING SUCH AS SICKNESS

This is subdivided into two parts:

2.1.1.1.1 Dedicating for temporary happiness

2.1.1.1.2 Dedicating for ultimate happiness

2.1.1.1.1 Dedicating for temporary happiness

The first to be explained is dedicating for temporary happiness.

The verse reads:

2. *May those found in all directions
Afflicted by suffering in body and mind
Attain an ocean of bliss and happiness
Through my merits.*

The commentary explains:

May those found in all directions, who are held by the sufferings of physical and mental sickness, be liberated from their sickness and be filled with an ocean of physical bliss and mental joy by whatever merits I have for happiness.

As you can see, the dedications are presented with an altruistic mind. *May those found in all directions*, implies one is extending one's scope and dedicating one's merits without any discrimination to all beings in every direction. Not focusing on certain beings, certain locations or certain directions means not leaving out others and shows how encompassing dedications focus on all beings in every direction who might be *suffering physical and mental sicknesses*. For them to be *liberated from their sickness and be filled with an ocean of physical bliss and mental joy by whatever merits I have for happiness*, means whatever merits I have accumulated for my own happiness, I dedicate for others' physical and mental happiness.

2.1.1.1.2. Dedicating for ultimate happiness

The verse reads:

3. *For as long as they are in cyclic existence
May they never fall from happiness.
May migrators attain uninterruptedly
The highest happiness.*

The commentary explains:

May these migrators [referring to all migrators in every direction] never degenerate from happiness until the end of cyclic existence, and in the end, may they attain the unceasing cause for the highest happiness. For the meaning of the first line of the verse, some commentaries explain it as 'until Buddhahood is obtained', however it comes to the same meaning.

This means that by the merits of the conduct of the bodhisattvas, may the migrators *attain unceasing causes for the highest happiness*, or the state of enlightenment.

2.1.1.2. PACIFYING THE SUFFERINGS OF THE LOWER REALMS

This is subdivided into three:

2.1.1.2.1 Pacifying the sufferings of the hells

2.1.1.2.2 Dedicating for animals

2.1.1.2.3 Dedicating for hungry ghosts

2.1.1.2.1. Pacifying the sufferings of the hells

This is subdivided into two:

2.1.1.2.1.1 Dedication for the quick pacification of sufferings

2.1.1.2.1.2 Dedication for pacification through the power of others

2.1.1.2.1.1. Dedication for the quick pacification of sufferings

This is subdivided into three:

2.1.1.2.1.1.1 Pacifying suffering in general

2.1.1.2.1.1.2 Pacifying the sufferings of the cold hells

2.1.1.2.1.1.3 Pacifying the sufferings of the hot hells

2.1.1.2.1.1.1 Pacifying suffering in general

Pacifying suffering in general is presented with the next verse. The verses in this chapter are quite easy to understand, but as with any explanation, if you read through them and try to derive their meaning, they have much more meaning and power.

The verse reads:

4. *May all embodied beings existing
In all the hell realms
Found in the transitory worlds
Be happy and attain bliss through happiness.*

The commentary explains:

May every suffering of every embodied being in all the hot and cold hell realms found in all transitory realms extending to the edge of space be pacified, and may they attain mental joy through the bliss of the Realm of Great Bliss.

With respect to *may every suffering of every embodied being in all the hot and cold hell realms*, recall the classifications of the hells i.e. the eight hot realms and the specific cold hell realms as well. These are mentioned in more detail as all the sufferings experienced in all of these various hell realms extend to the end of space. The dedication is, 'Wherever these sufferings may occur, may all of them be pacified and may the beings *attain mental joy through the bliss of the Realm of Great Bliss*'. Again, we can see that these are very inspirational prayers, and aspirational dedications.

2.1.1.2.1.1.2. Pacifying the sufferings of the cold hells

The first line of the next verse reads:

- 5a. *May those burdened by cold attain warmth.*

The commentary highlights:

May those burdened by the cold of the eight cold hells of blisters and so forth attain the warmth that will generate bliss for them.

The mention of, *those burdened by the cold of the eight cold hells*, again refers to the eight cold hells. Then, *of blisters and so forth attain the warmth that will generate bliss for them*, indicates that as they are suffering from the cold may they obtain warmth to sooth those particular sufferings.

This is again subdivided into four:

2.1.1.2.1.1.3.1 Pacifying suffering with water from the clouds of the two accumulations of bodhisattvas

2.1.1.2.1.1.3.2 Pacifying the sufferings of the neighbouring hells

2.1.1.2.1.1.3.3 Pacifying the sufferings of the actual hells

2.1.1.2.1.1.3.4 Pacifying other sufferings of the neighbouring hells

2.1.1.2.1.1.3.1. Pacifying suffering with water from the clouds of the two accumulations of bodhisattvas

The remaining three lines of the verse read:

- 5bcd. *May infinite water from
The great clouds of bodhisattvas
Refresh the beings oppressed by heat.*

The commentary explains:

May infinite water from the great clouds of compassion, building up the two accumulations of a bodhisattva, refresh those oppressed by heat.

The commentary explains, *may infinite water from the great clouds of compassion, building up the two accumulations*, i.e. the accumulation of merit and accumulation of wisdom, *of a bodhisattva, refresh those oppressed by heat*. Using this analogy of great clouds full of water that pour down as rain, you can visualise the two accumulations of the great bodhisattvas in the form of clouds laden with rain when you read the verses. This is symbolic of nectar, and so when the nectar pours down from the clouds of accumulation it enters into the beings who are experiencing extreme suffering of the hot realms etc. and completely pacifies them and eliminates their sufferings.

2.1.1.2.1.1.3.2 Pacifying the sufferings of the neighbouring hells

This next dedication of pacifying the sufferings of the neighbouring hells introduces the *neighbouring hells* which are situated around the hot hells.

The two verses read:

6. *May also the forests of blade leaves
Become beautiful sandalwood forests.
May the trees or the Shalmari forests
Become wish-fulfilling trees.*
7. *May they be beautified by the melodious
sounds of
White swans and yellow geese and other water
fowl.
Through lakes with greatly scented lotus
flowers
May the places of hell become enjoyable.*

The commentary explains:

May the forests with blade-like leaves, which exist next to the hot hells, become for the sentient beings there beautiful pleasure gardens like the flourishing groves of Indra.

May these trees be beautified by the melodious sounds of white swans, yellow geese and other water fowl. May the places of hell become enjoyable through lakes with greatly scented lotus flowers.

The commentary states that in the hot hells there are forests with blade-like leaves with spiky thorns on both sides of the leaf. They might be a sort of cactus that has spikes on both sides. When beings who dwell in these hells move about they are cut by these leaves. So the dedication is, *May the forest of blade-like leaves actually transform and become beautiful pleasure gardens like the flourishing groves of Indra*. This transformation into beautiful pleasure groves can occur due to the merits the bodhisattvas have accumulated.

The commentary further explains:

May the iron trees of the Shalmari forest, with the thirty-six downward pointing thorns be transformed

into wish-fulfilling trees becoming the source for everything desired.

An abode called the Shalmari forest is said to have downward-pointing thorns which are like swords. When beings are below a tree, they hear sounds that beckon them to climb upwards, but when they go up they are severely cut by sword-like thorns that point downwards. Then once they reach the top they are beckoned down, but when they go down the sword-like thorns point upwards, and they are cut again. There are detailed descriptions on this in the lam-rim teachings.

The dedication here is, 'May these razor-blade trees which cause so much agony and suffering in this abode, turn into wish-fulfilling trees'. A wish-fulfilling tree allows whatever one desires to magically appear, so this is a dedication for these trees that cause so much suffering to transform into wish fulfilling trees that only bring joy.

Furthermore, once these trees have been transformed into beautiful wish-fulfilling trees, the verse says *May they be beautified by the melodious sounds of white swans, yellow geese and other water fowl*. In conclusion, *May the places of hell become enjoyable through lakes with greatly scented lotus flowers*.

These descriptions create a very good visualisation and a sense of joy, and we can use them as a form of meditation. When your mind is filled with suffering and you are feeling weighed down and uncomfortable, then when you envision places of bliss and happiness for others it helps you too. Furthermore, doing these dedications can also become a cause to diminish the negativities to be reborn in these extreme levels of sufferings that we have created for ourselves. One can incorporate all these visualisations into one's dedication.

2.1.1.2.1.1.3.3. Pacifying the sufferings of the actual hells

The next two verses read:

8. *May the heaps of burning coals become heaps
of jewels.
May the burning ground become like a crystal
ground.
May the grinding mountains become the
crystal palace
Of offerings, and be filled with Ones Gone To
Bliss.*
9. *May the rain of leaves, embers and weapons
Become forthwith a rain of flowers.
May those cutting each other with knives,
Forthwith throw flowers for fun.*

The commentary explains:

May also the heaps of burning coals in the hot hells become heaps of jewels. May also the burning iron ground become like a pleasant crystal ground. May the ram-like grinding mountains, between which one becomes crushed, transform into the crystal bathing house filled with Ones Gone To Bliss.

May the rain of fire leaves, embers and weapons transform forthwith into a rain of flowers. May those in the reviving hells, who slice each other with knives, throw instead flowers at each other for fun.

The first verse says, *may the heaps of burning coals become heaps of jewels*. The hot hells explained here

have burning grounds, like red-hot sheets of metal. So the dedication here is, *May this burning iron ground transform into pleasant crystal ground.*

Then there are the grinding mountains, which are *ram-like* because they are like the heads of two rams colliding when they fight. These mountains are called *grinding* or *crushing mountains* because beings caught between them are completely crushed. We dedicate that these mountains transform into a crystal bathing house filled with Ones Gone to Bliss, a pleasant blissful abode where only buddhas are present.

In the explanation of the second verse, *may the rain of the fire leaves, embers and weapons* is an aspiration for these hot hells to *transform forth with into rain of flowers.*

Next is a dedication to pacify the reviving hells. Those reborn in this hell are in constant combat with each other using various weapons like swords etc. They fight and pierce each other with their weapons, falling to the ground with cuts and lacerations, but then they all revive again and start to fight all over again. And so it goes on and on. The dedication here is, 'For those who are reborn in this hell, may their weapons transform into flowers, and instead of using them against each other, may they instead engage in the playful gesture of throwing flowers at each other'. This is the aim of the dedication.

There are similar battles happening here on earth, where we see people constantly fighting each other and trying to destroy each other with various weapons. It is good to also reflect on that reality.

2.1.1.2.1.1.3.4. Pacifying other sufferings of the neighbouring hells

The verse reads:

*10. May those sinking in Vaitarani, equalling a fire pit,
Their bones, the flesh boiled off, in the colour of
the Kunda flower,
Through the power of my virtue attain the body
of a god,
Enjoying themselves with goddesses.*

The commentary states:

May also those sinking in the wrathful boiling waters of Vaitarani, the bank-less river of ash and boiling water, whose bones, with the flesh boiled off, are in the colour of the Kunda flower, attain the perfect body of a god through the power of my virtue, enjoying themselves with goddesses in a bathing pool.

May those who are sinking in the wrathful boiling waters of Vaitarani describes beings in hell realms being boiled in a cauldron of molten liquid iron, which is extremely hot. It brings to mind an image of something similar to lava from a volcano, which is basically molten rock. If beings are boiled a cauldron of liquid iron, their flesh is burnt away and their bones are completely exposed. Even the bones disintegrate into ashes. The dedication for those experiencing such extreme sufferings in these hell realms is, *May they attain the perfect body of a god through the power of my virtue, enjoying themselves with goddesses in a bathing pool.* Rather than experiencing extreme sufferings in the boiling cauldron, may the molten iron transform into pleasant water giving them the sense pleasures of the gods and goddesses.

2.1.1.2.1.2. Dedication for pacification through the power of others

The four subdivisions are:

2.1.1.2.1.2.1. Vajrapani pacifying suffering through power

2.1.1.2.1.2.2. Chenrezig pacifying suffering through compassion

2.1.1.2.1.2.3. Manjushri pacifying sufferings with emanations

2.1.1.2.1.2.4. The other close disciples pacifying suffering with ability

As indicated in the following outlines, Vajrapani pacifies suffering through power; Chenrezig pacifies suffering through compassion; and Manjushri pacifies suffering with emanations. The 'other close disciples' pacify suffering with ability. These are very meticulously presented.

If we take the concepts presented in the text and the commentary on a personal level, we can see that making a connection with deities such as Vajrapani, Chenrezig and Manjushri can have a very long-lasting positive effect for us. Even if we have to experience the results of our previous karmas with extreme suffering, then due to the power of our connection and prayers now, our sufferings will be quickly pacified. We should recognise the great fortune we have in making a connection with these deities now.

As will be covered later in the text, hell beings, who have the particular karma to see Manjushri, see him and call out to other hell beings to come quickly and see Manjushri. These are indications that even if reborn in the hell realms, positive karmic connections are still there, which occur due to the power of one's previous imprints of positive karma. Such miraculous things can happen. Take this into account when doing prayers for the deceased. Making strong prayers to Avalokiteshvara, and making requests for the being to be liberated from the unfortunate realms will have a definite positive effect. It will also have a positive effect for you, as well as the deceased, when you do this visualisation with strong faith and devotion. When we do these aspirational prayers, it will definitely have a positive effect for the deceased, so it is good to keep that in mind.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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Edited Version*

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

9 May 2017

As usual, let us devote some time to our regular tong-len meditation practice. [*tong-ten meditation*]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings based on the bodhicitta intention.

We'll begin by reciting the tenth chapter together. As mentioned previously, when we recite these verses it is good to incorporate one's own virtues in the dedication: 'whatever virtues I've created in the past, whatever virtues that I'm creating now in the present and whatever virtues I will create in the future, I dedicate towards the ends of the aspirations just as they are presented in this chapter'.

2.1.1.2.1.2. Dedication for the pacification through the power of others

There are four subdivisions:

2.1.1.2.1.2.1. Dedicating for the pacification of suffering through the power of Vajrapani

2.1.1.2.1.2.2. Dedicating for the pacification of suffering through the compassion of Chenrezig

2.1.1.2.1.2.3. Dedicating for the pacification of suffering through emanations of Manjushri

2.1.1.2.1.2.4. Dedicating for the pacification of suffering through the ability of the other close disciples

2.1.1.2.1.2.1. Dedicating for the pacification of suffering through the power of Vajrapani

Vajrapani is an embodiment of the power of all enlightened beings, so he is regarded as an incredibly powerful deity. Practices relying on Vajrapani are said to be very effective for eliminating various types of diseases and obstacles.

It might be appropriate to relate a true story here, which I felt was an obvious and clear sign of the power of Vajrapani. In 1984 I went up to Chenrezig for a teaching session. I was informed that a young Tibetan man who was married to an Australian was attending the teaching. Later I found out that I knew the man, whose name is Thubten Gendun. His wife Felicity was stricken with a disease on her leg for which there was no known cure.

In 1985, Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey-la was visiting Australia giving teachings and initiations. When he bestowed the Vajrapani initiation Thubten Gendun and Felicity were both present, and after receiving that initiation Felicity's leg (previously believed to be incurable) was completely cured. She is able to walk and no longer needs a wheelchair. Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey-la later said to her, 'Vajrapani turned out to be the most powerful remedy to cure your disease'.

These kinds of practices in relation to powerful deities definitely have a positive effect for some diseases that otherwise seem to be incurable, or for which a treatment has not been found. Of course, one would also need to

have the karma for that practice to be effective, but nevertheless it does definitely seem to have a positive effect.

There was once an American nun at Tara House called Konchog Drolma – Bonnie was her American name. Later she lived in Dharamsala for many years. At one time she apparently had a stomach ailment which could not be cured by any kind of medication. Then she visited Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey. Again through the practices given to her by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, she was completely cured. Apparently this occurred on two different occasions with two different complications! Her faith in Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey-la was unwavering and very strong. She said, 'I don't think there is anyone as powerful as Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey'. Through the advice of Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, those diseases and obstacles were removed.

Vajrapani, Chenrezig and Manjushri are also referred to as the three supreme lineage protectors. Vajrapani is from the lineage of the vajra family, Chenrezig from the lotus family, and Manjushri is of the Tathagata family. Although I'm not 100% certain, it may be that they are called the supreme protectors of the three lineages because each one of them represents a particular lineage.

Here the dedication is for the alleviation of the sufferings of sentient beings through the power of Vajrapani. On a personal level, faith and a strong connection with Vajrapani and the other deities can definitely have a very powerful effect on removing personal obstacles and so forth.

Both the relevant verse and the explanation in the commentary are quite clear.

11. *Thinking, "Why be afraid here of the lord of death's men, crows and vultures?*

The power creating bliss and happiness dispelling darkness completely, Whose power is this wholesomeness?"

They look up, and see Vajrapani blazing in the centre of the sky. May they accompany him as their joy purifies their negativities.

The commentary reads:

May sentient beings of the hell realms suddenly be freed from their sufferings, making them wonder, 'Why am I now free from the terrifying men, crows and vultures of the lord of death who harm me in this abode of hell. Whose is this wholesome power that creates physical bliss and mental happiness dispelling all darkness completely?' and when they look up into the sky see Vajrapani blazing with splendour in the centre of the sky. May they take refuge in this protector and the power of their extreme joy free them from their previously accumulated negativities and may they then accompany him.

Hell realms are not unique to Buddhism. Other religious traditions such as Christianity believe in hell realms as well. I've heard that some Greek Orthodox churches even have icons representing the hells. Also the Hindu tradition believes in the hell realms.

When beings in the hell realms suddenly find themselves free from suffering, they would wonder, 'Why am I free of these terrifying men, crows and vultures of the lord of death?' We can see these ferocious beings such as the terrifying

guardians and vultures with iron beaks that are depicted in the drawings of the hell realms. Due to the karma of the beings in the hell realms they are confronted by these terrifying denizens of the hells, such as vultures with iron beaks and terrifying guards and so forth. When that cause of so much pain and suffering suddenly disappears, they again wonder, 'Whose is this wholesome power that creates physical bliss and mental happiness? How has this come about?'. And when they look up into the sky they see Vajrapani blazing with splendour.

In one of the various manifestations of Vajrapani, known as the 'holder of the secret', he is lifting up a vajra with his hand facing outwards, and has a wrathful aspect. This manifestation of Vajrapani seems to be the one referred to here as blazing with splendour.

The aspiration here is for the beings in the hell realms to take refuge in the protector, Vajrapani, and through the power of their extreme joy free themselves from their previously accumulated negativities, and then accompany Vajrapani in great splendour and bliss and happiness. This is the extent of the aspirations in this verse.

2.1.1.2.1.2.2. Dedicating for the pacification of suffering through the compassion of Chenrezig

Chenrezig is an incredibly significant deity, who is the embodiment of the compassion of all enlightened beings. Relying on Chenrezig is said to be incredibly effective in subduing an otherwise unruly and unsubdued mind.

When you make supplications to Chenrezig while reciting the six-syllable mantra OM MANI PADME HUM and visualising your mind as being inseparable from the mind of Chenrezig, you will find this to be very effective method to settle down your agitated mind.

The aspirations in the verse and the explanation in the commentary are quite clear, so we don't need to spend too much time explaining them.

The verse reads:

12. *Having seen the fires of hell extinguished
By a splattering rain of flowers mixed with
scented water,
The hell beings wonder where this sudden
satisfaction of happiness
Came from, and see the One Holding a Lotus in
His Hand.*

The commentary explains:

Further, having seen the fires of hell extinguished by a splattering rain of flowers mixed with scented water, the hell beings wonder what the cause was for this sudden satisfaction of happiness. When they look around may they then see Chenrezig, who holds a lotus flower in his hands.

The aspiration here is to alleviate the sufferings of the hell beings. *Having seen the fires of hell extinguished by a splattering rain of flowers mixed with scented water* indicates a blessing from Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezig). Due to this blessing of Avalokiteshvara all the causes of suffering in the hell realms are transformed when a *splattering flowers mixed with scented water* rains down on them. The hell beings then wonder *what is the cause for this sudden satisfaction of happiness?* When they look around for the source, *may they see Chenrezig, who holds a lotus flower in his hands.*

2.1.1.2.1.2.3. Dedicating for the pacification of suffering through emanations of Manjushri

Manjushri is regarded as the essence of the wisdom of all enlightened beings. So here we make supplications to and rely on Manjushri as the enlightened being who is the source of all wisdom.

There are two verses under this heading.

The first reads:

13. *Friends, come hither, far away from the
dangerous ones. May all go
To him, by whose power they shall be free from
all sufferings and enraptured in the power
of joy,
Who generates bodhicitta and love, to rescue
all migrators.
Who will come to the youthful one with the
radiant top knot eliminating all fears?*

The commentary explains:

Some beckon their friends, 'Come here, come here, far away from the dangerous ones of hell. May all go to him, by whose power they shall be free from all sufferings of the body, and all mental fears, and thus be enraptured in the power of joy. He, who is the light and loving mother rescuing all migrators, the youthful one with the radiating crown protrusion who frees our minds from fear.'

The implication here is that some hell beings, having been suddenly affected by a powerful blissful experience, call over to the other hell beings saying 'Friends, come here, come here quickly, there is no danger here! It is a place free from danger and the sufferings of hell'. Through the power of Manjushri may they be free from all sufferings of the body, and all mental fears, and thus be enraptured in the power of joy.

Manjushri is described as *he, who is the light and loving mother rescuing all migrators, the youthful one with the radiating crown protrusion who frees our minds from fear.* The crown protrusion refers to the five layers of the top knot on Manjushri's head, which is one of the marks of an enlightened being.

The next verse under the same heading reads:

14. *A hundred gods make offerings to his lotus feet
with their crowns,
Eyes moistened with compassion, diverse
flower bouquets raining down on his
crown,
Hundred-thousands of goddesses in towering
buildings singing praises, behold him!
Having seen Manjushri like this may their
hellish minds emerge.*

The commentary then explains:

Friends, behold the one to whom a hundred gods make offerings to his lotus feet with their crowns, who has eyes moist with compassion, on whose crown diverse flower bouquets are raining down and who is praised by hundred-thousands of goddesses from towering buildings with verses and music. May the sentient beings of the hell realms be placed in the laughter of joy upon seeing the Melodious One who bestows breath.

Again, the verse and the explanation are quite clear so there's no need for further explanation.

2.1.1.2.1.2.4. *Dedicating for the pacification of suffering through the ability of the other close disciples*

'Other close disciples' actually refer to the eight close disciples of the Buddha who are in the aspect of bodhisattvas.

The verse under heading this reads:

15. *Thus, by the roots of my merits,
May the hell sentient beings be delighted
By seeing fresh, fragrant and blissful rain
falling from the unobscured
Clouds of the bodhisattvas Samantabhadra
and so forth.*

As the commentary explains

Thus, by the roots of my merits, may from the unobstructed clouds of the bodhisattvas Samantabhadra, Maitreya, Sainyingpo, Namkhai, Nyingpo and so forth, these bodhisattvas with powerful prayers, a blissful rain, fresh and fragrant, fall. May the hell beings, upon seeing this rain, be delighted.

The Sanskrit names are: Kshitigarbha; Akashagarbha, and Sarvanivaranavishkambhin respectively. These are three of the eight close disciples of the Buddha, who are said to have manifested as bodhisattvas at the time of the Buddha. The other five are the earlier three, Manjushri, Vajrapani and Avalokiteshvara, along with the bodhisattvas Samantabhadra, and Maitreya.

2.1.1.2.2. *Dedicating for the sufferings of animals to be pacified*

The aspirations presented in the following passages are very important to bear in mind as we contemplate the sufferings in the different realms. We can see how the text includes dedications to beings in all six realms from the hot hell realms through the cold hell realms and the neighbouring hell realms. Then there are the sufferings of animals, the sufferings of hungry ghosts and the sufferings of humans.

The two lines of verse for this heading are:

- 16ab. *May animals be free from the
Fear of eating each other.*

Then the commentary explains:

May, in dependence on each and every root of merit of myself and others, the animals be free from the fear of eating one another.

Although mentioned very briefly here, the sufferings of animals are very obvious and take many forms. In the wild, there is the constant suffering of bigger animals preying on smaller animals. Even those that prey on animals are themselves preyed upon by other animals. That form of suffering is continuous. Humans also inflict a lot of suffering on animals used as beasts of burden, and for heavy work and so forth. When we look around, animals are in a pitiful state due to their extreme suffering. So when we engage in any virtue, it is very meaningful to make strong dedications for the suffering of animals to be completely eliminated.

Contemplating the various types of suffering experienced by animals will naturally lead to a deeper sense of compassion, wishing that they be free from these sufferings. Then we will very naturally and spontaneously dedicate our virtue towards that end.

Here, the text is very meticulously explaining the way to generate compassion and to do something meaningful with it by accumulating virtue and dedicating it. There are so many ways of meditating in this way, which can be very effective for naturally subduing and calming our unruly mind.

If we don't include these practices into our meditation, then of course there is no way that they will move our mind, and we won't see any benefit. We will however benefit if we actually work at putting them into practice. As said before, we can relate to the sufferings of animals as we are surrounded by them. There's nothing obscure about this as we share the same abode, and the same planet: we are so closely associated with animals that we cannot avoid seeing their suffering. We also have the ability to free them from some suffering, especially our immediate pets. If we care for our dogs and cats we are helping them to have a better life, thus making their life a little bit more meaningful.

In fact it is right that we care for animals, as our survival very much depends on them. At an immediate and obvious level our clothing, food and so many other products come from animals. Even within our body, our immune system is very much dependent on bacteria if it is to function well. On that level the animals within our bodies are keeping us alive. So we can see how dependent we are on animals.

2.1.1.2.3. *Dedicating for hungry ghosts*

The second two lines of the earlier verse, and the next verse read:

- 16cd. *May all hungry ghosts be as happy
As the people in Draminyen.*
17. *May the hungry ghosts be satisfied
By a stream of milk flowing down
From the hand of the powerful transcendent
Chenrezig
And be refreshed forever by the bath.*

The commentary explains:

May the hungry ghosts be as happy as the people in Draminyen, who receive food, clothing and possessions merely by wishing for them.

May a stream of nectar milk flowing down from the hand of the powerful transcendent Chenrezig satisfy the hunger and thirst of the hungry ghosts, and may they be refreshed forever by bathing in it.

The commentary then explains quite clearly *may the hungry ghosts be as happy as the people in Draminyen* (the continent called Uttarakuru in Sanskrit) *who receive food, clothing and possessions merely by wishing for them*. The aspiration is for the hungry ghosts to achieve whatever they desire and be relieved from their sufferings of hunger and thirst.

Furthermore, *may a stream of nectar milk flowing down from the hand of the powerful transcendent Chenrezig satisfy the hunger and thirst of the hungry ghosts*. As a visualisation practice it is good to visualise the eleven-faced manifestation Avalokiteshvara with one of his hands holding a vase filled with nectar, which flows down to the hungry ghosts below relieving them of their thirst.

May they be refreshed forever by bathing in it. Here bathing relates to the bathing house that is visualised when we

make the offering of a bath, which was extensively explained in Chapter Three. During an Easter course we did a visualisation of a bathing house where after the enlightened beings have bathed, the water is then used to satisfy beings such as the hungry ghosts. These are visualisations that one can do.

2.1.1.3. DEDICATING FOR HAPPY MIGRATIONS

Having made dedications for the sufferings of the three lower realms to be alleviated, the text now turns to making dedications for happy migrations, which includes the desire realms.

This is subdivided into two:

2.1.1.3.1. Dedicating to be free from suffering

2.1.1.3.2. Dedicating to achieve their purpose

2.1.1.3.1. *Dedication to be free from suffering*

This has four subdivisions which meticulously relate the aspirations to the particular types of sufferings experienced in higher rebirths.

2.1.1.3.1.1. Dedicating to be without incomplete organs and the pain of childbirth

2.1.1.3.1.2. Dedicating to be without the suffering of poverty and mental suffering

2.1.1.3.1.3. Dedicating to be without the sufferings of sickness and encountering hate

2.1.1.3.1.4. Dedicating for the sufferings of travellers and non-human harms to be pacified

2.1.1.3.1.1. *Dedicating to be without incomplete organs and the pain of childbirth*

The verse reads:

18. *May the blind see with their eyes,
And the deaf always hear sounds.
Like the magical goddesses.
May pregnant women safely give birth.*

The commentary explains:

May the blind behold forms with their eyes, and may the deaf always hear sounds. Like the magical goddess, may pregnant women safely give birth.

Here *incomplete organs* refers to congenital defects of organs that are associated with a precious human rebirth, rather than becoming blind or deaf due to secondary circumstances. So *blind* refers to being blind from the time of birth and *deaf* from birth. When people lack these organs, they endure suffering that those with complete organs do not experience. The aspirations here are for the blind to be able to see and the deaf to be able to hear. Of course, this aspiration can also include those whose organs are defective due to later causes.

The term literally translated here as *magical goddess*, refers to Mayadevi who was mother of Prince Siddhartha. When she gave birth to him, it was a miraculous birth which didn't involve any labour pains. Therefore the aspiration here is, 'May all women giving birth also be free from the pain of childbirth'. Those of you who are mothers will know this extreme form of suffering, but the rest of us can only try to imagine what the pain of childbirth may be like.

2.1.1.3.1.2. *Dedicating to be without suffering of poverty and mental suffering*

One can dedicate for others to be free from mental suffering and the suffering of poverty. This also includes our own future. The verse relating to this is:

19. *May the naked ones receive clothes
The hungry get food, and may
The thirsty get water
And tasty drinks.*

The commentary explains:

May the naked ones receive clothing, the hungry food of perfect colour, smell and taste, and may the thirsty receive water and other tasty drinks.

Again, the commentary is quite clear. *The naked ones* refers to those who are deprived of clothing. The aspiration is 'May those who are deprived of clothing actually receive adequate clothing'. The next aspiration is for *the hungry to find food which is of perfect colour, smell and taste*. This supports what I've mentioned before: reciting OM AH HUM clears away the bad, foul colours and smell and taste, and consecrates and purifies the offering of food and drink one makes.

A similar aspiration is the dedication, 'May all find the food and drink that is most suitable', which might be coffee or tea or even alcohol. The main thing is that whatever they consume is tasty! If they have something that is not tasty, then it is not enjoyable. So the aspiration is not only may they be sustained by food, but may their food and drink be tasty as well. We can all relate to that can't we?

We may wonder, 'How, can I possibly benefit others in these extensive ways?' as we do not see any immediate benefit from making these incredibly powerful aspirations. Although we may not see any immediate benefit, these aspirations will definitely reap a positive effect at future time when we do have the ability to help others. For example, while doctors may have the same qualifications, some can more effectively treat patients than others. Their patients are more receptive to their help and so they can help their patients to a greater extent. These are the consequences of previous strong aspirations of really wanting to benefit others. The main thing is that we have this strong wish to benefit others, and when the time comes and we have all the right conditions then we will be able to effectively benefit the other according to their wishes.

However, there are some things we can do now. If we come across someone who does not have any clothes and we have an extra piece of clothing, we can easily give it to them to protect them from the cold. That is not beyond our capacity right now. Giving food to those who are hungry is also something we can do. The implication of 'food' in this context is that it wouldn't be a true act of generosity if we were to give food that we cannot consume ourselves, e.g. out of date food and so forth. Giving away food because we don't wish to consume it ourselves is not really an act of generosity. The implication in this verse is that the food we give is food that we would eat ourselves. If we were to see someone who is hungry, we should be willing to share our food with others. That is how we can benefit others now.

Those of us who believe in future lives need to understand that these aspirations are ways of implanting the seeds to have a greater capacity to be able to benefit others in our future lives – if, that is, we were to be reborn again as a human. Then, due to the aspirations we make and the virtues we collect now, we will be in a much better position to be able to benefit others than we are now. Thinking, ‘Oh, I can’t see any change in my capacity to be able to help others, so what purpose do these aspirations serve?’ is a very limited view. Since we believe in past and future lives, we need to have a broader understanding of this aspiration by seeing the benefits for our future lives.

The next verse under the same heading is:

20. *May the destitute attain wealth.
May the miserable and downtrodden attain joy.
May the depressed be uplifted
And become perfectly stable.*

The commentary explains:

May the destitute lacking possessions attain wealth. May the miserable and downtrodden who are separated from what they wish for attain mental happiness. May the depressed whose fortunes degenerated be mentally restored and attain the excellent and complete stability where they cannot be harmed by suffering or mental unhappiness.

As the commentary explains quite clearly, *may the destitute lacking possessions attain wealth. May the miserable and downtrodden who lack what they wish for find mental happiness. May the depressed whose fortunes have degenerated be mentally restored and attain the excellent and complete stability where they cannot be harmed by suffering or mental unhappiness.* This is all very clear.

2.1.1.3.1.3. *Dedicating to be without the suffering of sickness and not encounter hate.*

The two verses under this heading read:

21. *May all sick sentient beings quickly
Be liberated from their sicknesses.
May all the sicknesses of all migratory beings
Be eternally banished forever.*
22. *May the frightened be without danger.
May serfs become liberated.
May the powerless become empowered
With beautiful minds.*

Then the commentary explains:

By the power of whatever virtue there is of myself and others, may all sick sentient beings quickly be liberated from their sickness, and may all the physical and mental sufferings of migrators be banished forever. May those that are in fear of an enemy be without fear. May serfs, who are bound by others and lack independence and freedom, be liberated from their bondage. May the powerless gain power and strength, and be endowed with the beautiful mind of mutually benefitting each other.

The earlier part of the explanation is clear. At the end *beautiful mind* is another way of saying a compassionate mind. So the aspiration is ‘*May they be endowed with a compassionate mind of mutually benefitting each other*’. That is the main point.

2.1.1.3.1.4. *Dedicating for the sufferings of travellers and non-human harms to be pacified*

This dedication is for the suffering travellers to be overcome, as well harms from non-humans like spirits and so forth to be pacified.

The first verse under this heading reads:

23. *May all the travellers
Encounter happiness wherever they go.
May the purpose for which they set out
Be accomplished effortlessly.*

The commentary explains:

May all travellers of the ten directions, such as traders and so forth, be happy wherever they go, and may they achieve the purpose of their journey effortlessly.

This is quite clear so there is no need for further explanation on this point.

The next verse reads:

24. *May those who sail on boats and ships,
Achieve their aims according to their wishes.
May they safely reach the shore of their
destination
And joyfully reunite with their family.*

The commentary explains:

May those who set out on the ocean on small boats and big ships to find riches such as jewels, achieve their aims according to their wishes. May they then safely reach the shore and be happily reunited with their family.

Again, this is quite clear. We can all relate these accounts to our own wishes. This is basically wishing for the wishes of others to be fulfilled.

Then the third verse reads:

25. *May those wandering circuitous fearful desert routes,
Meet with travellers,
And be free from dangers such as bandits,
thieves, or tigers.
May they be able to walk their paths untiringly
and happily.*

The commentary explains:

May those who wander on circuitous fearful routes in sandy deserts, meet with travellers who give them a fresh breath of hope, and may they then be able to walk their paths untiringly and happily, free from dangers such as bandits, thieves or tigers.

This is also quite clearly explained. When we relate it to our own experiences, we can recall our feelings of anxiety and fear when we have travelled an unfamiliar route. If we become lost, especially if it’s deep in a forest or in a deserted area, we become anxious and panic about the uncertainties of the place. Just as we experienced unease and discomfort on such occasions, we are making aspirations for others to be free from becoming lost while on their travels. Wishing them to be *free from the dangers such as bandits, thieves* and wild animals like *tigers* is quite clear.

The final verse under this heading reads:

26. *May those in the wilderness without paths,
fearful and miserable,
Those without protector, the children and
elderly,
Whose minds are deluded by sleep or totally
crazy,
May all of these be looked after by the gods.*

Then the commentary explains:

May children, the elderly, those without protector, whose minds are deluded by sleep or totally crazy, who are lost in isolated wilderness without paths, be looked after and guided by the gods of the white side.

Again the first part of the aspiration is quite clear. *Gods of the white side* refers to gods who support the Dharma. It is also said that these are the gods who help those who are engaged in Dharma practice.

2.1.1.3.2. Dedication to achieve their purpose

This is subdivided into two.

2.1.1.3.2.1. General human purpose

2.1.1.3.2.2. Purpose of ordained ones

We can see here again this meticulous presentation of the different levels of the aspirations. In the human realms there is the laity and those who are ordained.

2.1.1.3.2.1. Dedication for the general human purpose

This is subdivided into three:

2.1.1.3.2.1.1. Attaining perfect excellence

2.1.1.3.2.1.2. Entering a correct path

2.1.1.3.2.1.3. Having temporary endowments and happiness

2.1.1.3.2.1.1. Attaining perfect excellence

This is subdivided into four:

2.1.1.3.2.1.1.1. Attaining a basis with freedoms and endowments with perfect possessions

2.1.1.3.2.1.1.2. Being free from harm and attaining perfect splendour

2.1.1.3.2.1.1.3. Attaining a perfect form and progressing from inferiority to greatness

2.1.1.3.2.1.1.4. Dedication for perfect virtue

2.1.1.3.2.1.1.1. Attaining a basis with freedoms and endowments with perfect possessions

The next verse and a half relate to this:

27. *May they be liberated from all inopportune
states,
Be endowed with faith, wisdom, and
compassion.
Always having perfect food and actions,
May they always be aware of their lifetimes.*

*28ab. May they receive unceasing wealth
Equalling the space-like treasure.*

The commentary explains:

May they always be free from the eight inopportune states for Dharma practice, and endowed with faith, wisdom and compassion thinking about the welfare of others. Having attained perfect food and actions, may they always remember their lifetimes. May all who are destitute of possessions receive an unceasing stream of possessions, equalling the concentration of space treasure.

When the commentary explains, *may they always be free from the eight inopportune states for Dharma practice* it is referring to being endowed with the eight freedoms. This aspiration is for others to *endowed with faith, wisdom and compassion* which is *thinking about the welfare of others*.

Furthermore, as well as having these conditions of *having attained perfect food and activity*, *may they also always remember their lifetimes*. *May all who are destitute of possessions receive an unceasing stream of possessions, equalling the concentration of space treasure*. Here *space treasure* refers to an inexhaustible treasure house where one can take from it whatever one wishes for, and there is always more to take.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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Edited Version

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

16 May 2017

While maintaining the motivation we generated during the prayers, we can now engage in our regular meditation practice. [*tong-len meditation*]

In the same way that we have briefly engaged in the *ton-glen* meditation just now, we should try to make it part of our daily practice. As I've mentioned previously, when the *tong-len* visualisation is combined with the breath, it is good for the breathing to be a bit more laboured: when visualising taking in others' sufferings you breathe in heavily, and when visualising giving away your happiness, along with your body, possessions and virtues, you breathe out heavily.

So the measure of the breathing for this practice is different to when we do the practice of single-pointedly focusing on the breath. It would be hard to combine the technique used in our normal breathing meditation practice, where we attempt to just focus on the breath, with the *ton-glen* practice as the two techniques are not quite the same. With the *tong-len* practice, we need to imagine that we are intentionally and willingly taking in the sufferings of others, and intentionally and willingly giving away our happiness, so more vigour is needed.

As in our previous sessions, let us first recite the dedication chapter together, based on the bodhicitta motivation that we generated earlier. Indeed, the very first verse of chapter 10 relates to bodhicitta, so it is an essential reminder to first generate the bodhicitta motivation, and then recite the aspirational verses of dedication while holding that motivation. When we generate the bodhicitta motivation, the practice of giving and dedicating becomes the perfection of generosity. It is good to know how that practice becomes a perfection.

The first verse of the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* reads:

*By any virtues of my writing the
Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Actions
May all migrators
Enter the bodhisattva's actions.*

While this dedication specifically relates to the composition of the text, it encompasses all bodhisattva actions, which should be dedicated in a similar manner. It is good to really try to contemplate the meaning of the verses and incorporate that understanding into one's recitation. This chapter presents a very good example of how to dedicate whatever virtues we accumulate. [*Recitation*]

The motivation we generated earlier will suffice as the motivation for receiving the teachings as well.

2.1.1.3.2.1.1. Attaining perfect excellence (cont.)

2.1.1.3.2.1.1.2. Dedication for being free from harm and attaining perfect splendour

Here, Shantideva relates to the various forms of suffering. It shows he's aware of the many different levels and types of suffering; he includes every type of suffering to be eliminated. He is also dedicating for sentient beings to be free from harm and to attain splendour. This dedication and those following are done out of great compassion – not being

able to bear seeing others suffering in numerous ways, then dedicating any accumulated virtues for the wellbeing of other sentient beings.

The verse reads:

*28cd. May they live together without quarrels and arguments.
May they, without harmfulness, attain independence.*

*29ab. May sentient beings with little splendour
Achieve great splendour.*

The commentary explains:

May they live together harmoniously, without quarrels, and may they live independently, without experiencing harm. May those of little splendour who are the object of ridicule, achieve great splendour.

We can also take this dedication as a personal instruction on how to live harmoniously with others: *may they live together harmoniously, without quarrels, and may they live independently.* This is the way to live with others without having conflict.

The second sentence reads: *may those of little splendour who are the object of ridicule, achieve great splendour.* I find this to be a significant point. It is a pitiful situation when others are ridiculed by those stronger than them, either in strength or in status. When I see the weak being bullied or taken advantage of, I immediately feel very uncomfortable. I've always felt like this. As I've shared in the past, when I was young, I had a few fights. Usually, the fights were because I was taking sides when I saw stronger kids bullying the younger ones. I would always take the side of the weaker ones, and try to fight back against the bullies.

We need to also be mindful to live harmoniously with others in our own lives. Although we consider ourselves to be Dharma practitioners, often, if we are not careful, we can start to quarrel with other practitioners out of jealousy, or find fault with, or criticise, them. It happens in every religious tradition; rivalry occurs, even in a religious context. Therefore, we need to be mindful.

These states of mind – jealousy, ridiculing others, or criticising them – come from not really paying attention to the purpose of our Dharma practice. Thus, if we practise Dharma and dedicate that practice in the ways mentioned here, it will prevent those unruly states of mind from arising. So, we really need to be mindful and take this as a personal instruction.

2.1.1.3.2.1.1.2..3. Dedication for attaining a perfect form and progressing from inferiority to greatness

*29cd. May those with wretched bodies such as ascetics
Have beautiful completely perfect and whole bodies.*

*30. May all women existing in the worlds
Become solely men.
May the low achieve high status
And abandon pride as well.*

The commentary reads:

May all those, who with wretched bodies, such as ascetics whose bodies are tormented by heat and cold, have beautiful, completely perfect and whole bodies. May all women in the worlds become men. May all those of low caste achieve a higher status, and abandon pride despite this attainment.

The first part is quite clear: *May all those, who with wretched bodies, those who are downtrodden or their bodies are weak, such as ascetics whose bodies are tormented by heat and cold, have beautiful, completely perfect and whole bodies.*

The next part requires some explanation; otherwise, there is a lot of room for misinterpretation. *May all women in the worlds become men.* If one has a proper understanding, this point will not affect one's mind. Otherwise some may use this one line as a reason to criticise the whole work of Shantideva. Those who don't have a good, broad, deep understanding of the Dharma would find reason to create a negative mind and start being critical.

Even if one were to take this literally, I would add another line, which is 'And may all men become like women'. The Buddha mentioned in another teaching that there are no men who would not desire women, and no women who would not desire men. From this perspective, desire refers to desiring the qualities of the other. In that sense, it is the same thing: all men would desire the unique qualities in women, and all women would desire the unique qualities in men.

In relation to the actual implication here, 'women' would not refer to all women in general, but to women suffering from adverse conditions, such as those who are mistreated, or have no power, or have no real independence, but are dominated by others. Even to this day, we can see this situation occurring in many parts of the world. I've heard that in some countries, women are completely dominated by men, and have no opportunity for individual independence, or even studying or pursuing a personal career, and so forth. These are really unfortunate circumstances.

Furthermore, some women are particularly affected by symptoms associated with the menstrual cycle, which may prevent that person from being able to pursue or to engage in normal activities. I don't think all women have such symptoms, but in these circumstances such women are really disadvantaged.

The aspiration here is 'may such women not have to experience such sufferings, and obtain bodies that are strong with vigour, and may they have ability and independence'. Of course, not all males would have the latter qualities, but this relates to those who do have a supreme male body with these qualities of strength, ability and independence. So the aspiration here is 'may women who are limited by certain physical hardships obtain such bodies of splendour, and be free from these particular sufferings'. When we relate to it in this way, we can see that these are aspirations are for human beings to be free of the particular disadvantages and sufferings experienced by some women.

Apparently, there are many ailments that are unique to the female body. Maybe Alan as a doctor might know more about it? Generally speaking, each individual has his or her own particular ailments. On a broader level, men, because of their different physiology and anatomy, would certainly have some ailments that women don't experience; whereas, women would have certain ailments that men don't experience.

The text here is particularly relating to those ailments that are obstacles in life. Thus the dedication here is for those who are disadvantaged, that they may obtain bodies which have strength, stamina and splendour, in order to be able to optimally practise the Dharma, without any interferences. That is the main point. In verse 10, the text referred to *enjoying themselves with goddesses.* Here again, these are the qualities of those who have perfect bodies.

Next the text reads, *may all those of lower caste achieve a higher status, and abandon pride despite this attainment.* Here, the dedication of one's virtues is made to alleviate the particular sufferings that come from belonging to a socially confined low-caste. In Australia and the rest of the developed world, there is no distinction based on caste, but in India – particularly in the past – the caste system was prevalent, and those of lower caste were underprivileged and disadvantaged. Therefore, the dedication here is for them to achieve high status, and after achieving high status to abandon pride despite that attainment.

In Buddhist communities in India, there has never been any distinction between castes.

2.1.1.3.2.1.1.4. Dedication for perfect virtue

The verse reads:

31. *By my merits,
May all sentient beings without exception,
Having abandoned all negativity,
Continuously practise virtue.*

The commentary explains:

By my merits from meditating on bodhicitta and so forth, may all sentient beings without exception, who are the purpose, abandon all obstructive conditions of negativities such as killing and the like, and continuously practise virtue.

By my merits from meditating on bodhicitta and so forth includes the virtues accumulated through the practices of generosity, morality, patience, joyous effort, and cultivating wisdom. So, through the virtues accumulated from these practices, *may all sentient beings without exception, who are the purpose* – that is, who are the purpose of one's dedications – *abandon all obstructive conditions of negativities such as killing and the like*, and thus be free from negativities such as the ten non-virtues, and *continuously practise virtue.* This again can be taken as a reminder to refrain from such non-virtuous actions oneself.

2.1.1.3.2.1.2. Dedication for entering a correct path

This dedication is specifically made for others to be protected from entering a wrong path which would otherwise lead to destructive behaviours and activities.

This is subdivided into two:

2.1.1.3.2.1.2.1. Dedicating to be endowed with correct motivation and practice of the path to liberation

2.1.1.3.2.1.2.2. Dedicating for complete conducive conditions and no obstructing conditions

2.1.1.3.2.1.2.1. Dedicating to be endowed with correct motivation and practice of the path to liberation

- 32ab. *May they be inseparable from bodhicitta,
And engage in the bodhisattva practices.*

The commentary explains:

May all sentient beings never be separated from bodhicitta and always engage in the bodhisattva practices, such as generosity.

This is a profound dedication: dedicating towards sentient beings to be *never be separated from bodhicitta and always engage in the bodhisattva practices such as generosity, morality, and so forth.*

2.1.1.3.2.1.2.2. Dedicating for complete conducive conditions and no obstructing conditions

These are particularly in relation to the accumulation of virtue, since there are conducive conditions we need to

acquire and obstructing conditions we need to avoid. That is the dedication here.

**32cd. *May they be looked after by the buddhas;
May they abandon actions induced by demons.***

The commentary explains:

May they be looked after by the virtuous teachers, the buddhas, and may they abandon the actions induced by demons, who obstruct the creation of virtue.

Here, the virtuous teachers, the buddhas, are seen as the conducive conditions for practising virtue, whereas the influence of demons or negative friends, is the obstruction.

This as a profound dedication. It is good to reflect upon this when doing our normal dedications, and make the strong aspiration: 'May I never be separated from the buddhas and virtuous teachers in this life and in all future lifetimes. In all future lifetimes, may I always be guided by the buddhas in the forms of virtuous teachers'.

2.1.1.3.2.1.3. *Dedicating for having temporary endowments and happiness*

This is again subdivided into three:

2.1.1.3.2.1.3.1. *Dedicating for long life and pure environment*

2.1.1.3.2.1.3.2. *Dedicating for being made happy by benevolent beings*

2.1.1.3.2.1.3.3. *Dedicating for complete necessities and pacification of harm*

2.1.1.3.2.1.3.1. *Dedicating for long life and pure environment*

Here, we can recall the aspirations we make to be reborn in the pure environment of the blissful lands. The first verse here is:

**33. *May all those sentient beings
Have a limitless life span.
May they always enjoy a happy life, and
May the very sound of death never ring.***

The commentary explains:

May all sentient beings take rebirth in a happy migration and be able to have a long limitless life span. May these long lives always be happy, and even the sound of death never ring.

Again, the explanation in the commentary is quite clear. The next two verses under this heading are:

**34. *May all directions be filled with
Groves of wish-fulfilling trees,
Full of buddhas and bodhisattvas
Proclaiming the melodious sound of Dharma.***

**35. *May the grounds everywhere be pure,
Without pebbles and the like,
Smooth like the nature of lapis lazuli,
Similar to the palm of one's hand.***

The commentary explains:

May all directions be filled with groves of wish-fulfilling trees, filled with buddhas and bodhisattvas proclaiming the melodious sound of Dharma. May the ground everywhere be lush, pure and smooth, without stones, thorns or pebbles, smooth like the nature of lapis lazuli, similar to the palm of one's hand.

The description of 'wish-fulfilling trees' was presented earlier in verse 6.

May the ground everywhere be lush, pure and smooth, without stones, thorns or pebbles, smooth like the nature of lapis lazuli, which is similar to the palm of one's hand. The description

given here indicates that the ground of the pure lands is very smooth and without any sharp objects. The ground itself is said to be like walking on a soft cushion that slightly sinks in when you walk on it, (but of course doesn't sink in completely). When you put your foot down, you feel an expansion, so it's very pleasant to walk. These are the descriptions given of the pure lands, where there's no cause for any discomfort or any kind of suffering.

So we make the aspiration 'may beings be reborn in such blissful lands, and have the opportunity to practise Dharma'. This is a very meaningful object of meditation: while dedicating for others, we can also make the aspiration 'may I be reborn in such pure lands, that are always surrounded by buddhas and bodhisattvas'.

If we can meditate on these points now, it will definitely have a positive effect at the time of death, because one will be more likely to have visions of such pure lands at that time. One would have a strong premonition of being reborn in the pure lands, where buddhas and bodhisattvas are residing everywhere, where everything is easy, without any stress, and so forth. How wondrous that would be, to have such visions at the time of death! The buddhas and bodhisattvas are not just residing there, but are spontaneously teaching, so wherever one goes, one continuously hears the sound of the Dharma. That's the main point - it's not just a pure blissful land where you relax and do nothing, but you also have access to the Dharma, and you are continuously able to engage in Dharma practice. If one were in such a land, there would be no suffering at all, because of the ever-present, positive influence of the Dharma.

While the descriptions here relate to pure lands, even today on this planet we can see places that don't have any of the conditions for hearing the Dharma, and where the land itself is uncomfortable, rough, and so forth. So we can see that similar descriptions fit certain environments on this Earth today.

In terms of abodes similar to pure lands, I've seen on TV certain places - I'm not sure if they are in America or elsewhere - that are really beautiful and seem to fit the description of the pure lands. On Channel 7, there are two presenters in the morning on the Sunrise program, I think, who recently went to America. The TV program showed some really lush and beautiful places, estates and so forth. I thought at the time that the people who live there would have definitely created the good causes and merit to be in such beautiful places. Whether they actually enjoyed their homes, I'm not really sure! But visually, they were really beautiful abodes.

When I see individuals living in these beautiful places and big, luxurious homes, I immediately think how wonderful it would be if they were happy as well. That would be nice. If they could actually enjoy their homes, that would be really great for them. But after that I think, 'Of course, what would be best is that they didn't have to die'. That thought stops my mind from craving to live in such places, because no matter how beautiful and luxurious, in the end, you have to leave it all behind.

If one thinks about death, grasping at such a nice abode will not occur. But if one does not think about death and impermanence, a craving for such nice places might develop. Indeed, meditating on death and impermanence is really helpful for spiritual practitioners. If one considers oneself a spiritual practitioner but does not recall death and impermanence occasionally, one's practice becomes difficult.

2.1.1.3.2.1.3.2. Dedicating for being made happy by benevolent beings

The first verse under this heading reads:

**36. *May, wherever mandalas of retinues are,
A multitude of bodhisattvas reside,
Adorning the ground
With their goodness.***

The commentary reads:

May wherever mandalas of retinues of dharma students are, a multitude of bodhisattvas reside, adorning the ground with the goodness of their excellent qualities.

May wherever mandalas of retinues... means that wherever beings engage in practising and listening to Dharma, may a multitude of bodhisattvas reside, adorning the ground with the goodness of their excellent qualities in that abode. One is dedicating one's merits by saying, 'whatever virtues one has accumulated, may these become a cause for places where people are engaged in Dharma practice, to always have bodhisattvas residing there'. Here the aspiration is for the bodhisattvas to remain for a long time to assist and benefit the beings in such places.

These are really meaningful dedications. For me, personally, whenever I see someone – whether they're men or women, from a religious tradition or not – doing any good for others and benefiting them, it really brings joy to my mind. I immediately think, 'May they have a long life, may they remain for a long time to continually be able to help and benefit others'.

**37. *May all embodied beings
Hear uninterruptedly the sound of Dharma
From all birds, trees, and sunlight,
And even from space.***

The commentary explains:

May all embodied beings hear uninterruptedly the sound of Dharma from all trees, light rays, and even from space, like bodhisattvas who have attained power.

The dedication relates to those bodhisattvas who have obtained certain high powers. Due to their attainments, they're able to hear the Dharma everywhere. Every sound becomes the sound of Dharma – from trees, birds, even light rays and space. The dedication here is that may all beings be born with such conditions.

**38. *May they always meet buddhas
And the children of the buddhas.
May they offer infinite offering clouds
To the highest of migrators.***

The commentary explains:

May these sentient beings always meet buddhas and the children of the buddhas. May they offer infinite oceans of offering clouds to the highest of migrators, the buddhas.

May they offer infinite oceans of offering clouds to the highest of migrators... This could be easily misinterpreted; *highest of migrators* refers to those amongst migrators who are held in the highest esteem – that is, the buddhas. So it refers to making offerings to the buddhas.

A practical way to relate to this is to offer our meagre virtuous acts and deeds now, that they will also become a cause for one, in the future, to be able to make abundant material offerings. While we may not have much in the way of material means to make extensive offerings now, we can

offer our virtues, which then become a cause for us to be able to make abundant offerings in the future.

2.1.1.3.2.1.3.3. Dedicating for complete necessities and pacification of harm

The first verse reads:

**39. *May the gods bestow timely rain,
And may a perfect crop ripen.
May kings act in accordance with the Dharma
And may the worldly realms increase.***

The commentary reads:

As conducive conditions for Dharma practice, may the gods bestow timely rain, and may the crops be perfect and complete. May the powerful among human beings, such as kings and princes, act in accordance with the dharma and may the worldly realms be increased through being adorned with happiness and joy.

Here, timely rain would refer to rain that falls at the right time to ensure *perfect and complete* crops. As farmers would know, soon after seed is sown, if there's rain, that is said to be the best condition for the seed to germinate and sprout. Then, as it sprouts, it needs further rain to grow into a bigger, mature crop. At a certain time, when the crop is about to ripen, it requires little or no rainfall, because that could destroy the crop. So, following the general pattern of the seasons, a crop would be sown when the rains are just right for the crop to grow, and this dedication is for the rains to fall in a timely way.

May the powerful among human beings, such as kings and princes, act in accordance with the Dharma. This is again a significant point. If rulers, such as the kings and princes of ancient times, were to be imbued with the Dharma, their rule would be a righteous one. The interests of their constituency would naturally be at the front of their minds, rather than their personal interests. Thus they would be able to rule justly and bring benefit to everyone.

Furthermore, *may the worldly realms be increased through being adorned with happiness and joy.* This is again a very meaningful dedication for the benefit of others.

Of course, the opposite would be true if kings and rulers were unjust and took advantage of their subjects. That would create much difficulty for the people living in that country.

**40. *May medicines be effective and
May the recitations of secret mantra be
successful.
May sky dwellers, yakshas, and so forth
Be endowed with the mind of compassion.***

The commentary reads:

May medicines be effective in curing disease, and may the purposes of the recitations of secret mantras accomplishing pacifying, increasing and other activities be accomplished the way they were intended. May sky dwellers, yakshas, carnivorous beasts and the like become endowed with the mind of love.

The dedication being made here is, may whatever medicines that are administered be effective in curing diseases. *And may the purposes of the recitations of secret mantras accomplishing pacifying* includes the four types of actions associated with the different purposes of reciting mantras – peaceful or pacifying; increasing; controlling or influencing; and wrathful activity.

When one recites mantras, it could be for any of these four purposes. Pacifying would be to pacify ailments, or to have good conditions, and so forth. When a mantra recitation is done for these ends, it would be for peaceful purposes. Increasing is for the purposes of increasing one's life force, or merit, for example. When mantras are recited for that purpose, the recitation is said to be done for the purpose of increasing.

Controlling refers to the purpose of controlling others. Also, when one recites the mantra for a particular deity, it is said that we are aiming to have control of the deity. That may seem a little presumptuous, but basically one is getting closer to the deity so that one can ask the deity to remove obstacles for oneself and make one's practice virtuous, and so forth.

Then there are recitations for wrathful purposes. Wrathful here implies, for example, subduing those who harm other sentient beings or harm the teachings. In order to subjugate such beings, certain mantras are recited for that purpose.

So for whatever purpose the recitation is done, may all of that be accomplished according to one's wishes. Of course, this would imply a Dharma purpose with the proper motivations, so may increasing and other activities be accomplished the way they were intended.

Then, the text mentions *sky dwellers*. I think this relates particularly to malicious beings. *Yakshas* are like demons. So may such beings and *carnivorous beasts and the like become endowed with the mind of love*. The aspiration here is in relation to those beings that may feel malice or harmful intent towards others: 'May their harmful intentions and malicious thoughts be supplemented with a mind of love, so that they do not harm other sentient beings'.

Although I've presented this in the past, in terms of knowing how rituals are practised, if one is doing mantras for the purpose of pacifying, the mala is held between one's thumb and first (index) finger. That's generally how it's explained. The second (middle) finger and thumb are used for mantra recitations done for the purpose of increasing. For the purposes of controlling, one uses the thumb and fourth (ring) finger. During what is called an approximation retreat, the mantra recitation is usually done using the thumb and fourth finger. You hold the mala between the thumb and fifth (little) finger for the recitation of wrathful mantras.

While this is the traditional practice, there are different presentations for reciting mantras. For example, if you recite mantras other than the pacifying ones, it would not be wrong to use the mala between the thumb and first finger, because the first finger is above all the other fingers, so it's not a mistake.

If one doesn't know these distinctions, and why things are done in certain ways, one could become very fixed and rigid about certain ways of doing things, and one may even turn around and tell others, 'You're doing it wrong, you've done it incorrectly!'. This brings up all sorts of doubts in people's minds. If you say things that create doubt in the mind of someone who's inclined to engage in virtue, they may lose the opportunity to create virtue. That would be a great disadvantage for them. So those who understand the implications of what they say to others will not say such things.

There is an additional subheading here which is:

Dedication to be separated from that which is unwished for

The verse is presented under this:

41. *May sentient beings not experience the slightest suffering,
Be free from dangers and criticism,
And not have the slightest mental unhappiness.*

The commentary explains:

May sentient beings be utterly free from physical suffering. May their minds be free from fears, may they not be humiliated by others and may they be utterly free from mental unhappiness.

Because there are no sentient beings who like any kind of physical suffering, the dedication here is that they may be *utterly free from physical suffering*. And there is no sentient being who wishes to feel any kind of fear in their mind, so the next dedication is that may they be free from all fears. Similarly, there's no one who likes to be humiliated, so may all beings be free from humiliation *by others and may they be utterly free from mental unhappiness*.

So, it's good for us to recite these verses and contemplate the meaning. This, in itself, can be a really inspiring and helpful practice for our mind.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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Edited Version*

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

23 May 2017

Based on the motivation we have just generated, we can now engage in our regular meditation practice.

[*tong-len meditation*]

Now, based on that positive motivation, we will read the tenth chapter together. We can make particular dedications for Elvira's father, who passed away recently, and for the victims of the Manchester tragedy. It is really terrifying to see how so many innocent people have been killed and the disruption to the lives of those who survived. Indeed the whole world is affected by this act of terror.

As we read in the chapter, there are dedications for the minds of malevolent spirits and non-humans and so forth to be pacified. We have just seen an example of people who invoke terror and suffering, so we dedicate for their minds to be pacified.

When there are terrorist actions such as these there is no benefit whatsoever. There is only harm for the victims and also the perpetrators. Actions such these arise from very evil negative states of mind, which only lead to harm. So we need to remember that the perpetrators are also an object of great compassion, as they have engaged in such negative deeds motivated by anger, or whatever strong negative mind that might be influencing them at that time. Because they create so much negativity for others and themselves, they are indeed a great object of compassion.

It seems that they are retaliating out of their own ignorance, as a result of the deeds of some leaders of a few nations. Their minds have been disturbed and that is why they are retaliating. This is no small matter for them, but the way that they respond is harmful. This kind of resentment, which is like a sickness, can be passed down over many generations and cause a lot of harm.

May the bodhicitta motivation that we generate bring about only benefit for sentient beings, may all their suffering be removed, and may they create the causes to achieve enlightenment. This is the extent of the motivation we generate. In particular, we are dedicating for the minds of others to be pacified.

Personally, I rely on deities such as Avalokiteshvara and Tara and make strong requests to these enlightened beings to bestow blessings and pacify the minds of those who are completely overwhelmed by ignorance, thus creating negative karma. At our level right now, making strong prayers and seeking blessings is the most we can do. Whenever someone requests to me to pray, I make strong prayers to the enlightened beings to please extend their help and blessing to those in need.

[*Recitation of chapter 10*]

We can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: 'For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice as best as I can'.

Along with this motivation we generate the really strong complementary aspiration, 'May I be never separated from the precious Mahayana teachers in all my lifetimes, and may I be able to meet with these same conditions that I have now, from life to life, in all my future lifetimes.'

2.1.1.3.2.1. Dedicating for the purpose of ordained ones

This is subdivided into five:

2.1.1.3.2.1.1. Dedicating for the Sangha in general

2.1.1.3.2.1.2. Dedicating for the purpose of gelongs

2.1.1.3.2.1.3. Dedicating for the purpose of gelong-mas

2.1.1.3.2.1.4. Dedicating for the purpose of complete morality

2.1.1.3.2.1.5. Dedicating for the enjoyment of the result

2.1.1.3.2.1.1. *Dedicating for the Sangha in general*

We need to keep in mind that the actual Sangha Jewel refers to the *arya Sangha*.

Here Sangha in general refers to the ordained Sangha. The teachings mention that an assembly of four pure ordained Sangha suffices as the actual Sangha Jewel. Therefore, ordained Sangha are held in high esteem, and respected in many traditions. The Sangha Jewel refers to those who are actively engaged in preserving the Dharma by propounding and practising the teachings. If we were to think about it in practical terms, then since the buddhas are already enlightened and in the state of perpetual bliss, they don't have to face any challenges and hardship. Whereas the Sangha are the ones who face many challenges and hardship while adopting various means to preserve the Dharma. For the preservation of the Buddha's teachings, along with the Sangha Jewel there is the Dharma Jewel – true paths and true cessation. These are significant points to take note of.

The verse says:

42. *May the monasteries abide well,
And be adorned by reading and recitation.
May the Sangha always be harmonious and
May the purpose of the Sangha be
accomplished.*

As the commentary reads:

May the Sangha who live in the monasteries abide well by spreading and increasing the Dharma through reading the teachings of the Buddha and the elucidations of his thought, and reciting prayers. May the Sangha always be harmonious while engaging in virtuous activities and may the purpose to benefit sentient beings and so forth be accomplished just as intended.

The specific Tibetan term used here is *tsuk la-khang* which is translated as 'monastery', however a more literal translation would be 'temple'. The connotation of *tsuk la-khang* is an abode where the vinaya and the three baskets of the Buddha's teachings are preserved. So in that sense a *tsuk la-khang* is a place where the sutras of the Buddha are kept and honoured, such as on the altar here at Tara Institute.

The word *gompa* is usually translated as ‘monastery’, a place where Sangha i.e. monks and nuns reside. The term ‘gompa’ has the connotation of an abode that is removed from places where there is sexual activity. That is why monasteries are usually found on the outskirts of villages or towns.

As the commentary states, *May the Sangha who live in the monasteries abide well by spreading and increasing the Dharma through reading the teachings of the Buddha.* The meaning here is to recite the Buddha’s teachings again and again, as a way of remembering them in order to be able to expound them. There are of course the recitations that are part of our commitments; however, here it refers to the texts explaining the Buddha’s teachings. Thus the Sangha in the monasteries memorise many different texts and recite them from memory.

In monasteries such as Sera Monastery, there is a tradition where the monks memorise a text during the day and then in the evening the memorised texts are recited from memory. As part of the curriculum, some monks spend from seven in the evening to about four or five o’clock in the morning reciting the texts they have memorised. I did this several times in my youth when I was studying at Sera.

The English translation ‘reading’ does not bring out the full meaning of the Tibetan word *lokpa* which has the connotation of listening to the teachings, contemplating and then meditating on them. This is the ultimate means of preserving the Buddha’s teachings, to keep them fresh and alive.

The next part of the dedication is, *may the Sangha always be harmonious while engaging in virtuous activities.* The Tibetan term *gen-dun*, which is translated as Sangha, has the literal meaning of ‘abiding in virtue’. The emphasis here is on engaging in virtuous activities harmoniously. This is said to be one of the essential elements for the wellbeing of the community of the Sangha. Furthermore, *may the purpose to benefit sentient beings and so forth be accomplished just as it was intended.*

2.1.1.3.2.1.2. Dedicating for the purpose of gelongs

The verse relating to this is:

**43. *May the gelongs who aspire towards the trainings
Attain isolation and
Upon having abandoned all distraction,
Attain a mind of pliant meditation.***

As the commentary reads:

May the pure gelongs who wish to protect their training from degeneration attain physical isolation from the bustle of worldly affairs, which is an obstacle to morality. Having abandoned all mental distractions and having become adorned with the bliss of mental and physical pliancy, may they meditate on virtue with pliancy.

May the pure gelongs who wish to protect their training from degeneration attain physical isolation from bustle of worldly affairs, which is an obstacle to morality. In order to practise pure morality, one has to protect it from adverse conditions. Conversely, if there are no adverse conditions, then there is no need to protect anything. The Sangha have taken vows and commitments as a way to protect

themselves from obstacles; if there were no obstacles to be protected from, then there would be no need for those vows. As the Vinaya text indicates, the early disciples of the Buddha didn’t have many vows, but as the early ordained Sangha started to engage in misdeeds, more and more vows were laid down.

These are indications of the need to protect the Sangha from external obstacles, referred to here as the *bustle of worldly affairs*, or being around people who engage in worldly excitement. Physical isolation in this context refers to refraining from bustling worldly affairs, while mental isolation refers to refraining from engaging in superstitious or discursive thoughts. These are the two main obstacles.

As the teachings indicate, one needs to practise in isolation. Although this usually refers to an isolated physical abode, real isolation encompasses both physical isolation i.e. refraining from mingling with the hustle and bustle of worldly life and people and engaging in frivolous activities, and mental isolation, which means refraining from engaging in superstitions or discursive thoughts. You can be physically isolated, but if your mind is constantly engaging in these superstitious or discursive thoughts, you will not be able to maintain your focus on your practice. These are instructions for all of us to keep in mind.

As further explained in the commentary, *having abandoned all mental distractions and having become adorned with the bliss of mental and physical pliancy, may they meditate on virtue with pliancy.* We need to understand how to acquire all the conditions to develop calm abiding, and then actually develop it. In the process of developing calm abiding, one obtains mental pliancy first, followed by physical pliancy, then one experiences the bliss of physical pliancy, which induces the bliss of mental pliancy. Then, having obtained actual calm abiding, one can meditate on virtue effortlessly for as long as one wishes. These achievements are essential for one’s practice.

2.1.1.3.2.1.3. Dedicating for the purpose of gelong-mas

The next two lines of verse are:

**44ab. *May gelong-mas have gain, and
May they abandon harm or quarrel.***

As the commentary explains:

May gelong-mas have the gain of being endowed with the Dharma, and abandon the harm of quarrelling, being seduced by others and such.

Being endowed with the Dharma, as translated here, implies being able to sustain oneself without much effort. It is essential that practitioners, particularly bhikshunis, have sufficient resources to engage in the practice of Dharma, because having to expend a lot of effort to secure basic necessities is an obstacle to practice.

Furthermore, *may they abandon the harm of quarrelling* refers to disputes and quarrelling with each other. *Being seduced by others* refers to being led astray by those who speak pleasant words and act as if they are friends, but who have the negative motivation of wanting to disrupt the morality of the bhikshunis. So the dedication is, ‘may

bhikshunis be free from all these adverse conditions and obtain all of the good conditions for the practice of Dharma’.

2.1.1.3.2.1.4. *Dedicating for the purpose of complete morality*

This refers to being able to practise pure ethics, unstained by faulty morality. The first four lines of verse read:

**44cd. Similarly may all those who are ordained
Never degenerate their morality.**

**45ab. Having renounced mistaken morality,
May they always abandon negativity.**

Here the commentary states:

Likewise, may all ordained ones complete their morality and be without degeneration. Should they receive individual mistaken moralities, then may they renounce them by generating regret and always abandon negativity.

As the commentary clearly explains, *likewise may all ordained Sangha complete their morality and be without degeneration*. So the dedication is for the Sangha to abide in pure morality without allowing it to degenerate. *Should they receive individual mistaken moralities, meaning if their moral ethics were to lapse, may they renounce them by generating regret and always abandon negativity*. While making every effort to observe morality, in the event that some breaches do occur due to strong delusions, may that become a cause for the Sangha to develop even stronger renunciation, and with the aid of regret, may they engage in purification practices.

On a personal level, it is good to note that although we may not intend to engage in negativities, if we do create negativities then that can become an impetus to engage in strong purification practices. So in this sense, it becomes a means to engage in further virtues.

The next lines of verse are

**45cd. On having attained a higher rebirth
May their discipline never degenerate.**

**46. May the scholars always be praised,
And always receive enough alms,
May their continuum be perfectly pure, and
May they be renowned in all directions.**

The commentary explains:

Then, having attained a higher rebirth in the next life, may even then their discipline not degenerate. May the scholars of the world receive praise and alms. May their continuum be completely pure, free from pride and such, and may they be pleasantly renowned in all directions.

This dedication for the purpose of perfect morality is framed around the positive results of observing morality. What is the benefit for the Sangha in abiding by all these vows? It is *a higher rebirth in the next life*; the consequence of observing morality is obtaining a higher rebirth the next life.

Furthermore, *may their discipline not degenerate* even in the next life. In other words, may they be able to maintain their morality even in the next life.

Next there is a dedication *for the scholars of the world to receive praise*, which means that those who have great knowledge are acknowledged with due praise. *May their*

continuum be completely pure, free from pride means that when they receive that praise may their mind not be affected by pride.

These are really significant aspirations, which we need also be mindful of applying to ourselves. If we have some specific knowledge and so forth then while we may receive acknowledgement or praise for that, we need to be mindful of not letting that become a cause for pride, because that would ruin our own ethics and positive virtuous mind.

Finally, *may they be pleasantly renowned in all directions.*

2.1.1.3.2.1.5. *Dedicating for the enjoyment of the result*

The next verse is:

**47. May they not experience the sufferings of the
lower realms.
May they, without any difficulties,
Quickly attain enlightenment
Through the body superior to gods.**

The commentary explains:

May they not experience the sufferings of the lower realms. May these proficient ones quickly attain enlightenment, without any difficult hard actions of the three doors, with the body that is the ripening result superior to the ripening result of the gods, this body that possesses the seven qualities of higher status for attaining omniscient consciousness.

May they not experience the sufferings of the lower realms. May these proficient ones quickly attain enlightenment, without any difficult hard actions. Here we can refer to the earlier explanations of how some austere practices involve a lot of physical endurance and so forth. So the dedication here is, may those engaging on the practices be free from such hard and difficult practices *of the three doors, with a body that is the ripening result superior to the ripening results of the gods*’.

This body possesses the seven qualities of higher status that are essential for obtaining the mind of enlightenment. A body that is endowed with the eight freedoms and ten endowments is said to be the body that is needed for obtaining higher status and liberation. To achieve enlightenment, however the seven qualities are necessary. These, as I have presented in earlier teachings, are having: (1) a good lineage; (2) a sound body with all the faculties intact; (3) sufficient wealth; (4) power and control; (5) wisdom; (6) long life and (7) freedom from sickness.

These are the essential qualities that are needed in order to be able to benefit others. Being of good lineage is good condition in itself, but if you are attractive as well as from a good lineage, then apparently that is very appealing to others, and you can accomplish great deeds. Having sufficient wealth, power and control gives you a positive influence over others, making them amenable to being led to virtue and conducting themselves in accordance with the Dharma. Without wisdom or intelligence, of course, you cannot really benefit others, and without a long stable life, you may do some good deeds, but will not be able to continue to do so for long. Being free from illnesses or sickness also enables you to help without interruption.

2.1.1.4. DEDICATING FOR THE PURPOSE OF ALL SENTIENT BEINGS

The lines of the verse relating this are:

48. *May all sentient beings repeatedly
Make offerings to all buddhas and
Through the infinite happiness of the buddhas,
May they always be endowed with happiness.*

The commentary reads:

By the might of whatever virtue there is, may all sentient beings in every action repeatedly make offerings to all buddhas with devotion. In dependence on this may they practise the actions of bodhisattvas, and thus continuously become endowed with happiness, through the infinite happiness of the buddhas.

By the might of whatever virtue there is, or through the power of whatever virtue one may have accumulated, may all sentient beings in every action repeatedly make offerings to all the buddhas with devotion. Here every action includes making an offering of actions that we would normally consider as mundane, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, and walking about. As I regularly emphasise, it is important to make offerings of everything we eat and drink, and this is being backed up in these teachings. In this way, even our normal activities and deeds can become the means to accumulate great virtue and merit. This is the point we need to understand here.

Thus *in dependence on this, may they practice the actions of the bodhisattvas and thus continuously be endowed with happiness through the infinite happiness of the buddhas.* Here we can also derive the understanding that the good, positive results obtained from these aspirations and dedications, such as the happiness of the buddhas, is dependent on causes and conditions. These again are points that we should recall.

2.1.2. Dedicating for purposes having gone beyond the world

This is subdivided into three:

2.1.2.1. Dedicating for the accomplishment of the wishes of the bodhisattvas

2.1.2.2. Dedicating for the completion of the Buddha's actions

2.1.2.3. Dedicating for accomplishment of the wishes of hearers and self-liberators

2.1.2.1. DEDICATING FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE WISHES OF THE BODHISATTVAS

The dedication here is for the incredibly extensive wishes that the bodhisattvas have to benefit sentient beings be accomplished just as they intended. The lines of the verse read:

- 49ab. *May bodhisattvas accomplish the purpose
Of migrators they intent in their heart.*

The commentary reads:

May, in dependence on the virtue of composing this commentary and other virtues, bodhisattvas accomplish the actions for the temporary and ultimate purpose of all migrators the way they intend in their heart.

May all the virtues that have been accumulated become the means for *the bodhisattvas to accomplish the actions for the temporary and ultimate purpose.* Here we need to understand that *temporary* refers to obtaining the high status of a good rebirth in the next life, such as in the human and god realms, and *ultimate* refers to liberation and enlightenment.

2.1.2.2. DEDICATING FOR THE COMPLETION OF THE ACTIONS OF THE BUDDHAS

The relevant lines of verse read:

- 49cd. *Whatever the protectors' intent,
May that happiness be received by sentient
beings.*

The commentary states

May sentient beings receive whatever infinite happiness the buddha protectors intend for them

Again, this is very clear. As the commentary explains, *may sentient beings receive whatever infinite happiness the buddha protectors intend for them.* May beings experience happiness and wellbeing, free from suffering as the buddhas intended.

2.1.2.3. DEDICATING FOR ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE WISHES OF HEARERS AND SELF-LIBERATORS

May the wishes of hearers and self-liberators be fulfilled.

The text reads:

50. *Likewise, may self-liberated buddhas
And hearers also attain happiness.*

The commentary reads:

Likewise, may self-buddhas and hearers also attain the happiness of peace.

This is quite clear. *May self-buddhas and hearers also attain the happiness of peace.* Their intended goal is to achieve self-liberation, a state mainly focused on themselves, where they are free from suffering and achieve the state of happiness. May they achieve that state of liberation.

2.2. Dedication for the purpose of self

This is subdivided into four:

2.2.1. Praying for the attainment of the temporary result

2.2.2. Praying to be directly guided by Manjushri

2.2.3. Praying to abide within the bodhisattva trainings

2.2.4. Praying to complete the purpose of others

Here the term 'praying' also means aspiring.

2.2.1. Praying for the attainment of the temporary result

51. *May I also, through the kindness of Manjushri,
Until attaining the ground of supreme joy,
Always remember my lives
And attain ordination.*

The commentary explains

By the power of these virtues may I also, through the kindness of Manjushri, until the attainment of the ground of supreme joy always have mindfulness of my lives and attain ordination, the vessel for qualities.

As explained here the aspiration is, *'may I have mindfulness and attain ordination through the virtues that I have accumulated through the kindness of my teacher*

Manjushri until I achieve the ground of *supreme joy*, which is the first ground of the ten bumis or grounds of a bodhisattva.

The remaining verse under this heading is:

52. *In spite of inferior food
May I have splendour and livelihood.
May I in all my lifetimes abide in solitude
And attain perfection.*

Despite inferior food that is bad and scarce, may my body be endowed with splendour, and may I have a happy livelihood. In all my lives may I remain in isolation from physical and mental distractions, and attain perfection.

This dedication is really very meaningful. 'Although my food may be meagre and not very tasty, may my body be endowed with splendour' means, 'may my body be nourished and thus lustrous and strong'. Rather than a happy livelihood, a more literal translation from Tibetan is, 'may I be able to sustain myself well'. Finally, in *all my life may I remain in isolation from physical and mental distractions*. This refers back to achieving mental and physical isolation, which was explained in an earlier verse.

2.2.2. Praying to be directly guided by Manjushri

The implication here is receiving direct guidance from Manjushri as a teacher.

53. *Whenever I wish to study,
Or have even small questions,
May I be able to behold without obstructions
The protector, Manjushri.*

The commentary explains

Whenever I wish to study the teachings of the conqueror and so forth, or wish to ask a small question regarding some meaningful words, may I be able to immediately, without obstructions, behold directly the protector Manjushri himself.

This is a very meaningful verse, which I recite daily as a personal initiative. As the commentary explains, the prayer is *whenever I wish to study* or have even the smallest of questions, may I be able to behold without obstruction the protector Manjushri himself. *Whenever I wish to study the teachings of the conqueror and so forth*, refers mainly to the teachings of Buddha. The intention here that whenever one wishes to ask a small question regarding some meaningful words, 'may I be able to immediately, without obstructions, behold directly the protector Manjushri and receive answers from Manjushri himself'.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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Edited Version*

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

30 May 2017

As usual, let us spend some time in our regular Tong-Len meditation practice.

[meditation]

2.2. Dedication for the purpose of self (cont.)

2.2.3. Praying to abide within the bodhisattva trainings

The verse reads:

54 *May my actions, to accomplish
The purpose of all sentient beings,
Extending to the edge of space of the ten
directions,
Equal the actions of Manjushri.*

The commentary explains:

To accomplish the temporary and ultimate purpose of sentient beings extending up to the edge of space of the ten directions, may my actions equal the actions of Manjushri.

The commentary says that, *to accomplish the temporary and ultimate purpose of sentient beings extending up to the edge of space of the ten directions*, one needs to visualise sentient beings extending as far as space exists. Accomplishing *the temporary purpose* refers to the temporary happiness of achieving a higher rebirth (in the human or the god realms – called good status). The *ultimate purpose* is a dedication for sentient beings to achieve the state of liberation, and ultimately enlightenment. The wish for your actions to equal the actions of Manjushri is an incredibly profound dedication and an aspiration which is important to make regularly.

2.2.4. Praying to complete the purpose of others

The verse reads:

55. *For as long as space abides,
And as long as sentient beings remain,
For that long may I also remain and
Eliminate the sufferings of sentient beings.*

Then as the commentary explains under this verse:

For as long as cyclic existence and the migrators circling within it remain, may I remain and eliminate all sufferings of sentient beings.

This is a verse His Holiness the Dalai Lama takes to heart as a strong aspiration. We can see from the extent of the aspiration embedded in the dedication that it is very profound and meaningful. The commentary clearly states that, *For as long as cyclic existence and the migrators circling within it remain*, until then, *may I remain and eliminate all sufferings of sentient beings*. This shows the extent of the incredibly powerful aspiration and dedication of the bodhisattvas.

The next verse reads:

56. *May any suffering of migrators
Ripen upon myself.*

*By the power of the bodhisattva Sangha,
May all sentient beings enjoy happiness.*

The commentary explains:

May any suffering of migrators that exists ripen upon me. By the nature of the power of the bodhisattvas' Sangha may all migrators enjoy happiness.

This verse describes what we actually intend to do in our regular *Tong len* meditation practice. It specifically encourages us to aspire to engage in the actual practice of giving and taking.

2.3. Dedication for the increase of the Dharma, the source of happiness

Recognising that the Dharma is the source of all happiness, and making aspirations for it to expand and go in all directions is an incredibly profound dedication.

The verse reads:

57. *May the sole medicine for the suffering of
migrators,
The source of all happiness,
The Dharma, abide long
With praise and high regard.*

The commentary explains:

In dependence on whatever virtue there is, may the sole unrivalled medicine for all sufferings, the holy source from which every happiness of migrators arises, the teachings of the Buddha Bhagawan, abide with praise and high regard for a long time, until the end of cyclic existence.

The words, *In dependence on whatever virtue there is*, refer to all the virtues one has ever accumulated. The text uses the analogy of a panacea – i.e. *the sole unrivalled medicine for all suffering*. The dedication thus infers that when one understands the profundity and the expansiveness of the teachings, and how they are a source for alleviating sufferings, Dharma is like an unrivalled medicine to end all the sufferings of sentient beings. In stating, *the holy source from which every happiness of migrators arises*, the aspiration is for *the teachings of the Buddha Bhagawan to abide with praise and high regard until the end of cyclic existence*.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama particularly recites this verse when consecrating new monasteries or temples. There are similar verses in the prayer *Benefits of Constructing images of Maitreya*, and few other verses proclaiming auspiciousness such as '*placing the victory banner in all directions*'. These are some of the verses which are recited. I'm just giving you this extra bit of information to know how the verse is used during certain occasions.

3. PROSTRATING BY REMEMBERING KINDNESS

Prostrating by remembering kindness particularly refers to Manjushri, with whom Shantideva himself had close personal relationship, and relied upon as a guide and teacher. Remembering Manjushri's kindness is highlighted in the first two lines of the verse.

The verse reads:

58ab. *I prostrate to Manjushri,
Through whose kindness virtuous minds arise.*

The commentary explains:

I prostrate to the special virtuous teacher Manjushri, the empowering condition through whose kindness the meditation on bodhicitta and then training in the actions as well as the virtuous awareness to compose the treatise taking these as the subject, arose.

From this we can see that Shantideva in no way boasted that he composed this work by himself, but rather relied on his own virtuous teacher Manjushri. In accordance with the lam-rim, this point relates to relying on the virtuous friend or teacher. After stating, *I prostrate to the special virtuous teacher Manjushri*, the empowering condition (to compose the treatise) relates to the fact that any virtuous state of mind does not arise out of nowhere, but rather everything that arises has its own causes and empowering conditions. The empowering condition of the virtue arising from this composition, Shantideva states, is his virtuous teacher Manjushri. In explaining, *through whose kindness the meditation on bodhicitta* arose, the commentary indicates that the ability to meditate on bodhicitta also arises through the kindness of the virtuous teacher Manjushri. Then, having meditated on bodhicitta *training in the actions* means engaging in actions based on the bodhicitta mind also arises through the kindness of Manjushri. Then, *the virtuous awareness to compose the treatise taking these as the subject*, also arose through the kindness of Manjushri. What is being presented here is the need to remember the kindness of the virtuous teacher.

The second two lines of the verse refer to the actual prostration:

*58cd. I also prostrate to the virtuous teachers,
Through whom one develops.*

One section in the lam-rim outline pays special respect to the virtuous teacher by remembering their kindness. You can see that this verse definitely relates to that point in the lam-rim.

The commentary explains:

I also prostrate to the virtuous friend through whose kindness I was inspired to engage in the trainings and who gave strength for the virtuous side by generating the realisations of listening, contemplating, and meditating in my continuum.

As presented here, these are indications of how, when we take it as a personal instruction for our own practice, it is by remembering their kindness that one will naturally develop respect for one's teachers. We can all remember the time when we didn't have any understanding of the Dharma or how to practise it. Now, however, we have reached the level of having gained knowledge of the teachings and received instructions on how to practise. So, gradually our understanding has increased which is all due to the kindness of the virtuous teachers. By contemplating and thinking about that, naturally remembering the kindness of the gurus and the teachers will arise, which is followed by paying respect.

The commentary continues:

This last chapter explains elaborately the training in the generosity of giving away body, possessions, and roots of virtue for the purpose of others with the dedication taking as objects and transforming them with strong aspiration into the temporary and

ultimate objectives of prayer. Since the training in generosity was also explained earlier, I did not write a separate chapter on generosity.

As explained here, this *chapter explains elaborately the training in the generosity of giving away body, possessions, and roots of virtue for the purpose of others*. As earlier stated, this is mentioned here specifically, *with the dedication taking as objects and transforming them with strong aspiration into the temporary and ultimate objectives of one's aspiration or prayer*. Since the training in generosity was also explained earlier, I did not write a separate chapter on generosity implies that it is included here in this last chapter. This next concluding verse is by Gyaltsab Rinpoche himself.

It reads:

Whatever virtue there is from listening, contemplating
and meditating,
Whether it is the mere virtue of prostration or
offering,
To make all virtues inexhaustible
And to increase them, I adorn them with dedication.
This is the condensed explanation.

Again, this passage reveals an essential instruction to take into our own practice. The commentary's author, Gyaltsab Rinpoche himself, says here that *whatever virtue there is from listening, contemplating and meditating*, that is, whatever time and energy one spends in listening to the Dharma, thinking about it and then meditating on it, *whether it is the mere virtue of prostration or offering*, which includes all other means for accumulating merit - such as doing prostrations and making offerings, the way *to make all virtues inexhaustible* so they do not dissipate or go to waste *and to increase them*, is *to adorn them with dedication*. This shows how it is really essential and significant to make dedications to ensure that one's virtues are not wasted, and for them to further increase.

As mentioned previously, whenever one accumulates virtue or merit, the way to secure them so they don't go to waste is by making a dedication. That is why we have the dedication at the end of every practice.

II. EXPLANATION OF THE NAME OF THE CHAPTER

As presented here:

**This is at the tenth chapter of dedication of the
Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life.**

The commentary reads:

This is the commentary on the tenth chapter called *Thorough Dedication* from *The Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, called *The Entrance for the Children of the Conquerors*.

The title *The Entrance for the Children of the Conqueror's* is the name Gyaltsab Rinpoche gave to his commentary.

THE MEANING OF THE END

There is a part at the end which has not been translated into English. It comes from under a heading used at the very beginning of the text, where it was the last of the four main headings.

This essentially explains who composed the text and who translated it.

**This text is called Introduction to the Bodhisattva's
Way of Life and is composed by the renowned
master Shantideva, who was guided directly by**

Manjushri himself. Shantideva personally engaged in incredibly profound deeds of the bodhisattvas way of life, and in particular, having mastered the highest yoga tantra practices, obtained the state of Vajradhara.

So the treatise propounded by this great master is completed.

It was translated by the Indian abbot Sarvajnadeva and the translator Pal-tzeg, from a manuscript that comes from the Muslim continent.

This probably refers to Afghanistan. There were many great Buddhist scholars in Afghanistan at one time, and there are quite a lot of references to the masters who came from the Muslim continent. That is my assumption knowing that there have been great scholars from Afghanistan.

At one time Buddhism flourished in countries like Afghanistan, but now there seems to be little or no trace of any practitioners there. However through artefacts we can see very obvious signs in carvings of Buddhas etc. still in Afghanistan that prove the strong influence of Buddhism at one time. I don't have a clear understanding of how many artefacts still exist. You might know better yourselves.

This concludes the teaching on the explanations of *the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* which we can safely say went very well.

Now we can make a strong dedication, of the studies done together, with the recitation of the Tenth Chapter.

[Recitation]

For the next session I would like you to have a discussion on the two truths according to the four different schools of Buddhism. How the Vaibhashika assert the two truths, and the two truths according to the Sautrantika, the Cittamatra or mind-only school and then the Prasangika. How do they each assert the two truths? What are their points of distinction and so forth? This is something I had in mind previously, but didn't find the right time for you to have the discussion.

In terms of doing the teachings on the lam-rim *Lamp on the Path*, my intention is just to go over the meanings of the verses.

For your homework, in preparation for these teachings, I would like you to read the lam-rim texts which are translated in English. The lam-rim text begins with the small scope. When it comes to classifications of certain topics, I would ask you to check what the classifications of certain topics are so as I go through the verses we will relate them to the specific classifications presented in the lam-rim text.

My intention is to present the lam-rim as material for you to actually put into practice. The lam-rim teaching is essentially tailored for that. The small scope begins with relying on a virtuous teacher. The actual topics are then: a precious human rebirth; death and impermanence; karma and then refuge. They will be the main topics of the small scope.

So you read from the lam-rim text, then as we go through the verses, we can relate to those topics in the lam-rim.

For example, when we come to the first topic of the precious human rebirth, when the text indicates the eight freedoms, you will be the ones to tell me what the eight freedoms are and what the ten endowments are. This is something to be prepared from your side. Then as we go through the text, we will come to those types of lists such as death and impermanence. We will look at the benefits or the advantages of thinking about death and impermanence and also the disadvantages of not thinking about death and impermanence, and what the measure is of thinking about death and impermanence, or how to go about that. These are the classifications presented in the lam-rim, and something you can familiarise yourself with.

In fact, it is particularly essential to reflect upon the topic of death and impermanence in order for our practice to become a real and pure Dharma practice. Without recollecting death and impermanence, almost everything we do would just focus on this life, and our practice could not be a pure Dharma practice. When the focus is on this life's pleasures or this life's gains, then it is not a Dharma practice. These are essential points. As I also presented during the recent Easter course on *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, until one reverses clinging to this life, one has not really engaged in the practice of Dharma.

The verse itself says that a precious human life is difficult to find and that one does not have leisure time with that life. By contemplating this, the clinging to this life will be reversed. Understanding points like those explained in *The Three Principals of the Path* are essential and can be related back to the lam-rim teachings.

Indeed when one starts to reduce the clinging to and the grasping at this life, one's mind starts to become more joyous, more calm and happier. Otherwise, for as long as we have a strong clinging to this life, we will never be satisfied, and never content. No matter how much we try to gain, there is never a sense of contentment in one's mind.

I think that an example of those with external signs of discontentment are those with tattoos on their bodies. They begin with a small tattoo somewhere, and then it seems that they are not content with that and then they have to get a bigger tattoo, and then they get more tattoos covering all parts of their body. Then when all the other parts of their body are completely tattooed, they even start to tattoo their forehead and face! So I feel that clearly shows discontentment.

Then there are also accounts of someone owning three to four thousand pairs of shoes – another external sign of discontentment. Another instance I saw personally was when I was staying at a home in Perth owned by very rich woman whose father got rich in mining. Now she (Gina Rinehart) is a mining tycoon and has apparently made a lot of money. In any case, the father remarried a Filipino woman (Rose Hancock/Porteous). We were shown the house and there was a small room full of cosmetics! When I saw all that I felt it was a sign of discontentment. Perhaps a few would be okay, but a whole room full of cosmetics! All of those cosmetics

didn't seem to have helped to beautify her body, and surely didn't stop her from ageing!

Then again on the other hand, I have seen well-known and apparently quite rich individuals wear very simple clothes and go around helping those who are poor. I see that that as a really a good sign. The money they would have saved on expensive clothing etc. is rather used to help the poor and the needy, and that is very noteworthy. When we see accounts like that, it can remind us how suffering is really the suffering of dissatisfaction. It is not the suffering of not having, but rather it is the suffering of dissatisfaction. Even if someone has things in abundance, they are still not happy.

I am just indicating here that the main topic of the small scope is an explanation of how to develop a disenchantment with the pleasures of this life, and thus overcome the clinging to and grasping at it. Then when the strong clinging to this life is reduced, even in this life itself one starts to experience the positive consequences of the mind being more relaxed and happier, not to mention the benefits in the future lives.

When we can understand these teachings, and how putting them into practice can begin to transform our mind, we can see how the actual practice of Dharma is a means to bring about a more genuinely happy mind now, and in future lives.

This reminds me of a remark made by a Mongolian abbot when he was abbot of the Gomang Monastery in Drepung. One time when I was visiting that monastery he was asking about the wellbeing of a prominent teacher Khensur Lobsang Wangchuk, who was indeed a great teacher and master. The Mongolian abbot asked me "How is Khensur Lobsang Wangchuk?" and I said "Oh, he is actually quite well". Then he replied to me "Indeed, he would be well whether he is sitting, whether he is moving about, wherever he is going, whatever he is doing he would be happy!".

The main point here is that as our mind becomes more subdued and naturally becomes happier, then whatever we do, on every account we will be more joyful. Of course in terms of this life it is a only certain number of years, but it is especially a good preparation for the time of our passing, at the time of death, when our mind could be much more joyful and more peaceful. We see these accounts occurring. So for the future life it will also be the best preparation.

Basically death and rebirth in an everyday experience is similar going to sleep and then waking up again. By going to sleep with a happy mind, it is more likely you will wake up with a happy mind.

There are accounts of prominent masters and teachers making remarks like "I have no hesitation for an old person in the evening to come back again as a young vibrant child in the morning". Even children appreciate this notion. When a mother was asked by her child "What happens when we die?" and responded with "Oh well, when we die we will just come back again", the young child remarked "Oh, how wonderful. That is very nice". This idea seems to give some solace that everything you know doesn't just disappear, but there is a continuation

and you will come back. This is quite a comforting notion.

Then there are accounts of child prodigies where young children show great skills which usually would have taken years to learn. Without any teaching they spontaneously become great experts in, for example, playing the violin or playing the piano. Those who do not believe in past lives are astonished and wonder how this can be explained, whereas past lives easily explains it as a strong imprint from the past.

On TV recently a child of barely one year old was swimming like a fish with no fear of the water. By now he's probably a bit bigger, but he was swimming then under water with no hesitation and no fear. I don't know what you would relate it to but whenever I see accounts like this I think it's quite astonishing. There are many signs of what seem to be amazing things which are something to be learned about and something to know about.

For the discussion, could those of you who have resources bring them along because we can't expect the newer students to know where to find them or to have access to them. If you can bring those resources it would be good to share them or to show them during the discussion.

This approach will be good for teachings like the tenets, which I have presented previously. There is a particular tenet called *The Precious Garland of Tenets* which is quite a short text that has been translated to English. I think Geoffrey Hopkins has also translated the Changkya tenets by Changkya Rolpay Dorjee. Of course now in my old age I might not recall specific passages, but I have read it many times and it is really good text.

In my youth I memorised the whole lam-rim and its outline, and I was able to quote and recite it. Now, in my old age I may not be able remember it all, however in my youth I definitely made the effort to memorise many texts.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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