
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱུང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའི་སྐྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual we will spend some time in meditation. The *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* that we have recited will suffice for our motivation. It's good to really think about the meaning of the lines in that prayer.

For the purposes of our practice it would be good to envision the objects of refuge, Buddha Shakyamuni surrounded by all gurus, buddhas and bodhisattvas, in the space before us. At the front, in the centre, we can envision all those beings towards whom we feel hostile. To the right we envision our father of this life surrounded by all relatives and friends of the male aspect, and to the left side our mother and all other relatives and friends of the female aspect. Surrounding these are an infinite number of sentient beings. As one engages in the *tong len* practice of giving and taking, envision receiving inspiration from the objects of refuge, and then engage in the practise of giving and taking in relation to the surrounding beings, who are the objects of our love and compassion. This ensures that we are doing a very good and appropriate practice.

As we become familiar with this visualisation, we will be able to use it whenever we recite the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*. When we commence the prayer we will be able to recall the objects of refuge in front of us and the objects of bodhicitta surrounding us. Also as we recite the prayer we can imagine ourselves to be like a chant leader, leading all other sentient beings surrounding us into taking refuge as well. As we sincerely take refuge in the objects of refuge we imagine that all beings surrounding us also take refuge in the objects of refuge and that we all receive the blessings. With this in mind we can now engage in the practice.

[meditation]

This is a very meaningful practice. As we engage in it we can generate the strong aspiration, 'May I be able to put this into practice. May I be able to actually implement this visualisation and make it an actual practice'. Then our meditation practice becomes really meaningful. We should not consider this a mere simple practice. It is, in fact, an incredibly meaningful and powerful practice. The teachings mention again and again that the root of all happiness lies in generating true love and compassion within one's heart. So this practice of *tong len* is definitely a very high level practice. Any practice that we engage in that is not based on love and compassion is only a practice that is sullied with personal interest and gains.

The more we familiarise ourselves with the practice of love and compassion, meditating and thinking about it again and again, the more it will help us to reduce anger towards others, which is a practical benefit for ourselves as well as others. That is because the practice of

generating love and compassion in one's heart involves focussing on those sentient beings who are experiencing suffering, and who are deprived of happiness. So the more we familiarise our minds with their plight and wishing them not to experience any suffering, the more endearing and closer they become. Thus we begin to really open up our hearts to them.

As we progress with our practice, we slowly begin to transform that initial wish for sentient beings to be free from suffering and endowed with happiness into the state of taking on a personal responsibility for doing that ourselves. Thus we transform our love and compassion into superior intention, where we make the resolve, 'I will myself lead all sentient beings out of the state of all suffering and place them into the ultimate state of happiness'. Having developed this superior intention, we are now very close to developing the actual awakening mind. This is how we gradually develop our intention to benefit other sentient beings.

As mentioned previously, when we relate to the plight of those who are deprived of happiness and who are experiencing great suffering there is no room for an angry and hostile mind to arise. That is because our thoughts are filled with genuinely wanting them to experience happiness and not to experience any suffering. When we are feeling love and compassion, thoughts of anger cannot arise. Likewise, thinking in this way will definitely help to overcome feelings of jealousy, contempt, competitiveness and so forth towards other beings. Through this practice these kinds of negative attitudes will definitely be overcome. So we can see how, as we develop our mind and improve it further, what seems like a simple practice is really a profound one. This is the way to progress on the path to enlightenment.

Of course the very reason we engage in the practice of meditating on love and compassion is so that we can implement it when we actually interact with others. We need to remind ourselves again and again, that the whole purpose of meditating on love and compassion is so that we can integrate and apply it in our daily lives. When we come out of our formal meditation practice and begin to interact with others, we need to ensure that our interactions are actually based on the sense of love and compassion with which we have been familiarising ourselves with during the meditation sessions. If we do this sincerely with a strong commitment, then the positive effect of our meditation will indeed extend into our everyday lives where we interact with other beings. This is how we need to actually engage in the practice.

I emphasise these points regularly as a way to remind you that these are essential practices—they are the very practices we need to take to heart. The teachings remind us again and again that love and compassion is the very basis for every Dharma practice. So we need to actually implement this advice in our own practices.

During the recent Easter course there was someone who said she used to come here regularly. She confided that she had practised meditation for over ten years, but her practice had lapsed for a while. However she has taken it up again recently. She said that while she is able to maintain her focus during meditation for about half an hour and even up to an hour at times with no problems,

she reverts to being grumpy and irritated as soon as she comes out of her meditation. She was being very truthful about her difficulties in maintaining her practice.

Being truthful like that is far better than being pretentious about not being affected by the world. Others may not detect what is going on, but affecting this pretentious calm and cool attitude when there is actually internal irritation can harm our progress. It is far better to be honest about the failings in our practice. When we are honest about where we are at, then when we listen to the teachings and receive advice, it can really hit the mark and help us to transform our mind.

This situation of not being able to extend our calm state of mind during meditation into the post-meditation state, arises because of not maintaining mindfulness and introspection out of the meditation session. It is because we have not maintained mindfulness and introspection outside the meditation session that the faults of becoming agitated and grumpy occur.

As I have mentioned previously, someone else confided in me that although he had been familiar with the meditation practice for over ten years, he had never heard about the specifics of applying mindfulness and introspection in meditation. He said it was really incredible when he was introduced to it. How had he missed this essential point?

2.1 Explaining the benefits of bodhicitta

Having heard of the benefits in detail, one will then feel inspired to develop bodhicitta. The way the text next introduces the nature of bodhicitta is really very skilful. Here, we can note the meticulous presentation of the great master Shantideva. Firstly he inspires us by explaining the benefits of bodhicitta, and then he explains what the nature of bodhicitta is.

2.2. Identifying the nature of bodhicitta

This heading has three divisions:

2.2.1. Divisions by nature

2.2.2. Explaining the divisions with an example

2.2.3. Explaining the difference between the benefits of the wishing and engaging minds

2.2.1. Divisions by nature

The divisions of bodhicitta by nature are presented in this verse:

15. *The mind of enlightenment, if summed up,
Should be known in two aspects:
The mind wishing for enlightenment and
The one engaging in enlightenment.*

Of course these two divisions of bodhicitta have been presented many times in previous teachings to older students.

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Take the subject 'the generation of the mind of supreme enlightenment': by way of nature it should be known in brief in two aspects—the mind focusing on wishing for enlightenment, and the mind focusing on engaging in enlightenment.

Thus, there are two divisions of bodhicitta by nature: wishing bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta.

Next Gyaltsab Je presents this definition of bodhicitta:

The definition of the Mahayana mind generation is the mind that accompanies the aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the purpose of others.

This of course is an abbreviated definition; we have gone over the more detailed definition of the Mahayana mind generation in previous teachings.¹ However, the definition of the *Mahayana mind generation* presented here is that it is *the mind that accompanies the aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the purpose of others*.

Here we need to take note that within the divisions of mind and mental factors, bodhicitta is a primary mind and thus not a mental factor. It is however accompanied by the mental factor of aspiration which is of two-fold: the aspiration to benefit other sentient beings and the aspiration to achieve enlightenment oneself.

The first aspiration is the aspiration to benefit others, which is generated within one's mind-stream on the basis of having developed love and compassion and superior intention. From that follows the aspiration to achieve enlightenment oneself for the sake of all sentient beings. This is the actual aspiration that accompanies bodhicitta. In other words, in order to fulfil the aspiration to benefit other sentient beings, one needs to first fulfil the aspiration of achieving enlightenment oneself. Thus we need to obtain enlightenment first in order to benefit others to the fullest extent. This is an essential point that we need to recognise and understand.

In summary, the Mahayana mind generation or bodhicitta is a primary mind that is accompanied by two aspirations. The aspiration to benefit others is the causal aspiration, whereas the aspiration to attain complete enlightenment is the resultant aspiration that accompanies bodhicitta. Thus the aspiration to achieve enlightenment is that which accompanies bodhicitta, i.e. the *mind of supreme enlightenment*.

As mentioned previously, in terms of development, the aspiration to benefit others is generated first followed by the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for oneself. In terms of obtaining the results, one first obtains the state of enlightenment and will then be able to lead other sentient beings to the state of enlightenment. So, one needs to obtain enlightenment first in order to be able to actually engage in the ultimate purpose of benefitting others, i.e.

¹ There are two Tibetan terms used in this context, *teck-chen sem-kye* and *jang-chub sem*.

The Sanskrit term bodhicitta is *jang-chub sem* in Tibetan – *jang-chub* means enlightenment and *sem* means mind, hence the literal translation is 'mind of enlightenment'; however the implicit meaning is the 'mind that aspires to obtain enlightenment'. The person who has this mind that aspires to obtain enlightenment is a *jang-chub sem-pa*, or bodhisattva in Sanskrit.

The term *teck-chen sem-kye* is translated in the commentary as 'Mahayana mind generation' – *teck-chen* means Mahayana, *sem* means mind and *kye* means generation. It specifically refers to a mind that is characterised as a Mahayana mind from the moment it is generated and for as long as it is maintained.

So the two terms essentially refer to the same thing with respect to the nature of the mind which aspires to enlightenment. The difference lies in the fact that one term involves a process, i.e. generation, and a setting, i.e. Mahayana, whereas the other is focussed on the result, i.e. the 'mind of enlightenment' or more specifically that which aspires to obtain enlightenment.

lead them to the state of complete enlightenment. As the teachings mention, when we work solely for the benefit of others, it will naturally fulfil our own purpose as well. So, this means that when we are fully committed to benefiting other sentient beings, that will also serve as the optimum means to obtain enlightenment ourselves, because we realise that without obtaining enlightenment oneself first there is no way that we can fully benefit others.

More specifically, you will recall that in the seven-point cause and effect sequence for developing bodhicitta, the state of mind that serves as the immediate cause to achieve the result of bodhicitta is called superior intention. This is where one takes on full responsibility for leading all beings to happiness and removing them from all suffering. The mind of superior intention makes this resolve, 'I will not rely on others to do it, but rather I will take it upon myself to bring happiness and free all beings from suffering'.

Having taken on that personal responsibility, which is based on love and compassion, and making the courageous commitment to bring all beings to the ultimate state of happiness and free them from all suffering, one then reflects on whether one has the ability to do that right now. When one realises that one does not have that full ability now, one investigates who has that ability, and comes to realise that only a buddha has the full capacity to benefit all sentient beings.

When one takes refuge in the Buddha by reflecting on the enlightened qualities in detail, such as the qualities of his holy body that is adorned with the enlightened signs and marks, the numerous qualities of his speech, the unimaginable qualities of his omniscient mind, and his vast virtuous activities, then that in itself becomes a strong impetus to develop exactly those same qualities for ourselves. It is only when one has obtained all the qualities of enlightenment that one will gain the full ability to free all other beings from suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness. When one develops the strong aspiration to obtain enlightenment as a way to benefit all sentient beings fully and completely, then one has developed bodhicitta or the awakening mind. This is how one develops the Mahayana mind generation—a mind that aspires to obtain supreme enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

You also need to understand that bodhicitta is developed only on the basis of having first obtained calm abiding. As explained many times previously, the mind basis for developing bodhicitta is a higher realm mind called the preparatory stage.² As explained in the teachings, calm abiding, the preparatory stage and the mind of higher realm are all obtained simultaneously. The reason why bodhicitta cannot be generated based on a mind of the desire realm is because the mind of the desire realm is a very gross level of mind, and since bodhicitta is only developed in relation to a subtle mind and particularly a

very firm and stable mind, it has to be generated based on calm abiding which is a higher realm mind.

You can refer to the more extensive definition of bodhicitta that is presented in other texts and compare it with the definition presented here. Does the definition presented here include all of the necessary elements of bodhicitta? It's good for you to investigate this. So, is this definition intact?

Students: Yes.

But this definition would apply even to an ordinary being who has not yet entered the path. Ordinary beings just prior to entering the Mahayana path would have generated the mind that aspires to enlightenment, and even though it is a contrived mind it still meets all the criteria of this definition, doesn't it?

Also, the Buddha's eye consciousness is a primary consciousness, which also meets the criteria of the definition, but it would not be referred to as being bodhicitta. Thus the crucial element that needs to be added on to this definition of the generation of a Mahayana mind is that it is a Mahayana primary mental consciousness. So, thus the full definition would read: the Mahayana primary mental consciousness that accompanies the aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the purpose of others. This definition carries the criteria for it to be the full definition of the generation of the Mahayana mind of bodhicitta. Adding the extra element 'Mahayana primary mental consciousness' to the definition, rules out the primary consciousnesses of the other senses such as eye primary consciousness, the nose primary consciousness, the tongue primary consciousness and so forth as bodhicitta.

The inclusion of 'Mahayana' in the definition also rules out the mental consciousnesses of an ordinary being who has not yet entered the Mahayana path, as being bodhicitta. In the definition presented here it just mentions a 'mind that accompanies the aspiration' and does not specify that it has to be a Mahayana mental consciousness.

We will not go further into the extensive explanation in the commentary at this point, as you can read that for yourselves. As presented there, in addition to this two-fold division Gyalsab Je mentions twenty-two divisions by example and four by boundary, all of which are explained in the lam rim teachings. The commentary also refers to abandoning the four black dharmas and relying on the four white dharmas and so forth, and again these are also explained in the lam rim teachings. As the author of the commentary, Gyalsab Je, mentions, to understand all of these more extensively, you must study the lam rim teachings.

2.2.2. Explaining the divisions with an example

The next verse goes into more detail.

16. *In the same way one understands the difference between
Wishing to go and going,
Those who are proficient should
Understand the difference of the two
sequentially.*

² A preparatory virtuous state of concentration within the sphere of the form and formless realm that directly generates an actual state of meditative concentration of either the form or formless absorption. There are eight types of preparatory meditative concentrations.

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

The mind that thinks, 'I want to go to that place' while resting and not being held by the action of going, and the mind that thinks, 'I shall go to that place' while held by the action of placing one foot down and raising the other, are the same in being an awareness that thinks 'I should go to that place'.

The difference lies with being held, or not being held by the action of going.

That is the example. Then the commentary continues:

The respective difference between the wishing and engaging mind generation should be understood by those who are proficient in the same way. They are the same in being a mind that thinks, 'I shall attain enlightenment for the welfare of others', but one of them does not depend on being held by the practice of the perfections of generosity and so forth, and the other does depend on that.

So the difference between wishing bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta does not lie in the intention, which is the same for both, i.e. 'I shall obtain enlightenment for the welfare of others'.

What does differentiate the two is that wishing bodhicitta is not accompanied by engaging in the practices of perfection of generosity and so forth. Whereas engaging bodhicitta, while having the same mind of 'I shall obtain enlightenment for the welfare of others', is held by the practices of the perfection of generosity and so forth. With engaging bodhicitta the practice of the perfections of generosity and so forth is manifest.

One way to understand this is that a bodhisattva who is in meditative equipoise is not actively practising engaging bodhicitta, but they do maintain the wishing bodhicitta within their mental continuum. When the bodhisattvas come out of meditative equipoise and enter into the post-meditative state, they engage in activities of benefiting others such as by practising generosity, giving teachings and so forth; and at that time their mind is held by the engaging bodhicitta. It is good to understand this distinction between wishing or aspiring bodhicitta, and engaging bodhicitta. That should be sufficient for now—you can do more research on that for yourselves.

The commentary ends the section with this comment:

The master Kamalashila and others explained it in the same way, so I will not elaborate it here.

2.2.3. Explaining the difference in the benefits of the wishing and engaging minds

This is sub-divided into two:

2.2.3.1. The benefits of the wishing mind

2.2.3.2. The benefits of the engaging mind

2.2.3.1. THE BENEFITS OF THE WISHING MIND

In his commentary on this section, Gyaltsab Je begins with this quotation from the sutra called *The Liberation of the Superior Jampa*:

Son of the lineage, it is like this: For example, the precious diamond, though broken, outshines the supreme ornaments of gold and so forth, still keeps the name 'precious diamond', and eliminates all poverty. Son of the lineage, likewise the precious diamond of the mind that generates omniscient

knowledge, even without significance, outshines all the gold of the qualities of the hearers and self-liberators. It keeps the name of bodhisattva and eliminates all the poverty of cyclic existence.

This quote was also mentioned when we were studying the *Madhyamaka* (or Middle Way text), so you will be familiar with it.

Then the verse from the root text is presented:

*17. Though from the wishing mind of enlightenment
Great benefit arises while circling,
Continual merit, similar to the mind
Of engaging, does not arise.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

As stated here, though a great result from the mind wishing for enlightenment arises while being in cyclic existence, a similar uninterrupted stream of merits, such as that which arises from the engaging mind does not arise.

As a result of the merit accumulated from a wishing mind of enlightenment while one is in cyclic existence one actually experiences great positive results, such as being born as a universal monarch and so forth.

However an uninterrupted stream of merit is not obtained from a mind that merely wishes for enlightenment. The engaging mind produces an uninterrupted stream of merit, which is far superior and far greater than the merit one gains from just the wishing mind.

The distinction between the mind that generates a wish for bodhicitta and the mind that engages in bodhicitta can be understood in terms of how each is actually implemented. The wishing mind is where one develops that keen aspiration to achieve enlightenment, 'May I achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings', which suffices for the wishing mind. Based upon that aspiration of wishing to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, the engaging mind actually makes a promise to achieve enlightenment. When we talk about the bodhisattva vows, we are talking about vows that are based upon the engaging mind. Based on the earlier aspiration 'for the sake of all sentient beings I aspire to achieve enlightenment', the engaging bodhicitta mind promises to engage in the practices of the six perfections such as generosity and so forth. So we can see that there is definitely a difference between a mere aspiration and making a promise to fulfil that aspiration.

We can relate this to the practices and commitments that we regularly undertake, such as the Vajrayogini sadhana. The practice begins with 'I aspire to achieve the united state of Vajrayogini and for that purpose I will now engage in these practices of generating myself as the deity and so forth'. The first part 'for the sake of achieving enlightenment may I achieve the state of Vajrayogini' suffices as wishing bodhicitta. The second part 'for that purpose I will engage in the self-generation of Vajrayogini' suffices for engaging bodhicitta. It is good to apply this understanding to any practices we may engage in.

One also needs to understand that it is the promise that makes engaging bodhicitta so much more powerful. We can see this with our practice of the virtues, such as

refraining from killing. The mere act of refraining from killing is of course a virtuous act in itself. However if one were to actually promise, 'Today, I will not engage in any act of killing' or 'I will completely refrain from killing' then the act of refraining from killing becomes much more powerful and much more meritorious. This is important to understand.

It is good to study the definition of the Mahayana mind generation or bodhicitta and become familiar with what it actually means. That doesn't mean just being able to repeat the definition, but rather having a personal understanding of what bodhicitta actually means. What is the actual difference between wishing bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta and so forth? We need to really understand this so we understand what we are striving for.

Bodhicitta is not something to be left as merely an intellectual understanding. We will gain the most benefit from bodhicitta when we actually meditate on it. Initially meditating on bodhicitta can be done with the explanation based on the sequential development of bodhicitta. As I have presented on numerous occasions, there are two main methods for developing bodhicitta. One is based on the seven-point cause and effect sequence, and the other on the technique of equalising and exchanging oneself with others. In the form of a meditation, or as part of familiarising one's own mind with them, it is good to go over these points and try to reflect upon them.

The seven-point cause and effect sequence begins with developing equanimity towards all living beings. We begin the process of developing a contrived bodhicitta by 1) contemplating how all beings have been equally kind to oneself, as they have all been one's mother in an infinite number of past lives. At this point you need to use logical reasons to determine that, as one's mental continuum has gone back beyond the conception of this life through numerous, countless, and infinite past lives, then all beings must at one time or another have been one's mother. Then 2) we remember the incredible kindness shown to us by all beings, just like one's mother in this life. In this way we remember their great kindness. Next, 3) we develop the strong intention of wishing to repay that kindness. Then 4) we develop heart-warming or appealing love for all beings, 5) followed by compassion. The sixth cause 6) is superior intention. Having meditated in this sequence one has, using this contrived means, reached a point where one really wants to do anything possible to benefit sentient beings, to bring them happiness and remove their suffering. When we acknowledge that we do not have the full potential or ability to achieve that goal, then the aspiration to obtain enlightenment is developed.

When we develop that thought, 'How wonderful it would be if I could obtain enlightenment in order to benefit all beings', we have generated a contrived bodhicitta attitude. We need to further familiarise our mind with this contrived attitude until it becomes the effortless and spontaneous wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings.

The technique that Shantideva presents in great detail in the eighth chapter of *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* is the

equalising and exchanging self with other technique. The exchanging self with other technique has four stages, beginning with 1) equalising oneself with others, which is developing equanimity. Then based on that, 2) one contemplates the many faults of cherishing oneself; followed by 3) contemplating the benefits of cherishing others. Then comes 4) the actual practice of exchanging self with others, which incorporates superior intention. You would have done this *tong len* practice of giving and taking over the three weeks when I went to India last year.

Some texts indicate that when one engages in the practice of developing bodhicitta using the exchanging self with others technique, then the seven-point cause and effect sequence is subsumed into that technique. Whereas if you're practicing the seven-point cause and effect sequence for developing bodhicitta, that doesn't necessarily suffice as a practise of exchanging self with others technique.

Some have commented that the exchanging self with others technique doesn't necessarily mean that you have to think about past lives. I think this particular explanation is presented in *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, which also mentions that the exchanging self with others technique incorporates the seven-point cause and effect technique as well.

So it's good to refer to different texts and read their various explanations as a way to increase your understanding and wisdom. The opportunity we have now is, of course, very rare, and this is a good opportunity to try to bring this about again in the future. But that's very hard to predict.

Before she passed away Caryn Clarke confided in me, 'I have no real hesitation about death itself, but the prospect of not meeting with such an opportunity to be with you again is a prospect that really frightens me'. She was referring to me, but of course she really meant having the opportunity to practise Dharma and meet with teachers. We need to take this as a personal instruction. The great Kadampa masters had similar ways of presenting instructions; with predicaments and so forth. Caryn said, 'You know I've had the opportunity to be with you for about seven years, and that was a great time of being together, for learning and practice. I worry that I won't have this opportunity again'. These are points that we need to remember.

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

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

14 May 2013

Based on the motivation we generated in the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in our meditation practice. [meditation]

It would be good to generate from the depths of one's heart a positive motivation for receiving the teaching such as: For the purpose of all sentient beings, to free them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of enlightenment and happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself; so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

2.2.3. Explaining the difference in the benefits of the wishing and engaging minds (cont.)

The distinction between the wishing mind and the engaging mind was presented in the last session, along with the benefits of the wishing mind of bodhicitta. It is good to reflect on those benefits.

Again, I exhort you to contemplate the meaning of the teachings that have been presented and not to just leave it as a mere intellectual understanding thinking, 'OK, I've heard that. It makes sense'. There is not much benefit in just skimming over what is being presented. The only way to derive any personal benefit is by really contemplating and reflecting on the meaning of these points. Only then can one taste the real flavour of what is being presented. Having reflected on and digested the meaning of what the great scholar and master Shantideva presented, we will begin to really admire and venerate him.

The most important application of these teachings to our practice is to see how they counteract our very stubborn mind, which cherishes our own interests and well-being. It counteracts that self-cherishing because everything being presented here relates to thinking about the welfare of all other beings, and how to benefit them. By its very nature the material presented here extends our view beyond ourselves to benefiting others, which definitely counteracts our focus on our own interests and our self-cherishing mind.

The essence of this presentation lies in the ways and means to benefit others, which also helps to simplify what might otherwise seem to be a complex teaching. When we look into it, we find that we already have, to a certain degree, a wish to benefit others. So it is just a matter of further developing and expanding that. That is essentially what is being presented here.

2.2.3.2. THE BENEFITS OF THE ENGAGING MIND

The two verses relating to this heading are:

18. *Whoever, from the time they perfectly generate
With an irreversible attitude,
This mind to liberate the infinite
Realms of sentient beings,*
19. *From then on, although they sleep
Or become reckless, manifold
Merits of uninterrupted power,
Equalling space, strongly arise.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je begins his explanation of the meaning of these verses as follows:

Whoever, from the moment they perfectly generate an irreversible engaging mind for the purpose of others, to completely liberate all realms of beings and place them in the state of enlightenment, for as long as cyclic existence lasts,...

These verses are introducing the nature of the engaging mind as a way of explaining its benefits. As explained earlier, the wishing mind is a mere aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of other sentient beings, whereas the engaging mind is a mind accompanied by actions or deeds such as the six perfections. *From the moment* someone makes that pledge or vow to engage in the bodhisattva deeds *they perfectly generate the irreversible engaging mind for the purpose of others*. This refers to engaging in the actions solely for *the purpose of benefiting others for as long as cyclic existence lasts* and *to completely liberate sentient beings in all realms*. This is the extent of the pledge that is made when one takes the engaging bodhisattva vows.

So, the engaging mind is this very strong and stable pledge to not abandon working for the purpose of others for as long as cyclic existence lasts. This means continuously working for the purpose of others until the very last sentient being is liberated. Here we need to take note that the negativity from breaching the bodhisattva vows is only incurred when one has made this pledge. With a wishing mind one has not made any pledge, so if one does not apply oneself to the practice, or if one breaches any of the practices, there will be no resulting negativity, simply because one has not made the pledge. The negativity of a downfall occurs only when one breaches the commitments of a pledge.

Having explained the engaging mind and that it involves making a pledge, Gyaltsab Je indicates that from the time the bodhisattva makes the pledge and generates the engaging mind:

... from then on, whether they sleep or become reckless through intoxication and so forth, they will still create a manifold uninterrupted power of merit as vast as space.

That is because the wishing mind is generated merely through aspiring to the result, while the engaging mind is held by the practice of completing the causes for enlightenment.

As this is such a clear presentation it is good for us to reflect on its meaning. Because of the power of the pledge and the power of the mind that one has generated (i.e. the resolve to benefit all sentient beings until the end of samsara), bodhisattvas continue to create merit even while asleep, or during moments when they are not being conscientious, such as becoming intoxicated. Some bodhisattvas may engage in worldly activities, such as socialising with others, maybe even drinking to the point of becoming a little intoxicated, and temporarily numbing the mind. However, due to the power of their pledge they are still accumulating merit at that time.

Here we need to understand that there are occasions where, even though their mind is not manifestly active such as when it is intoxicated, or sleeping, the bodhisattva still accumulates merit. But it is important that we don't misinterpret this. It doesn't mean that once the pledge is made, one does not need to further develop that engaging mind—bodhisattvas still need to train to further develop that altruistic state of mind. However, once they have developed the engaging mind they will continuously

accumulate merit, as vast as space, in all their activities, even while sleeping and eating. When eating, for example, they will consciously consume the food with the intention, 'It is for the purpose of nourishing my body to make it stronger, so that I can further develop myself to be in the service of benefiting others, that I eat and drink'. They sleep with the intention, 'I go to sleep in order to rejuvenate and restore the energy of my body, so that I can further work for the welfare of other sentient beings'. So in this way, any activity, even sitting or moving about, is engaged with a conscious mind of doing so for the purpose of benefiting others. That is how bodhisattvas are said to accrue an incredibly vast amount of merit. All their activities become the means to accumulate merit, because they are done for the purpose of other sentient beings.

The main point here is that the way to accumulate a continuous stream of merit is by holding that intention to benefit others. Then whatever activity one engages in actually becomes a means to benefit others. The simple act of opening a door can be done with the intention, 'By opening this door may I open the door to liberation for all sentient beings'. With the bodhicitta attitude a normal and simple activity such turning on the light can generate an altruistic intention such as, 'May turning on this light become the cause to remove the darkness of ignorance within all sentient beings'. So, whatever seemingly simple, mindless activity we normally do, it becomes a supreme means to accumulate extensive merit when it is accompanied by the intention of wishing to benefit others. So combining any practice or activity with that intention of benefiting others is a means to accumulate great merit.

On a practical level, if we can ensure that whenever we engage in any activity we do so with an intention that the activity will benefit others, then that will be a direct antidote to the self-cherishing mind. As explained extensively, because so many faults arise out of a self-cherishing mind, we definitely need to overcome it. A practical way to begin overcoming that negative state of mind is by turning every activity into an intention to benefit others, which will act as a direct antidote that overcomes the self-cherishing mind.

In addition to these ways of training our mind to overcome self-cherishing, there is the practice of equalising and exchanging self with others. This is a practice where we intentionally engage in methods to lessen the self-cherishing mind and replace it with a mind that cherishes others. As mentioned previously, when we ensure that our actions are held with the intention to benefit others, then these actions actually become a practice of cherishing others. Doing anything with the intention of benefiting others will naturally overcome the self-cherishing mind. The practice of exchanging self with others can be thus applied with this intention. We have heard of these practices and techniques many times, so now it is up to us to use every opportunity to try to apply them. That is how we will gain the greatest benefit from the practice.

However, you need not worry that your own welfare will suffer if you cherish others! As mentioned in the teachings, the side-effect of cherishing others will be that your own welfare and wellbeing will naturally be enhanced. More extensive explanations about the benefits of cherishing others and overcoming self-cherishing are found in the eighth chapter of this text.

As mentioned in that chapter, we just need to look at the difference between the Buddha and ourselves in order to understand the disadvantage of cherishing oneself and the

benefit of cherishing others. Having surpassed the practice of cherishing others, the Buddha became a supreme enlightened being, whereas we are still ordinary beings suffering in cyclic existence. That is because we have held onto the self-cherishing mind. This really summarises the benefits of cherishing others. If we have any doubts that we might lose or miss out if we don't cherish ourselves, we can encourage ourselves by remembering that the ultimate benefit of cherishing others is that we will become enlightened, just like the Buddha. There is no greater benefit than that!

We can see the significance of becoming a buddha by recalling how many beings are naturally drawn to the Buddha now—they naturally respect and admire him and want to follow his advice. His Holiness recently mentioned that it had come to his attention that a general survey in China had revealed that there are over 200 million Chinese people who are interested in the Buddhist teachings and who consider themselves to be Buddhists. That is the extent of the interest in the Buddha in these times. Of course, in the past, China was mostly a Buddhist country. When I was in Tibet I used to hear from the elders that things began to decline in China when the emperor was no longer able to reign. If he had been able to rule continuously there would have been peace and wellbeing in China. That is because the emperor was regarded as a manifestation of Manjushri. If the emperor had remained in power, then as a follower of the Dharma, and as a manifestation of Manjushri, he would have brought peace and harmony throughout the Chinese nation. That's what the elders in Tibet used to say.

To this day one of the prominent places of pilgrimage in China is the Five Peaks of Manjushri, where there are many monasteries and temples on the main mountain. I wouldn't mind going on a pilgrimage there but at my age I don't know if I would be able to reach the summit! There's a Tibetan saying that whoever makes the pilgrimage to the Manjushri peaks will definitely receive some sign of making a connection with Manjushri.

Getting back to the main point mentioned earlier, lest we feel we are missing out by cherishing others and overcoming our self-cherishing mind, we can reflect on the Buddha's deeds and qualities, and how we will achieve the same state of buddhahood. That will really help to encourage us to practise cherishing others.

2.3. The reason for these benefits arising

Thus far the many benefits of cherishing others have been presented. Lest one wonders how and why these benefits come about, Shantideva very meticulously presents the reasons why these benefits arise. He does so under two headings:

2.3.1. Stating the quotation

2.3.2. Establishing it with reasoning

2.3.1. Stating the quotation

The quotation is presented in this verse:

20. *That this has validity
Was taught by the Tathagata
In the Subahuprccha
For those aspiring to the lesser.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je elaborates:

That it is valid that the engaging mind has these benefits was established by the Tathagata himself in the *Sutra Requested by the Bodhisattva Subahu* with reasoning ...

The sutra that is referred to here is the *Sutra Requested by the Bodhisattva Subahu*, and *with reasoning* indicates that the quotation from the sutra is a citation that withstands the three-fold analysis. As older students would be aware from previous teachings, the three-fold analysis determines whether a quotation is valid or not.¹ The three-fold forms of analysis are:

1. Obvious phenomena are not contradicted by direct valid perception.
2. Slightly obscure phenomena are not contradicted by valid inference based on the force of evidence. Examples of slightly obscure phenomena would be impermanence, selflessness and so forth.
3. Extremely obscure phenomena are not contradicted by valid inference based on scriptural authority. Examples of extremely obscure phenomena would be the subtleties of karma.

The main point is that a quotation is established as a valid quotation when it withstands the three-fold analysis.

Gyalsab Je's commentary continues:

Why did the Buddha do this? It was intended for those sentient beings who are inclined to the lesser; such as a person whose hearer lineage is not definite, but who is afraid of accumulating vast merit, and thus they turn away from the Mahayana path and aspire to the hearer's enlightenment. It was to help them give up their inclination to the lesser, so that they could be placed in the Mahayana.

We need to clearly understand what is being presented here and what we should specifically rely upon. As mentioned here in the commentary, the Tathagata or the Buddha specifically explained the benefits, especially for those who might be inclined to the Hinayana or the Lesser Vehicle. *Like a person whose hearer lineage was not definite* means that if a being's lineage is already definite or fixed, then there would be no point mentioning it to them because they have definitely entered the Lesser Vehicle. Those whose lineage is not yet definite could turn to either the Mahayana or Hinayana path depending on which teachings inspire them. Such beings might be afraid of the effort needed to accumulate the vast merit required in the Mahayana path and possibly *turn away from the Mahayana path and aspire to the hearer's enlightenment*. So in order to help them give up their inclination to the lesser vehicle and become established in the Great Vehicle, the Buddha explained the benefits of cherishing others.

At a personal level, this is very sound advice. We might safely assume that we don't have the hearer's lineage, meaning that there might be no immediate danger that we will enter the hearer's path. Nevertheless we may lack aspiration to practise the Mahayana path because we are afraid of the vast amount of merit that needs to be accumulated. The prospect of having to accumulate extensive merit might be so daunting that there might be times when we start to think, 'Um, maybe I will set the practice for enlightenment aside for now, and go for self liberation!'

There is a reason why the lam rim teachings present the practices of the three scopes sequentially. If the great scope practices are not presented, then there is the danger for the trainee to aspire to self liberation after they have trained

their mind in the small and medium scope practices. When the trainee becomes familiar with the practices of the small scope followed by the practices of the medium scope, they will develop confidence about being able to obtain liberation. So if bodhicitta is not presented to them at that stage then there is the danger that they will strive just for self-liberation. When the practices of the great scope are introduced they will be able relate their own plight in samsara to all other sentient beings. That can then be developed into the great resolve of liberating all sentient beings and thus entering the Great Vehicle. We need to see how the lam rim has been presented in this way so that there is no danger of entering the lower vehicle; i.e. the path aspiring to self-liberation.

To put this into a more specific context, the benefits of bodhicitta are presented to beings who are not yet inclined to enter the lesser vehicle, such as the hearer's vehicle. If all the great deeds of the bodhisattvas are presented initially to a beginner trainee, that could be too daunting for them and hence there is the danger that they might turn to the lower vehicle.

For example, the great deeds of generosity practised by a bodhisattva could extend to giving away their own limbs and even their whole body. There are many accounts of how in his previous lives as a bodhisattva the Buddha gave away his limbs and his own body in order to benefit others; he gave away his possessions; and there are even accounts of him giving away his children and wives and so forth. His generosity was so great that he was able to give away much that would otherwise be cherished as being so very dear. The thought of such practices of generosity can be very daunting, and there could be a danger that one might think, 'I can't manage that!', and enter the Lesser Vehicle. However, when the mind is not yet set and the potential to enter the Great Vehicle is still intact, presenting the benefits of bodhicitta in detail will really inspire them to enter the Great Vehicle path.

So the benefits of bodhicitta are presented by starting with the disadvantages of cherishing oneself, and then describing the great benefit of cherishing others. When these are presented systematically, they will be a source of inspiration to actually engage in those practices, because the great benefit in cherishing others will be apparent.

2.3.2. Establishing it with reasoning

This section is subdivided into two:

2.3.2.1. The validity of the benefits of the wishing mind

2.3.2.2. The validity of the engaging mind

Having presented a valid quotation, i.e. a quotation that withstands the three valid forms of analysis, the benefits of bodhicitta are established more firmly using logical reasoning.

2.3.2.1. THE VALIDITY OF THE BENEFITS OF THE WISHING MIND

This is further subdivided into four:

2.3.2.1.1. Great benefit because of the infinite applications for virtue

2.3.2.1.2. There is no higher concern for others than this

2.3.2.1.3. Sentient beings do not generate such a concern even for their own purpose

2.3.2.1.4. Praising it as a summary

2.3.2.1.1. Great benefit because of the infinite applications for virtue

This is presented in two verses:

¹ This threefold analysis is discussed in the teachings of 19 June 2001, 18 November 2003, 23 October 2007, 15 November 2011.

21. *Even if one thinks: I shall
Alleviate just the headache of sentient beings,
Since it has the intent to benefit
One becomes endowed with boundless merits.*
22. *What need is there to mention the wish to
alleviate
The boundless unhappiness of each sentient
being
And to establish each of them
In boundless qualities?*

The commentary explains:

Captain Friend's Daughter, though generating only the limited thought, 'May I free sentient beings from their headaches', had a true concern for others which generated infinite merit...

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary is related to an account of events that took place in the past. The *tong len* practice of giving and taking is said to have originated from this historical account.

It is a rather long story but I can give a brief account of the story of Captain Friend's Daughter, who was actually his son. Long ago there was a captain called Friend who really longed for a son, but every time a son was born to his wife it died soon after it was born. Thinking that there must be a spell on his family, he decided to name the next born son Daughter instead of son. In due course his wife bore a son, who he named Daughter, and indeed the son didn't die. Hence he was referred to as Captain Friend's Daughter. He grew up to be a fine young man and followed his father's footsteps, becoming a merchant and sea captain. He would go on sea voyages to buy wares from other places, and sell them on his return. Whenever he made a profit he would give it to his mother and he was also very generous to the poor as well.

On one occasion he set out on a dangerous voyage with some other merchants to find some particular jewels. Thinking of the great dangers, his mother was concerned and didn't want her son to go. So she tried to prevent him from leaving by holding on to his clothes, and lay down in the doorway so as to not let him pass. However, because he had decided that he really wanted to go on this voyage, he stepped over his mother's head and went out to his ship.

The ship was wrecked because of bad weather, but Daughter was spared. Clinging to a plank from the ship he drifted towards an island. It is said that once he landed on the island, he passed through many different kinds of magical valleys of great enjoyment. Eventually he came to a place where he witnessed people undergoing great suffering. In particular, he saw someone whose head was pierced by a turning cartwheel. When the cartwheel turned over his head it drilled through his skull which meant that his brains and so forth oozed out, which he licked up.

Captain Friend's Daughter asked the locals, 'Why is this happening?' What was the karma that this person created in the past to experience this kind of result now?' He was told that this was the result of this individual having kicked his mother's head in the past. When he heard that, Daughter immediately started to feel very anxious and fearful, remembering how he had stepped over his mother's head when he left home. At that very moment the cartwheel changed direction and headed towards his own head. When the cartwheel fell upon his head and started drilling a hole, he began to experience excruciating and unbearable pain. At that moment he thought, 'May this great agony and excruciating pain that I am experiencing now suffice to take

away the headaches of all sentient beings'. It is said that the moment he generated that intention, the cartwheel detached itself from his head and flew away.

There are different versions of what happened next. One says that after he had developed the intention to experience the suffering of headaches of all sentient beings, the cartwheel detached itself from his head and he went up to the pure lands. Another version says that he returned to his homeland. The main point of the story, however is that this individual practised the two main aspects of the giving and taking practice. Earlier, he had engaged in great deeds of generosity, giving his profits to his mother and also to charity; later he engaged in the practice of taking, when he took upon himself the suffering of all beings experiencing excruciating pain.

So, even just the wish to alleviate the headaches of others was the means for that person to accumulate a great amount of merit. That being the case, Gyaltsab Je argues:

If that is so, then what need is there to mention that the wish to eliminate infinite unhappiness of each sentient being, and to establish each of them with the infinite qualities of a buddha, has limitless merit?

If even the thought or wish to alleviate the headaches of sentient beings produces such great merit, then there is no need to mention the limitless merit that would be accumulated by generating the thought of eliminating the infinite unhappiness or suffering of each and every sentient being, and establishing their ultimate happiness with the infinite qualities of the buddhas.

Here we need to establish through logic how this altruistic wish of the bodhicitta attitude is a means to accumulate an extensive amount of merit. There is so much merit to be gained by thinking about alleviating the suffering of just one sentient being, or even one aspect of the suffering of other sentient beings. We can see that with examples from everyday life. When someone is suffering, we have a genuine wish for them to be free from the suffering, which is a really noble thought. Based on that wish to alleviate their suffering, we do everything in our power to help them to be free from that suffering. When someone is gravely ill and bed-ridden, then after generating the initial thought of wanting them to be free from the suffering, we might then do something practical to help them. Likewise, with the bodhicitta attitude, when we generate the wish for all beings to be free from all suffering and to lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, we can see, just through logic, how much more merit that would generate. This is how such an intention would result in limitless merit.

From this explanation we can also understand the teaching when it says, 'It is through the bodhicitta attitude that one can accumulate the most extensive merit as well as purifying extensive negative karmas'. These are important points for us to reflect upon: thinking about removing suffering from even one sentient being is a great deed, and the moment we generate the thought to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings, we accumulate a great, extensive amount of merit.

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

བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

21 May 2013

Sitting in an appropriate posture, focusing our mind inward, and bringing to mind the motivation we have generated earlier, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [*meditation*]

It is important to also generate an appropriate motivation for receiving the teaching such as: 'In order to benefit all sentient beings, to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching, and put its meaning into practice well'.

2.3.2.1. THE VALIDITY OF THE BENEFITS OF THE WISHING MIND (CONT.)

2.3.2.1.2. There is no other superior intent to benefit than that

Having mentioned the benefits of the wishing mind earlier, the text is re-emphasising that there is no greater superior intent to benefit than this. The root text states:

23. *Regardless of whether it is father or mother,
Who has such intent to benefit?
Regardless of whether god, sage,
Or brahmas, do they possess it?*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je begins with a question:

In the transitory world, what father or mother who wishes to benefit their child has such an intent to benefit?

The intent to benefit referred to here is the wish for all beings to obtain supreme happiness and to be free from all suffering, i.e. wishing bodhicitta. So, what is being explained here is that there is no greater intent to benefit others than bodhicitta. The text explains the reason for this being so by comparing it to the intent to benefit that other beings in the transitory world have, such as fathers and mothers who have the intent to benefit their child. Although in our contemporary world we would regard the parent's intention to benefit a child to be one of the highest and noblest, it is however merely focused on the child's welfare for this life only. Thus a parent's intentions for their child's welfare would be in relation to the child having sound health and being free from illness; receiving a good education so they can earn a lot of money and become rich and famous; having good companions; and to become powerful. One could argue, in our mundane or contemporary world there is no higher intent than that. Gyaltsab Je then asks:

What other person has such a wish to establish supreme happiness?

This is a rhetorical question indicating that indeed there is no-one else in the transitory world who has such an intent to establish others in supreme happiness.

Then Gyaltsab Je answers his question:

Not the gods or the true speaking sages, and not the brahmas who abide in the four immeasurable thoughts have such a mind to benefit.

As a way to understand why others in the transitory world don't have such an intent to benefit, one might wonder if it is because others lack any sense of love for others? As explained earlier, parents have a great amount of love for their children. Yet even fathers and mothers, who love their children dearly, don't have the intention for their child to obtain supreme happiness. Even though in the transitory world the greatest wish to benefit is the one that parents hold, they don't have that intention to benefit their children beyond this life's goals.

If one further wonders, is it because others lack clairvoyance that they don't have such intent? As explained in the commentary, not even the gods, such as Indra who has great clairvoyance, have such an intent to benefit. If one wonders, is it perhaps because others lack knowledge that they don't have this intent? Further, even the true speaking sages, such as the great sage Serkya who had vast knowledge and was skilled in so many arts and treatises, don't have that intent to benefit. Is it because others lack the intention to benefit others altogether that they don't have that intent to benefit? To remove such doubts the text explains that even brahmas, who abide in a joyful land with the four immeasurable thoughts, do not have that intent to benefit. Brahmas live in the joyful lands where there is no immediate suffering and they are endowed with the four immeasurable thoughts, such as immeasurable love and so forth, so they definitely have the intention to benefit others. However, even their intent to benefit can't equal the intent to benefit others to obtain supreme happiness.

Here it is good to reflect on this presentation to really get a sense of how noble and how superior this intent to benefit others, which is based on the bodhicitta attitude, really is. It is the highest intent to benefit others, which surpasses all other forms of intention to benefit others in the transitory world. In our worldly system we might ask what could surpass a parent's love and their intent to benefit their children? What could be greater than that? However, as explained, the intent to benefit others that is based on bodhicitta is far superior to that.

We might feel that even though parents have the best intentions for their children, they are not really able to benefit their children to the greatest extent as they lack the knowledge and don't have clairvoyance. We may feel that having clairvoyance would be the optimum way to benefit others. However, as pointed out in the text, although being clairvoyant is a tremendous mental achievement, without the intent of benefiting others based on bodhicitta, that clairvoyance in itself does not suffice to be able to benefit other beings to the fullest extent. Simply put, just having clairvoyance is not such a big deal in comparison to the bodhicitta attitude. The benefits of bodhicitta far outweigh any benefits one may gain from developing clairvoyance, and it is a far more meritorious attitude to meditate on and to cultivate.

Furthermore, we might feel that if one has immeasurable thoughts of benefiting others, such as that in which a brahma abides, then that mind might be the noblest intent to benefit others. However, as pointed out here, the

intent to benefit others based on bodhicitta outweighs even that. These are important points for us to reflect on. If whatever intent we might have to wish to benefit others is merely focused on the worldly benefits of this life, then it is a very limited intention to benefit compared with the bodhicitta attitude. But even though we haven't developed bodhicitta yet, just generating the thought, 'I will not harm any living being, and do whatever possible to benefit others', is extremely beneficial for our mind, and is a means for us to acquire merit. As mentioned previously, it is really important that we generate such thoughts on a regular basis.

Some of the practical ways to generate the bodhicitta attitude that I explained in previous sessions are exactly in accord with the text that His Holiness the Dalai Lama will be covering in the teachings in Sydney, *Vast as the Heavens, Deep as the Sea, Verses in Praise of Bodhicitta* by Khunu Lama Rinpoche. Just last weekend I made a commitment to myself to read this text again. It's incredibly uplifting and really inspiring. And the ways to cultivate the bodhicitta attitude are exactly as I have explained to you earlier, so it is not really difficult to understand at all. Reading the text would also be good for you who are intending to go to the teachings to prepare yourself. The beautiful presentation really inspires us to generate that mind ourselves.

In my last session, I explained how, when a bodhisattva generates that bodhicitta attitude, then whatever activity they engage in will become a meritorious act. Even such activities as walking or sleeping or even opening a door and so forth will generate merit. That is exactly how it is explained in Khunu Lama Rinpoche's text, which explains the many ways of turning what would normally seem to be mundane activities into great meritorious deeds by generating the bodhicitta attitude. As I mentioned earlier, the text is not very difficult to comprehend, and the passages and verses are easy to understand. They are extraordinarily beneficial for anyone who is inspired to develop the bodhicitta attitude. Reading this text will further inspire anyone who has even just a spark of that inspiration. So I exhort you to read it.

The presentation in the text is very meticulous. It first encourages us to remember bodhicitta in every activity that we engage in. When sitting remember bodhicitta; when you are standing remember bodhicitta; when you walk remember bodhicitta; and before you sleep remember bodhicitta. The author first exhorts one to remember bodhicitta, then gradually exhorts one to actually generate bodhicitta, when sitting, walking, eating and before sleeping. So the text exhorts us to generate the bodhicitta attitude at a beginner's level. The text essentially complements this very text that we are studying, *The Bodhisattvas Way of Life*. It unmistakably puts the onus on us take the initiative to do as it instructs.

Our daily activities can be basically summarised into four activities: we are usually sitting, eating, walking about, or sleeping. So, the main point here is to always be mindful while engaging in those activities to take the opportunity to remember bodhicitta. The great master Atisha advised us, 'When you are alone, watch your mind; when you are with others, watch your speech', which is very beneficial

and practical advice. Of course this instruction was given with respect to Dharma practice, but even in a worldly context it is also very relevant and applicable. These are really important points to keep in mind.

Other Kadampa masters have also pointed out that the best instruction is to look into one's mind, the best companions are mindfulness and introspection, and the best knowledge is the wish to benefit others. That very succinctly summarises the main points. All the great masters have presented such succinct yet very poignant instructions about how to go about our daily lives.

2.3.2.1.3. Sentient beings do not generate such a concern even for their own purpose

The relevant verse is:

24. *These sentient beings have not generated
Previously such a mind for their own purpose,
Not even in their dreams;
How would they generate it for others?*

Here *these sentient beings* refers to those beings mentioned earlier, such as parents who have great love for their child, gods who have clairvoyance, the sages who have great knowledge and brahma, who has the four immeasurable thoughts in their mind. As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Sentient beings have not previously generated such a mind for themselves, and not even dreamt of it in their dreams. So how could they manifest it now while they are awake?

If sentient beings don't have an intent to benefit others in their dreams then how can they manifest this attitude when they are awake? The main point here is that if they don't have the intention to benefit others even in their own dreams, meaning for their own purpose, then how could they have that intention to benefit others while they are awake?

This relates to points that I have emphasised in many teachings. Without having developed renunciation, there is no possible way to develop love and compassion for others. Hence, there is no possibility of developing bodhicitta without renunciation. If we were to look at it sequentially, one needs to first develop renunciation, i.e. the wish to renounce the suffering of samsara oneself, and based on that, one generates the altruistic wish for others to be free from the suffering of samsara. These are very important points to reflect upon, and there are many such points in the Buddha's teachings.

One needs to first have an experience oneself and only then can one relate it to others. This, in its simplest term, is the point to consider. Here the first experience is one of being completely overwhelmed by the suffering of samsara. That generates a keen longing to be free from that suffering, and one has developed renunciation when that mind unceasingly and spontaneously has this longing to be free from the sufferings of samsara.

Then we relate it to others and see how all other sentient beings are in the same plight. Based on our own experience and understanding of the suffering of samsara and wishing to be free from that, we can wish other sentient beings to be free from that suffering as well. Then, based on that, one develops the altruistic attitude of bodhicitta.

As I have related earlier, a good example that portrays the way one's own experience makes such a great difference in the way one relates to others, is found in the army. A general who has reached his rank by progressing from the lowest ranks will interact and relate to others with kindness and understanding, which will differ greatly from those who become generals because of their connections. The general who has reached their high rank from lowly beginnings has endured the whole range of experiences and hardships. So they can relate to new recruits and understand the difficulties they may face.

Again and again the teachings emphasise that without developing renunciation first, there is no possibility of developing bodhicitta. Furthermore, the development of renunciation has to be based on practising morality. As explained in the teachings, if one practises pure morality without renunciation, then that practice of morality will suffice merely as a cause to obtain high status such as being born as a human or in one of the celestial god realms in the next life. That practice of morality, as pure as it may be, cannot be a cause to obtain liberation unless it is combined with renunciation. It is only when one develops renunciation based on the practice of pure morality that the practice of morality will be a cause to obtain liberation.

2.3.2.1.4. Praising it as a summary

The next verse contains similar points:

25. *Others do not generate this mind for the welfare of others
Even for their own purpose.
This distinguished precious mind,
Something special unprecedented was born.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

While it has not been generated even for a moment by other sentient beings for their own sake, for this precious wondrous exalted mind wishing to attain enlightenment in order to place all sentient beings in happiness and abandon their suffering, which has not arisen before, to be generated now by bodhisattvas is praiseworthy. Thus others also need to hold it as being praiseworthy and strive for it.

The main point presented here is that the precious superior mind of a bodhisattva, the wish to attain enlightenment in order to place all sentient beings in the ultimate state of happiness and to free them from all suffering, has not been generated for even a moment by other sentient beings for their own sake. So when the bodhisattvas generate such a mind, others should acknowledge and praise it, and strive to develop it themselves.

What is referred to here as the *distinguished precious mind* is the actual bodhicitta that encompasses the engaging mind. It doesn't refer merely to the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, but to the mind aspiring to achieve enlightenment that is combined or held with engaging in the deeds of the six perfections.

It is really important to reflect on what kind of mind bodhicitta is? What is the superior intention? By contemplating these questions and gaining a profound understanding, we will naturally develop a genuine admiration and respect for bodhisattvas, who are the noble beings that are endowed with this mind of

bodhicitta. As explained in the teachings, the mind of a bodhisattva is bodhicitta, and the actions in which they engage in are the practices of the six perfections. Thus in both thought and deed they are incredibly noble, and surpass all other ordinary beings who may be endowed with good thoughts and engage in basic good deeds.

The only intent of a bodhisattva is the wish to benefit others, and for the sake of all other beings they aspire to achieve the highest goal of enlightenment. In fulfilling that aspiration their deeds and actions are completely selfless and solely for the benefit of others. Thus a bodhisattva does not even have an atom of self interest—their only intention is to benefit others. As a way to appreciate the great extent of that intention and to understand just how noble it is, we can consider the example of someone who has the altruistic intention to benefit all the people in Australia, with no self interest at all. If we think about it, completely dedicating one's whole life to the welfare of each individual in Australia would be an incredibly noble deed, wouldn't it? If doing that is, from a worldly perspective, great and admirable, then just imagine how great it would be for someone to have the intent to benefit not only the people of Australia and this world, but all sentient beings in the entire universe. Imagine not leaving out a single living being, but wishing to benefit all sentient beings equally and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness and freedom from all suffering. We can only try to fathom how incredible that is. This is how we can think about the intentions of bodhisattvas.

In practical terms, even non-Buddhists such as Christians seem to appreciate the teachings on bodhicitta. As I have related previously, when I went to a Christian monastery up in the Yarra Valley I met a young Christian monk there. I don't know how much understanding he had of bodhicitta but he did say to me, 'The teachings and the explanations you have of bodhicitta in your Buddhist tradition are really incredible and astounding'. He seemed to really relate to that. Indeed, who wouldn't appreciate such a state of mind and the intent to benefit others?

2.3.2.2. THE VALIDITY OF THE ENGAGING MIND

That is subdivided into three:

- 2.3.2.2.1. Actual
- 2.3.2.2.2. Its validity
- 2.3.2.2.3. Clearing away doubt

2.3.2.2.1. Actual

The relevant verse reads:

26. *The cause for the joy of all migrators,
The remedy for the suffering of sentient beings,
The merits of the precious mind,
How can it be comprehended?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

If the benefits of the wishing mind are very great, then the benefits of the mind that is held by the practice of the perfections are even greater.

Having gained a sense of the great benefits of the mere wishing mind, one can naturally understand that the benefits of the engaging mind are far greater. At this point we can reflect upon the differences between the wishing mind, the mere aspiration to achieve

enlightenment, and the engaging mind, where the aspiration is combined with actual deeds, and actions such as the six perfections.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Since it works to achieve the happiness of higher status and definite goodness of all migrators, ...

As explained in the commentary, with wishing bodhicitta one also works to achieve the happiness of higher status and definite goodness. Generally speaking that is the goal of the small and medium scopes, which is a good result and a desirable achievement. Khunu Lama Rinpoche explains this very point in his text when he states that the bodhicitta attitude itself will suffice as a means to obtain one's temporary goals of high status and definite goodness (liberation). Thus the temporary good results and benefits such as obtaining high status and liberation are obtained through the cultivation of bodhicitta.

Here we can take note that when he praises bodhicitta His Holiness the Dalai Lama often uses this verse from the prayer to Maitreya:

I prostrate to bodhicitta,
The mind that reverses the lower realms,
Shows the path to high status,
And guides one to freedom from ageing and death.

This verse indicates how bodhicitta suffices to free one from the lower realms, leading one to high status, and it frees one from the fears of aging and death, which indicates liberation.

You would have heard His Holiness reciting this verse and praise it in his teachings, so it's good to keep this in mind. I am older than you are and my brain should be weaker, but somehow I seem to remember these points that His Holiness presents. You of course have much fresher minds.

Then Gyaltsab Je explains:

... it is the cause for their joy and the precious wish-fulfilling jewel that is the medicinal elixir that destroys the sickness of suffering of all sentient beings.

The point here is that bodhicitta itself will suffice to obtain one's temporary goals such as high status and definite goodness or liberation. Furthermore it brings about happiness for all sentient beings and is thus like the precious wish-fulfilling jewel.¹ Bodhicitta is a wish-fulfilling jewel that serves as a medicinal elixir which destroys the sickness of all suffering. It is not as if bodhicitta is able to cure only some kinds of sufferings while not managing to cure others. Rather it is able to overcome the entire range of sufferings of all sentient beings.

Then Gyaltsab Je asks this rhetorical question:

How can one put a measure to the merits of such a mind, since it is infinite?

The merits for developing bodhicitta are said to be infinite, in support of which the commentary quotes from the *Sutra Requested by Viradatta*:

From the *Sutra Requested by Viradatta*:
The merits of the mind of enlightenment,

If they were put into form
All the sphere of space would be filled
It is even more than that.

As indicated here, if the merits were in tangible form, then even the extent of space will not be sufficient to hold the merits of generating bodhicitta. We can also recall Nagarjuna's explanations in his *Commentary to Bodhicitta*, where he explains that the merit that one accumulates from a single moment of generating bodhicitta cannot be expressed, even by all the buddhas.

Then the commentary ends this section with:

More extensively, one can know from the *Compendium of Deeds* where it quotes the *Array of Stalks Sutra*.

2.3.2.2.2. *Its validity*

Here, we can relate the validity of the engaging mind to the three valid reasons that establish validity.

The verse relating to this heading reads:

27. *If even the mere intent to benefit
Is far superior to offerings to the buddhas,
What need is there to mention the striving
For the happiness of all sentient beings?*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

It is taught in the *King of Concentration Sutra* that even the mere motivational thought, 'I shall attain enlightenment to rescue all sentient beings' is more meritorious than making offerings to all of the buddhas found in the billions of buddha fields.

If this is so, then what need is there to mention the infinite merit of striving extensively in the practice to achieve the highest happiness for all sentient beings?

When the *King of Concentration Sutra* mentions the mere intention or aspiration to achieve enlightenment to rescue all sentient beings, we understand that to refer to the wishing mind. The merit from the wishing mind is far more superior than making offerings to all the buddhas found in the billions of buddha fields.

As explained in the teachings, there are billions of buddha fields, so to make offerings to billions of buddha fields would mean that each offering would be immensely extensive. As the *King of Concentration Sutra* indicates, the intention to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings is much more meritorious than that. Shantideva is saying that if that holds for the mere wishing mind, then *what need is there to mention the infinite merit of striving extensively in the practice to achieve the highest happiness for all sentient beings*, which is the engaging mind. i.e. the intention combined with the actual practices. The point here is that generating this engaging mind gives rise to far more extensive merit.

We need to rely on scriptural authority that withstands the three-fold analysis, such as the *King of Concentration Sutra*, because the extensive merit gained from developing bodhicitta falls within the category of extremely obscure phenomena, and thus cannot be validated by valid perception and valid inference.

The threefold analysis

As presented last week, there are three categories of phenomena: obvious phenomena, slightly obscure phenomena and extremely obscure or subtle phenomena.

¹ If one possesses this legendary jewel, all of one's wishes are fulfilled.

Obvious phenomena are not contradicted by valid perception. When the Buddha talked about obvious things such as the colour of the snow mountain being white, then that can be validated by a valid perception. Of course, someone with jaundice will not see it as white but as yellow, but that is not a valid perception because their perception is impaired. Thus, an obvious object can be analysed and be validated as being true by mere valid perceptions that confirm it as being true.

Slightly obscure phenomena are not contradicted by valid inference based on the force of evidence. For example, when the Buddha taught that the nature of products is that they are impermanent and transitory, this can be analysed and validated by the valid inference holding it to be true. The opposite, which is that products are permanent, does not hold as it does not withstand analysis using valid reasoning. The Buddha's statement that things do not have a self, for example, is also within the category of slightly obscure phenomena, so it has to be validated through valid inference.

Extremely obscure phenomena are validated by scriptural authority. This means that the analysis is based on validating the phenomena by reference to scriptures that withstand the three-fold analysis. Examples of extremely obscure phenomena are the subtleties of karma, and the extensive merit gained from bodhicitta, which is in this category. So we need to rely on citations from the Buddha's teachings, i.e. the scriptural authority of a valid being, to validate such extremely obscure phenomena.

The syllogism to validate the *King of Concentrations Sutra* is: Take the subject, the *King of Concentrations Sutra*: Its contents are infallible—because it is a citation that it withstands the three-fold analysis. I have explained this syllogism several times in previous teachings, so it would be good for you to look it up as way to expand on your understanding on this. I will not go into further detail now.²

I remember that on one of His Holiness's visits some years ago, His Holiness presented the very same topic in his teaching that I had just taught. After the teaching Lobsang Jinpa commented, 'His Holiness went into great detail on that particular topic. He must have been intending that for the senior geshes who were present', indicating that it would have been too obscure for general listeners. However, I later heard that many students who had been attending my classes actually understood what His Holiness was presenting, based on what I had explained in our classes here.

That might have been a way for you to gain a little bit more confidence in my teachings [laughter]. You may gradually develop confidence in my teachings like that!

2.3.2.2.3. *Clearing away doubt*

First of all, certain doubts that might go through our minds are presented. Doubts such as if sentient beings naturally don't want to experience suffering and they naturally want happiness then wouldn't they be capable of working that out for themselves? Why would we have

to actually do it for them? Those sorts of doubts are raised and then the teachings explain how to clear them away. Shantideva wrote these poignant lines, which are often quoted in the teachings:

28. *Though having the wish to destroy suffering
They run directly to suffering itself or alone;
Though desiring happiness, due to ignorance
They destroy their happiness like an enemy.*

Due to ignorance specifically refers to being ignorant of what righteous things to adopt and what negative things to discard or abandon.

This presentation relates particularly to the practices that are presented in the small scope of the lam rim teachings. This is, of course, my personal interpretation as to how this definitely relates to the practices presented in the small scope. More specifically, ignorance refers here to not knowing how to adopt virtues such as the ten virtues and how to shun or to abandon the ten non-virtuous deeds. Overcoming that ignorance is the way to stop creating the causes for one's own suffering.

This teaching is not really all that difficult to understand. It's just a matter of reading it, trying to contemplate it and then trying to integrate it into your own way of thinking. That's how it will benefit you. Even if you are not able to practice it in extensive ways with large numbers of beings, it is important to begin with your own companion or partner. It's important to begin at home and really try to practice this teaching with those you relate to in your everyday life.

Our mental agony seems to begin with a lack of harmony with our very closest companions. So if we can make peace, beginning with those we live with, then we will have a joyful smile and a happy mind. The reason we live with companions is so that we can derive a mutual benefit, but of course our predicament is that often we seem to receive a lot of harm from the very person from whom we feel we can gain benefit. The reason why we seem to have more intense anger towards someone who is supposed to be close is because of that very expectation we have: 'I expected to gain benefit from this person, but instead of benefit I am receiving harm'. That is why anger erupts like a huge fire in our minds. I have often mentioned that if children don't respond well to their parents and have a good rapport with them, then there is a significant reason for parents to feel distraught and unhappy.

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

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² This threefold analysis is discussed in the teachings of 19 June 2001, 18 November 2003, 23 October 2007, 15 November 2011.

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྣོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བལྟགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

28 May 2013

Based on the refuge and bodhicitta motivation that we generated earlier, we can now engage in the practice of meditation with a focused mind.

[meditation]

It is important to generate a proper motivation prior to receiving the teaching, such as: In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment myself.

So we generate the thought, from the depth of our hearts, of wishing to achieve enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings, and for that purpose, listening to the teachings and putting them into practice well.

Shantideva presented the unique exchanging self with other technique for developing bodhicitta, and a good preparation for engaging in this practice whole-heartedly is to engage in this practice at a meditation level.

2.3.2.2.3. Clearing away doubt

The first verse of the three verses relating to this heading is:

28. *Though having the wish to destroy suffering
They run directly to suffering alone;
Though desiring happiness, due to their
ignorance
They destroy their happiness like an enemy.*

It is good to really contemplate the very profound meaning of this verse.

Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary on this section with a rhetorical question:

Sentient beings wish for happiness, and do not wish for suffering, and by striving in this way they are able to achieve happiness and abandon suffering. Therefore are they not proficient in the practice of achieving happiness and abandoning suffering? Why should others strive for that purpose?

It is indeed true that we all like to believe that we are skilled in acquiring the means for our own wellbeing and in removing any unwanted problems or suffering. We all have the notion, 'Oh, I am quite skilled at that', and might well have the assumption that, because we are already well-equipped, we do not need any further advice. It is, of course, a fact that sentient beings wish for happiness and do not wish for suffering, and at a personal level we make every attempt to make this wish come true.

The doubt that is raised here is that, if individuals are already proficient in the practice of achieving happiness and abandoning suffering for themselves, then why should others strive to achieve their purpose. The answer, as stated by Gyaltsab Je, is:

One definitely needs to strive.

Then Gyaltsab Je goes on to explain the reason:

Although sentient beings have an intent to abandon suffering, through the power of the afflictions they only create the causes for suffering. Thus they run

infinitely in cyclic existence, especially towards the suffering of the lower realms.

This very meticulous presentation explains that while none of us wish to experience any suffering, it is as if we are intentionally running towards our own suffering. That is because we actually engage in accumulating the very causes of suffering. So it is as if we want to experience suffering. A very vivid analogy that illustrates this is with moths, which, being attracted to light, fly into a flame or a lamp. We can see so many moths perish in the flame of a candle or get trapped in a light fitting and perish because of the heat. Our predicament is exactly like that: we run towards the very sources that cause us so much suffering.

The causes of suffering are, for example, engaging in the ten non-virtues. Rather than abandoning these ten non-virtues, sentient beings intentionally create negativities such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harmful speech, gossip, and the three of the mind; covetousness, harmful intent and wrong view. So, sentient beings engage in the very deeds or actions that are the causes of suffering. Rather than abandoning or refraining from engaging in these causes of their suffering, they are attracted to and engage in the very causes of suffering. That is how sentient beings inevitably end up experiencing suffering.

As explained in many other teachings as well, if we don't wish to experience suffering, we need to overcome the causes of suffering; the only way to eliminate suffering is to abandon the causes of suffering. Other commentaries explain the lines *having the wish to destroy suffering, they run directly to suffering alone*, to mean that if we intentionally adopt the causes of suffering, then it is inevitable that we will experience suffering. If we adopt the causes rather than abandoning them, then the outcome is that we will definitely experience the consequence, which is suffering.

As I have mentioned previously in other sessions, we need to consider this predicament carefully. We need to be really mindful of our actions. There are often cases where, when we are not able to engage in some negative action, rather than feel a sense of loss, we feel glad about it. We might even claim, 'Oh, I have missed a great opportunity'. How many times have we been in a state where we intentionally strive to engage in some negative action and if we are unable to do so we feel sad about that? For as long as we hold onto such an attitude, we will not be abandoning the causes of suffering. If we intentionally create the causes of suffering and feel sad and distraught when we are not able to do so, then how are we ever going to overcome suffering?

Having considered and contemplated our own predicament first, we can then relate it to others who are totally ignorant about the causes of suffering. What chance do they have when they are completely ignorant about what the causes of suffering are? They are completely ignorant of the fact that they are repeatedly creating the causes of suffering that lead them to perpetually experience great sufferings. It is said that when we think about the predicament of other sentient beings in this manner, then we will develop a much more profound and deeper level of compassion towards them.

This level of compassion is called uncommon compassion, which is unlike the common form that arises in relation to witnessing the obvious suffering of others. The uncommon compassion arises when one understands and sees how beings intentionally strive in creating the very causes of suffering. From our own experience we know very well how difficult it is to avoid creating some of the causes of

suffering, even though we know that they are causes of suffering. Beings who are completely ignorant and who do not have that understanding are in a much more pitiful situation.

These profound lines from Shantideva are very poignant, and it would be really good to memorise them.

*Though having the wish to destroy suffering,
They run directly towards suffering alone
Though desiring happiness, due to ignorance,
Destroy their own happiness like an enemy.*

It would be good to reflect on the meaning of this verse on a daily basis: 'Am I running towards suffering by creating the causes for suffering? Am I holding onto the very causes of suffering? Could I be destroying the causes of my own happiness?' It is really important to consider these points. By memorising these lines you can remember their meaning on a daily basis, which will be very helpful.

Based on the understanding of what is being presented here we can slowly get a sense of the value of the mind training practices, where we train the mind to be happy when we experience suffering, and unhappy when we have pleasurable experiences. Being happy when we experience suffering arises from understanding that whenever we experience suffering we are experiencing the result of previously created negative karma. So the experience of suffering means that previously created negative karma has ripened, and as we are experiencing suffering we are actually exhausting that negative karma. So we should be glad that the negative karma is ripening now, so that we won't have to experience it in the future. Willingly accepting any difficulties that we might be experiencing now will enhance our practice.

The reason why this practice serves as an antidote to overcome worldly concerns is because training our mind to think in this way helps to overcome the delusions. If we don't embrace this practice of being happy when we experience suffering, then because we are not happy about it, our mind will begin to feel agitated and slowly become angry. So if we don't endure suffering when we experience it, we will inevitably start to feel angry, and create negativity from that anger.

It is the same with being unhappy with pleasurable experiences. When we have fleeting pleasurable experiences, we are using up our good karma. If we are attached to the pleasurable experience then it is just a waste of our good karma, which is not something to be happy about. Furthermore, if you don't embrace this attitude of feeling unhappy when experiencing pleasant situations, then your happiness will slowly turn into attachment to that pleasurable experience, and thus we create negativity.

So embracing these points of practice is essential if we are to overcome the delusions, in particular anger and attachment. As such, they are a supreme means to overcome the eight worldly concerns.

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Though they wish for happiness they are confused about the methods for happiness, and out of ignorance they destroy their happiness, as if it were their enemy.

When one does not adopt the causes for happiness and actually intentionally abandons those causes, then it is as if one is destroying the very causes of the happiness one longs for.

As explained in the teachings on karma, if one wishes to abandon suffering, one needs to abandon the causes of suffering. The causes of happiness are refraining from the ten non-virtuous actions, so if one intentionally adopts these non-virtuous actions then one is destroying the causes of happiness. Yet so often we seem to intentionally adopt non-virtuous actions, such as taking life, stealing and so forth. There are many who take great pleasure in engaging in non-virtuous actions such as killing!

Whenever we experience suffering, we should think, 'This suffering is the consequence of engaging in negativity in the past. As I do not like this experience of suffering, and do not want to experience it again, I should therefore avoid adopting the causes of suffering'. Every time we remember to think in this way, the suffering becomes worthwhile, because it encourages us to refrain from further adopting the causes of suffering. In fact the teachings mention five qualities of suffering from which we derive benefit.

Likewise when one experiences a happy situation, then rather than being attached to that happy state, we should remember, 'Since this is a happy state that I wish to experience, and as it is a result of engaging in the positive causes for happiness, may I strive to further adopt the causes for true happiness'. That is how we need to exhort and encourage ourselves to adopt these practices.

Gyaltsab Je concludes his commentary on verse 28 with these words:

In this way, they engage mistakenly in the methods for achieving happiness and avoiding suffering.

As so meticulously explained earlier, this is exactly the predicament of sentient beings.

Since we unavoidably experience suffering, the advice for our personal practice whenever we experience any kind of suffering or uncomfortable situation, we should take that as a message from the Buddha reminding us to avoid engaging in negativity. Whenever we experience a pleasant situation, that is also a message from the Buddha reminding us to adopt virtue. Whenever we experience an unpleasant situation, we need to consider it as a personal message from the Buddha, and remember, 'Since it is an uncomfortable situation I should avoid the causes of suffering, which is all negativity'. Likewise whenever we experience happiness, we should regard it as a message from the Buddha to adopt virtue.

When we actually put these points into practice then we will be able to adapt to any kind of situation that we may encounter, and it won't disturb us to any great extent. When we experience suffering, then rather than becoming agitated and wary and feeling despondent about it, we can think, 'OK, this is a reminder for me to further engage in virtue and avoid negativity, and to engage in practices to purify the causes of suffering'. If we adopt this way of thinking then when we experience suffering we can make that suffering part of our practice. Then, rather than being in a situation that causes us distress, making us feel despondent and completely overwhelmed, it will actually become a means to further enhance our practice.

Whenever we experience a pleasant situation, rather than relaxing, taking it for granted and becoming lazy, we should think, 'Well this is the result of good karma that I have created previously. So, now I can use this opportunity to further enhance my practice. I should not become attached to these good conditions, but rather create more virtue and causes for happiness'. Thus, we incorporate both pleasant

and unpleasant situations into our practice. In that way our practice becomes steady, rather than constantly fluctuating.

It is in this way that we can use whatever circumstances we find ourselves in to engage in the practice of adopting what needs to be adopted, and abandoning what needs to be abandoned. We need to constantly be mindful of this practice.

If we don't know how to transform our suffering to encourage ourselves to engage in further practice, then we will really miss out; we can become completely lost and immersed in our own suffering. Thus, transforming suffering into the path is an essential method to enhance our practice.

The next lines from the root text are:

29. *Those who are destitute of happiness
And who have many sufferings,
I shall satisfy them with every happiness and
Remove all their sufferings.*

30ab. *I shall also eliminate their ignorance
What other virtue could equal that?*

With regard to first two lines Gyaltsab Je explains:

For that reason, what virtue is equal to the mind that wants to satisfy sentient beings, who are confused about the methods of happiness and suffering, and who lack happiness and have many sufferings?

What greater virtue could there be than wanting to satisfy sentient beings who are confused about the methods of happiness and suffering, and who lack happiness and have so much suffering? This rhetorical question implies that there is no greater virtue. Again we are being presented with the optimum method for developing profound and deep compassion for sentient beings.

The second two lines *I shall satisfy them with every happiness and remove all their suffering*, relates to the bodhicitta attitude.

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

What virtue, with all the happiness of higher status and definite goodness, wants to cut the continuity of all suffering and clear the ignorance that is confused with regard to what is to be practiced and what is to be abandoned?

This refers to another doubt: Why should one strive for the purpose of others? The answer is that, although wishing to avoid suffering sentient beings create the very causes for their own suffering because of their ignorance, and although wishing for happiness, they destroy the causes of their own happiness, because of their ignorance. Therefore there is no *equal or higher virtue to the mind that wants to satisfy sentient beings who are confused about the methods of happiness and suffering, and who lack happiness and have many sufferings.*

Here, wishing them to have all the *happiness of higher status and definite goodness* refers to enjoying all forms of happiness, and removing all forms of suffering from the temporal happiness of high status all the way up to ultimate happiness of definite goodness, liberation and enlightenment.

The aspect of **love** within the bodhisattva's mind is wishing all beings to experience the happiness of high status all the way up to definite goodness; the aspect of **compassion** in the bodhisattva's mind is wishing all beings to be free from all sufferings; the aspect of **wisdom** within the bodhisattva's mind is that which wishes to clear away the ignorance of sentient beings, i.e. that is confused with regard to what is to be practised and what is to be abandoned. This is the main

point that is being presented. Bodhisattvas strive to help beings who wish for happiness and who do not wish to experience any suffering, but who completely lack the knowledge to attain their wishes. These beings are confused about what is to be practised and what is to be abandoned, so the bodhisattvas intend to lead them to that state of understanding, by removing their ignorance of the causes of suffering and happiness. Thus, the answer as to why it is essential to strive to work towards providing happiness and removing the suffering of other beings, is that because of their ignorance sentient beings lack the optimum means to do it themselves.

In relation to this particular point, Shantideva says: *I shall also eliminate their ignorance. Thus: what other virtue could equal that?*

It is bodhicitta that enables bodhisattvas to work towards eliminating the suffering of sentient beings, and endowing them with a state of happiness. The question Shantideva poses: *What other virtue could equal that?* is a rhetorical question, implying that bodhicitta is indeed the highest virtue. As such there is no power equal to the power of bodhicitta.

Although the commentary explains the meaning of the verses, it is good to remember the verse itself and then use the commentary to elucidate its meaning. Verses are easier to recite and to reflect upon because of their concise nature, and because of the profound meaning, they are optimum means to instil love and compassion within us.

The last two lines of verse in this section are:

30cd *Where else is such a friend?
Where else is such merit?*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

What other friend is there who establishes all happiness and rescues from all suffering? What other merit is there that shows correctly what has to be practised and what has to be abandoned? There is none. That is why one should strive to generate the mind of enlightenment.

What other friend is there who establishes happiness and rescues us from suffering, implies there is no superior friend than that mind of enlightenment, and that there is no intent superior than that wish to benefit others.

This is exactly what I have been saying to you over and over again in my teachings. The wish to benefit others, and the love and compassion within your heart is your best friend. How do we define a best friend? It is someone who only thinks of benefiting us and who does not wish us any harm. The bodhicitta attitude, based as it is on love and compassion, is an attitude that can only benefit us. There is no harm in holding this attitude, there is only benefit; there are only advantages and no disadvantage. Therefore we need to strive to cultivate that state of love and compassion in our heart. I am just trying to re-emphasise what the great master Shantideva presented in this very special teaching.

The way we need to take this to heart is to really think again and again about the unmatched value of love and compassion and ultimately, of course, bodhicitta, which is all condensed into the whole-hearted wish and resolve to benefit others. We develop it from the depth of our heart, by thinking again and again about the great benefits of developing love and compassion. The more we contemplate the value, benefits and great advantages of developing such an attitude, the more we will be inclined to really develop it. When it is well established in our minds, the wish to benefit

others will be cultivated from the depth of our heart. We need to be inspired to develop and establish bodhicitta, just as indicated in the dedication verse we recite regularly.

May the supreme jewel bodhicitta
That has not arisen, arise and grow,
And may that which has arisen never diminish,
But increase more and more.

This one verse encapsulates the presentation of the entire *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*. As mentioned previously, the first three chapters of *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* focus on developing the bodhicitta that has not yet been developed. The subject of the next three chapters is increasing the bodhicitta that has already been developed. Then chapters seven to nine show how to firmly establish bodhicitta so that it never declines, and the last chapter is the dedication.

By relating to the text in this way, we can be encouraged to develop bodhicitta within ourselves.

2.4. Praising the person who has generated such a mind

Thus far we have covered the benefits of bodhicitta, and now we come to the noble being who has generated bodhicitta.

It is inner qualities we see in someone that determine whether they are considered as praiseworthy. Even in a conventional sense we praise people for their character and their good qualities, not just their physical body. Here, when we contemplate the unequalled value of bodhicitta, we will naturally be able to see that anyone who has bodhicitta is praiseworthy.

There are three subdivisions in this category:

- 2.4.1. Suitable for praise because of helping out of compassion, without being asked
- 2.4.2. If even small benefit is praiseworthy then achieving all happiness and benefit is even more praiseworthy
- 2.4.3. Praiseworthy because of becoming the supreme field

2.4.1. Suitable for praise because of helping out of compassion, without being asked

We regard anyone who helps us when we are in difficulties, even if we have not asked for help, as being very kind. This section relates to that particular aspect of a bodhisattva.

The relevant verse is quite easy to understand:

31. *If any repaying of benefit
Is momentarily praiseworthy,
What need is there to mention the bodhisattva
Who does good without being asked to?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse begins with:

One should praise and eulogise bodhisattvas.

The reason that is presented is:

From a conventional point of view, someone who repays a kindness is praised, with the saying, 'That is a grateful person'.

We all agree that whenever someone benefits from the kindness of another, they will praise that kindness, and say they are very grateful for that. That is definitely the case at our conventional level.

I have related to you previously that I go to the St Kilda sea baths regularly. Last year there was a man who regularly brought his aged mother to the pool. He was very attentive to her, helping her into the pool, helping her while she was in the pool, and then helping her to get out. On one occasion I put my thumbs up, indicating that what he was doing was a really good thing. I haven't seen him with his mother again

this year, so maybe his mother's age is such that she finds it too difficult to come now.

There was also another lady who would come with her mother and help her. I once asked her, 'Is she your mother?' and she said, 'Yes'. I praised her saying, 'It is really very good that you are helping your mother, bringing her here, helping her out. Your kindness is quite incredible'. Later I met her at the pool again, when she said, 'Oh, my mother is not able to come now, but she would really like to see you again'. When I see the younger generation taking care of the older generation, particularly their parents, it moves my mind and is praiseworthy.

I used to see some definitely older people in the baths and they seemed to be happy to see me, but I haven't seen them for a while. Maybe they are not able to come any more. There were also young children who used come to the pool as well, but they don't come any more. Maybe they have to go to school now. These toddlers were very happy and glad to see me when I was there.

We need to take these examples of people who are serving the elderly to heart, and to try to implement it as part of one's practice, particularly if one has aged parents. I consider caring for aged parents as one of the highest virtues. And in fact that is not just my personal view. The Buddha himself mentioned in his teachings that caring for the sick and the elderly and one's parents creates great virtue and is very meritorious. As the Buddha indicated, when one's parents are aged and not very well, then all of the conditions to create merit are met in caring for them.

My practical advice, which I have shared with others in the past, is that when caring for your parents, try to not even think about the past. There might be uncomfortable memories, but at present that is all irrelevant. Just think, 'These are my parents and I am their child, and it is fitting for me to be helping them now'. Just focusing on that, and helping and serving one's father or mother is a really great deed. Having shared this practical advice, some have confided in me that they have really benefited from that advice, which encouraged them to take the initiative to actually care for their parents. They thanked me, saying they would never forget that advice. If we can take this to heart it will really be a practical and great way to accumulate virtue.

A more specific account is the exchange that I once had with Toby Gilles. It must have been several years ago, as his mother passed away about two years ago. So it was some time ago when I asked after his mother, and his response was, 'Oh, Mum is quite frail and unable to go out much, but her mind seems to be quite happy'. He went on to explain that his sister was really caring for her, making tea, cooking and nursing her, and my immediate response to that was, 'That is incredibly good. She is really practising the Dharma'.

Then I went on to say, 'I can't say for certain that sitting down, doing your prayers, and meditating is practising Dharma, but I can definitely confirm that your sister's care for her mother is Dharma practice'. He was a bit taken back and said, 'Do you really mean it? I said, 'Yes, I can definitely confirm that your sister is practising Dharma, but whether your sitting down and saying prayers and meditating is Dharma or not, I cannot say for sure'. Then I explained that my reason was based on one definition of Dharma, which is that benefiting others is practising Dharma. In this case, Toby's sister was definitely benefiting their mother by helping and caring for her, and so there was no question about whether or not that virtue was Dharma, whereas, the

virtue of reciting prayers and meditating depends on one's motivation, and as such, one can't say for sure whether that the action itself is a Dharma practice or not.

I was able to speak in that very frank way with Toby because he was quite fond of me. We had a good rapport. Whenever I used to go to Geshe Loden's centre in the past, he would always take it upon himself to make tea or coffee for me and make sure that I was comfortable. He even went to the extent of saying, 'If you were come to live here, I would definitely take care of all your needs', but changes have taken place and he is not living there any longer.

It has been a while since I last saw Toby, but the last time we met I mentioned to him there is a nice venue at Bacchus Marsh where we used to go for Easter courses and it might be good for him to arrange for some Dharma talks there, and that people who are interested might come to the talks. I was encouraging him to share his knowledge of the Dharma in that way. I haven't met him since then. I was invited to his birthday some time after our last meeting, but I was not able to go.

To continue with Gyaltsab Je's commentary, if, in worldly terms, someone who repays a kindness is praised, then:

What need is there to mention that bodhisattvas, who achieve all happiness and benefit out of compassion without being asked, are worthy of praise by gods and humans?

From the conventional point of view we are grateful to someone who helps us and praise them for their kindness. So what need is there to mention being grateful to bodhisattvas who, out of great compassion, extend their help to all beings, without even being asked, benefiting others to achieve the ultimate state of happiness. Without any doubt, such bodhisattvas are worthy of praise, not only by humans but also by gods.

As you are aware, the next session is the discussion session and following that is the exam. As I mention regularly it is good to engage in the discussion as well as the exam with a good attitude, in a spirit of sharing and further developing your understanding.

More importantly it is good to keep these points in mind in our regular daily life. We need to really understand these points and try to put them into practice as much as we can. Our kind attitude should be based on love and compassion and kindness, and the practice that we engage in has to be the practice of adopting virtue and abandoning negativity. To the best of our ability, we need to take every opportunity to accumulate virtue or merit and to abandon and really minimise negativity.

That, in essence, is the practice that we need to adopt. The benefit from the virtue or the merits that we accumulate from that will travel with us to the end of this life and beyond. None of us are extending our life span. In fact we are all getting closer and closer to our next life. Whether young or old, we are all in the same predicament—we will come to the end of this life and go onto the next life. So it is good to be equipped for that journey, and to take something with us into the next existence.

The alternative to preparing ourselves in this way would be trying to hold onto whatever wealth we have accumulated. I have recently heard an account of someone who was always holding onto his pillow. When he died and they took his body away they found the pillow was filled with his money. This goes to show the extent of clinging that someone can have for their money.

There is another story of the Tibetan who passed away in Dharamsala. It was traditional to sell the possessions of the dead. He had a doona which, of course, was sold very cheaply. The person who bought it took it to the river to wash it and noticed that there was something unusual stuffed inside. The Tibetan had been using the doona to store his money.

Then there was the Tibetan in Dalhousie who was known to always carry his cushion with him wherever he went. Later it became known that he did so because it was his safe for storing his gold. In the early days of course he would not have had good accommodation, so he might not have really found a good place to keep his gold. So he was quite clever to put it in a cushion which was the last place people might think to look. He was never separated from this cushion, which was his safe.

This is just one account of how having wealth doesn't necessarily bring calm and peace, but can cause more worries. Of course, I have many other stories like that, but I will leave them for another time.

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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Tara Institute 'Shantideva's Bodhicharyavatara' Block 3, Study Group 2013

The login username is "studygroup", the password is "bwol" (just remember "Bodhisattva's Way of Life").

Discussion Week 5 (04.06.2013)

Week: 1 (7 May 2013)

1. The Mahayana mind generation, or bodhicitta, is a primary mind that is accompanied by two aspirations. Can you name and describe these 2 aspirations?

2. a) What is the full definition of Bodhicitta, as distinct from this commentary's definition?

b) Why is the inclusion of 'Mahayana' in the definition important?

3. Explain the difference between Wishing Bodhicitta and Engaging Bodhicitta

4. Bodhicitta is not something to be left as merely an intellectual understanding..... There are two main methods for developing Bodhicitta. What are they?

Week: 2 (14 May 2013)

5. How do Bodhisattvas accrue vast amounts of merit?

6. What can we do on a practical level?

7. In addition to these methods of training our mind to overcome self-cherishing there is another practice. What is it and how does it work?

Week: 3 (21 May 2013)

8. Our daily activities can be basically summarised into four activities.

a) What are they?

b) What do we need to be mindful of while engaging in those activities?

c) What did the great master Atisha advise?

9. Other Kadampa masters as well as all the great masters have presented succinct yet very poignant instructions about how to go about our daily lives. What are these instructions?

10. What is renunciation?

11. Discuss how the following can be validated:

- Obvious Phenomena
- Slightly Obscure Phenomena
- Extremely Obscure Phenomena

Week 4 (28 May 2013)

12. These profound lines from Shantideva are very poignant, and it would be really good to memorise them.

Vs. 28 ***"Though having the wish to destroy suffering,
They run directly towards suffering alone
Though desiring happiness, due to ignorance,
Destroy their own happiness like an enemy."***

13. Explain the mind training practices, where we train the mind to be happy when we experience suffering, and unhappy when we have pleasurable experiences. pg. 2, para 2

Exam

Name:

Block 3

Week 6: (11 May 2013)

1. The Mahayana mind generation, or bodhicitta, is a primary mind that is accompanied by two aspirations. Can you name and describe these 2 aspirations?

2. a) What is the full definition of Bodhicitta, as distinct from this commentary's definition?

b) Why is the inclusion of 'Mahayana' in the definition important?

3. Explain the difference between Wishing Bodhicitta and Engaging Bodhicitta

4. Bodhicitta is not something to be left as merely an intellectual understanding..... There are two main methods for developing Bodhicitta. What are they? Briefly describe each method

5. How do Bodhisattvas accrue vast amounts of merit?

6. What can we do on a practical level?

7. Our daily activities can be basically summarised into four activities.
a) What are they?

b) What do we need to be mindful of while engaging in those activities?

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- Obvious Phenomena

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- Extremely Obscure Phenomena

11. These profound lines from Shantideva are very poignant, and it would be really good to memorise them. Quote verse 28.

12. Explain the mind training practices, where we train the mind to be happy when we experience suffering, and unhappy when we have pleasurable experiences. pg. 2, para 2