
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As we have already generated our motivation while reciting the prayers, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [meditation]

You can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So, for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put it into practice well.

4.2.4.1.2. Striving day and night to be liberated from negativity

The implication of the outline is that there will be grave consequences if we do not strive day and night to be delivered from negativity. So we need to contemplate this, and follow this advice. The relevant verse reads:

62. "From non-virtue arises suffering
How does one become free from that?" you say.
It is suitable that I contemplate
This alone day and night.

With respect to this, Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins:

'From non-virtues such as killing arise the sufferings of the hells and so forth. How can I become free from that?' As presented:

It is suitable for me to contemplate day and night only karmic cause and effect.

The quote from *non-virtue arises suffering* is from Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*, which explains that the sufferings of the hells and so forth arise from non-virtues such as *killing*. While killing is specified here, the rest of the ten non-virtues are implied as well. When one engages in non-virtues such as killing, the definite consequence will be suffering in unfortunate rebirths such as in the hell realms. The implication here is that karma is infallible—once the cause is created one will definitely have to experience the consequences.

One has definitely engaged in non-virtues such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and so forth in the past, so a great amount of negativity has already been accumulated. By contemplating the law of cause and effect, one realises that the consequence of engaging in such negativity is that, if it is not purified, then one will definitely take unfortunate rebirths in the hell realm, or hungry ghost realm or animal realm and experience great suffering. Faced with this prospect the question arises, 'How can I free myself from the consequences of my negative acts?' Thus, *it is suitable for me to contemplate day and night only karmic cause and effect*.

The Tibetan word *tak-tu* means *at all times*, so the implication here is to think about karma at all times—*day*

and night. Also when the root text says *this alone*, it is emphasising that one should be contemplating the essential points of karma at all times. When one really contemplates the effects that arise from the creation of negativities, then the need to purify those negativities will inevitably become a primary concern.

The next part of Gyaltsab Je's explanation is this essential point:

If one does not gain certainty with regard to karmic cause and effect, then one will not have certainty for any Dharma that makes the Conqueror happy.

Therefore everybody should strive in this.

This really encapsulates the essence of the verse. *If one doesn't gain certainty with regard to karmic cause and effect*, refers to the understanding one needs to gain from contemplating that the consequence of engaging in non-virtue is definitely suffering, and that the consequence of engaging in virtue is definitely happiness. There is no room for negotiation: negative karma definitely brings about unpleasant and unhappy results, and positive karma or virtue definitely brings about happy results.

Until one gains *certainty* about this point, whatever *Dharma* one does will not be in accordance with what would *make the Conqueror happy*. The emphasis here is to always be mindful about the infallibility of karma in all our activities. When we really take the initiative to contemplate the infallibility of karma, then the more we contemplate this, the more confidence we will gain about the certainty of karmic causes and effects. And as we gain more confidence about the certainty of karma, the stronger our determination and willingness will be to refrain from engaging in non-virtues such as taking the life of other sentient beings, and so forth. Likewise, our willingness to engage in accumulating virtue will naturally increase. So the essential practice of shunning negativity and adopting virtue comes about from an understanding of how karma works. Thus, cultivating certainty about karma is essential.

This is also in line with the advice of the Kadampa masters, who said, 'We regard any person who engages in the practice of avoiding the ten non-virtues and adopting the ten virtues, while encouraging others to do likewise, as a real practitioner and a true adept, regardless of the tradition that they may be following'. The great Kadampa masters said that that they were not concerned about particular traditions or particular appearances, i.e. whether they are a monk or a lay person; if they are truly practising this essential point then they are a real practitioner, a true adept, a noble being, and a real virtuous friend. This is something that we need to keep in mind.

It is also good to reflect on the common ground of all traditions, which is to acknowledge that adopting the ten virtues and avoiding the ten non-virtues is common to all religions. There are differences in explaining what it means to hold a wrong view, but the importance of avoiding killing and so forth is common to all religious traditions. In fact anyone with some commonsense would definitely accept the ten non-virtues as misdeeds. Thus, as presented in the commentary, abiding by the law of

karma is an essential practice that makes the conquerors happy.

The commentary concludes with:

That some say they have gained certainty with regard to emptiness but do not value karma is clearly a distorted understanding. They have not ascertained that emptiness is in actuality dependent arising.

If someone claims that they have gained some understanding of emptiness, and that they do not need to abide by karma (the law of cause and effect), then that in itself proves that what they are claiming is distorted and a completely wrong understanding. The reason it is a wrong understanding is because they have not ascertained that emptiness is in actuality dependent arising.

The point that is raised here is *that emptiness is in actuality dependent arising*. I have explained this extensively hundreds of times. So, if you have paid good attention then you will recall those explanations. This explanation is based on the teachings of the great master Nagarjuna and his disciple Chandrakirti. These great masters gained a profound understanding of emptiness by exhaustively applying themselves to understanding the Buddha's teachings particularly those on ultimate truth. They then very kindly presented this unmistakable view to us through their written works. We need to regard these great masters as being extremely kind in presenting the unmistakable view of emptiness to us, as without their clarification we would definitely be lost. We would come to wrong conclusions and develop a distorted view of emptiness.

This point is encapsulated in these words from the *Heart Sutra*, '*Form is empty, and emptiness is form*'. This indicates that while form is completely empty of inherent existence, it is within the sphere of emptiness that form is able to manifest and function interdependently. It is because things are empty of inherent existence that it is possible for things to exist interdependently as form, sound, smell, taste, tactile objects and so forth. When the *Heart Sutra* states, *Form is empty, emptiness is form*, it is explaining that while form and so forth are ultimately empty of inherent existence, conventionally they do exist interdependently. You need to remember this essential point always.

4.2.4.2. CONFESSING WHAT ONE DID BEFORE

This has two subdivisions:

4.2.4.2.1. What one has to confess

4.2.4.2.2. The way of confessing

4.2.4.2.1. What one has to confess

This refers to the negativity that one needs to confess. The verse relating to this point reads:

*63. I, out of unknowing ignorance,
Have created natural non-virtuous actions
And accepted negativities. Any of these
That I have done,*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Due to unknowing and ignorance with regard to karmic cause and effect, I have created either natural non-virtues which are a negativity whoever commits them—regardless of whether one has vows or not,

and misdeeds through decree which are committed only by those who have taken vows. Thus, I declare whatever wrong doings that I have committed.

One has *created each and every negativity* because of a failure to recognise actions as being negativities *due to unknowing and ignorance*, specifically ignorance of the karmic law of cause and effect.

Here, *whatever* refers to the two ways of creating negativity—the misdeeds of a person with vows who creates negativity with respect to their vows, and those without vows who create natural non-virtues.

The Tibetan text presents *natural non-virtue* first. Killing is a natural negativity or *misdeed* because it is a misdeed, regardless of whether the perpetrator knows it is a misdeed or not, regardless of whether they have taken vows or not, and regardless of whether they are ordained or not. Anyone who engages in the negative act of killing, for example, will incur negativity. That is why it is called a natural misdeed.

Whereas *negativity by decree*, which is translated in the root text as *accepted negativity*, is negativity committed by those who have taken particular vows, such as ordained monks and nuns, who incur negativity if they break their vows. If a lay person engages in the act of killing, they would incur the natural negativity or misdeed, but a monk or nun who engages in the act of killing would incur both the natural misdeed, as well as the negativity or misdeed by decree, because they have taken vows to refrain from killing.

With both natural negativities and the negativity of decree one creates negativity in relation to *self and others*.

So, confession involves confessing negativity incurred by either natural misdeeds, or a negativity that one has incurred because of decree. Regardless of how the negativity was committed, it has to be purified.

To summarise the main point, one needs to recall whatever negativity one may have created in the past and identify it as negativity by confessing it. This then gives one the impetus to engage in practices to purify it.

That covers the point about what one has to confess, which are the negativities incurred in the past.

4.2.4.2.2. The way of confessing

The verse relating to this outline is:

*64. Before the eyes of the protectors,
With hands folded and a mind seeing the
fears of suffering,
I prostrate again and again
And confess all of them.*

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

One should confess all one's negativities by prostrating repeatedly in front of the buddhas and their children with folded hands and a mind that sees the dangers of the negativities.

As the commentary explains, the way to confess negativities is to begin by visualising *the buddhas and their children*, indicating the bodhisattvas, *in front of oneself*. We really need to pay attention to the importance of visualising the buddhas and bodhisattvas as the objects of reliance. When we do a purification practice such as prostrating, it is important to really bring to mind the

buddhas and bodhisattvas, and try to generate as much as possible a strong sense that they are actually present in the space before us.

This has great significance because the more we develop that awareness of the presence of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, the stronger our inclination to confess and engage in a purification practice becomes. It also guards us against engaging in further negativities.

An awareness of the presence of buddhas and bodhisattvas helps to develop a conscientious mind, as well as the mental factor of shame and embarrassment. Basically, when there is the awareness of the buddhas always being present, one will be hesitant about creating negativities. The awareness that because the buddhas are omniscient they always know what one is doing, will protect one from engaging in negativity.

Prior to prostrating, one can kneel in front of the buddhas and bodhisattvas with one's palms together, recalling the negativities one has engaged in the past, and being moved to tears by strong regret and remorse, one now acknowledges the great opportunity that one has to purify this in the presence of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. So with that understanding in mind one can then engage in the purification practice such as prostrating, which also encompasses taking refuge in the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The word *repeatedly* in the commentary indicates that one needs to engage in confession and purification practice again and again.

As mentioned previously, the degree of regret that one feels is dependent on recalling the consequences of the negativities. When one has a strong sense of how the consequences of the negativities will result in suffering, then strong regret and remorse will definitely arise; which will then be followed with the strong wish to refrain from negativities; followed by making a promise to refrain from such negativities in the future. This is how to engage in this practice.

4.2.4.3. MAKING A PROMISE TO REFRAIN FROM NEGATIVITY AFTER HAVING REQUESTED ATTENTION

The meaning of this heading is quite clear. The relevant verse is:

65. *I request the guides to accept my
Negativities as mistakes.
Since they are not wholesome
I shall not do them again.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Oh guides, for these reasons, please accept my negativities as mistakes. Since these negativities are not wholesome I promise not to do them again, even at the cost of my life.

Make the promise in this way, not to do the negativity henceforth, by cutting off the continuity.

As the commentary explains, one pleads with *the guides*—the buddhas and bodhisattvas—for *these reasons*,—referring to the negativities that one recalls and their great consequences—*please accept my negativities as mistakes*.

Since these negativities are not wholesome I promise not to do them again, even at the cost of my life is where one makes a promise to refrain from negativity in the future. As mentioned previously, this is also in line with the confession ceremony for the sangha where the abbot asks, 'Do you see your faults as faults?' and the reply is, 'I do'. 'Henceforth will you refrain from engaging in them again', to which the reply is 'I will'. It is the same with any confession and purification practice. Having pleaded with the guides or the buddhas and bodhisattvas to pay attention, one proclaims one's negativities and accepts them as negativities, and then makes the promise, 'I will not engage in negativity again even at the cost of my life. This should be the extent of one's promise.

As I have mentioned previously, when one promises not to engage in negativity it needs to be a very sincere promise, from the depth of one's heart. There must be a definite determination not to engage in any negativity by clearly accepting them as faults. If one thinks, 'I am not so sure if I wish to avoid engaging in negativity', then the 'promise' is more like a lie, because there is no actual intent to avoid engaging in negativity. So making the promise with keen determination to avoid negativities in the future is essential. This is emphasised in the commentary which explains that one makes the promise not to commit negativity *by cutting of the continuity*.

Then Gyaltsab Je continues:

Although there are many doors for purification explained in the teachings and treatises, that which has the antidote complete is to purify by way of the four powers intact. Thus, this is the way to purify.

As explained here there are *many doors for purification*, meaning that there are many purification methods. For example, those negativities incurred by breaching the commitments of tantric vows are purified by engaging in the practice of Vajrasattva, while the negativities incurred by breaching the commitments of the bodhisattva vows are purified by engaging in practices such as *Thirty-five Buddhas* practice. This practice commences with the indication it is the means to confess and purify the negativities incurred by breaches of the bodhisattva vows. While there are different methods, one needs to apply the four powers for them to be a complete antidote. In order for the Vajrasattva practice of purification and the Thirty-five Buddhas practice of purification to be complete antidotes, one has to actually apply all four opponent powers, thus all four powers have to be intact. This is the actual way to purify negativity.

Then Gyaltsab Je's commentary goes on to say

That this purifies also the karma definitely to be experienced is explained in the *Togke Barwa* and *The Great Commentary to the Eight-thousand Verse Sutra*.

I had explained previously that when the four opponent powers are intact, even the karma that is to be definitely experienced can be purified. And, as explained previously, the karma that is to be definitely experienced is that which is both created and accumulated. This is explained in the Buddha's teaching in sutras such as *Togke Barwa* and *The Great Commentary to the Eight-thousand Verse Sutra*.

Then Gyaltsab Je exhorts us with the following lines:

We, who do not know the instances of karmic cause and effect well, ...

This means that we might lack a complete knowledge of the instances of karmic cause and effect

... and who, although knowing a little, do not practise what has to be abandoned and what has to be practised accordingly, should confess on a daily basis, uninterruptedly, by way of the four powers.

This is really succinct advice reminding us that while we may not know about karmic cause and effect in great detail, we do have some understanding. But while we do have some understanding we may not really engage in the practice of abandoning negativity and adopting what has to be adopted, which means that we still find ourselves engaging in negativities on a daily basis. So because we find ourselves engaging continuously in such negative deeds, it is befitting for us to engage in confession by way of the four powers, continuously, on a daily basis.

As I have explained in the past, it will be really worthwhile at the end of the day, before we go to bed, to really recall the day and if one has engaged in negativities, to confess that, and then rejoice in the virtues that one has accumulated. It is important to reflect on these points.

Actually it would be a good idea to memorise these few lines so that you can recall them regularly.

The commentary concludes its explanation of this section thus:

Especially one should practise by focusing on purifying the obstacles to the generation of bodhicitta.

This presentation returns us to the main topic of the root text, the methods of generating the altruistic mind of bodhicitta.

Summarising verse

Then the author of the commentary, Gyaltsab Je, presents his summarising verse:

Those tormented by the faults of attachment, jealousy
And conceit due to exaggeration will not generate the
supreme mind.
Hence, whatever mistakes one made with body,
speech and mind,
Confess them from the depths of one's heart to the
protectors.

In *Those tormented by the faults of attachment, jealousy and conceit*, the Tibetan word *zir*, translated here as *tormented*, also has the connotation of being *intoxicated*. So the first two lines of this verse mean that it is not possible for the altruistic mind, the supreme mind of bodhicitta, to be generated by those who are tormented or intoxicated with the faults of attachment, jealousy and conceit, which can only result in the continuous creation of negativity.

Realising that, one needs to exhort oneself to confess to the protectors whatever mistakes one has made in body, speech and mind, from the depths of one's heart. The confession practice is essential if one is inclined to purify one's mind.

II. THE TITLE OF THE CHAPTER

The root text reads:

This is the second chapter on confession, from the Introduction to the Actions of the Bodhisattvas.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary concludes with:

This is the commentary on the second chapter called Purifying Negativities from the commentary on the *Introduction to the Actions of Bodhisattvas*, called *The Entrance for the Children of the Conquerors*.

Of the seven limbs, this chapter has covered the limbs of prostration, offering, and confession, in addition to refuge. However the chapter is called the chapter of confession, because the primary focus is on confessing and purifying negativities.

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

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Based on the motivation we generated with the prayers we have just recited, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [*meditation*]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

2. THE ACTUAL EXPLANATION OF THE STAGES OF THE PATH¹

2.2. The method for taking the essence

2.2.2 Explaining the individual meanings

2.2.2.1. CONTEMPLATING THE BENEFITS OF ENLIGHTENMENT

2.2.2.2 THE WAY OF TRAINING IN THE PRACTICES UPON GENERATING THE TWO BODHICITTAS

2.2.2.2.1. Taking the mind of enlightenment²

2.2.2.2.1.2. The actual taking of the mind of enlightenment after having applied the conducive conditions of accumulating merit such as rejoicing in virtue and so forth.

As I have mentioned previously, with anything that we wish to achieve there are certain factors that oppose that achievement and certain factors that contribute to it. Likewise with the development of bodhicitta, there are certain opposing factors and certain conditions that are conducive. The opposing factors are the negativities that have to be removed through purification practices, which was the topic of the second chapter, and the conducive conditions are the means by which we accumulate merit.

Some of the means of accumulating merit, such as prostrations and so forth, were discussed in the second chapter, and this outline continues that presentation, beginning with rejoicing.

As the outline indicates, the actual mind of enlightenment is generated after having built up the conducive condition of merit through rejoicing and so forth. This also implies having rid oneself of the opposing factors, which is done by confession and purification. What we need to derive from this outline is that if we wish to develop the mind of enlightenment we need to overcome the opposing conditions as well as acquiring the conducive condition of accumulating merit. Without engaging those two aspects, there is no way we can establish the basis for generating the mind of enlightenment.

Using sound reasoning and logic we can also understand that whatever result we wish to achieve, there are bound

to be some opposing factors that need to be overcome, and some conducive factors or conditions that need to be acquired, and both are necessary for success. So whatever result we seek, we need to endeavour to overcome the opposing factors and acquire or establish the conducive factors.

The heading *Taking the mind of enlightenment after having built up the conducive conditions of merit and rejoicing in virtue and so forth* is covered in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: TAKING THE MIND OF ENLIGHTENMENT³

I. Explaining the text of the chapter

II. The title of the chapter

I. EXPLAINING THE TEXT OF THE CHAPTER

The chapter has three sub-divisions.

1. Preparation
2. Actual
3. Conclusion

1. PREPARATION

This section has five sub-divisions:

- 1.1. Rejoicing in virtue
- 1.2. Requesting to turn the wheel of Dharma
- 1.3. Requesting not to pass beyond sorrow
- 1.4. Dedicating virtues
- 1.5. An auxiliary of the perfection of generosity: training in the thought of giving away body, possessions and roots of virtue

1.1. Rejoicing in virtue

This is further subdivided into three:

- 1.1.1. Rejoicing in the virtues that are the causes of higher status, and in their effects

Here the merit from rejoicing in virtues is held in conjunction with the causes for higher status and their effects. This means that the merit is not held with renunciation, or the mind of awakening (bodhicitta), or the wisdom realising emptiness.

- 1.1.2. Rejoicing in the virtues that are the causes of mere liberation, and in their effects

Here the merit from rejoicing in virtues is held in conjunction with obtaining liberation.

- 1.1.3. Rejoicing in the causes of highest enlightenment, and in their effects

1.1.1. Rejoicing in the virtues that are the causes of higher status, and in their effects

Higher status refers to taking a fortunate rebirth in the god realms or as a human being. This was explained in detail in *Precious Garland*, which was the last text that we studied.

The first verse of the chapter reads:

1. *In the virtues that give respite from the sufferings
Of the lower realms of all sentient beings,
And in the abiding in happiness of them that suffer,
I rejoice with pleasure.*

Gyaltshab Je's commentary explains the meaning of this verse as follows:

¹ These headings relate to the structural overview of the entire text. The numbering of each chapter is self-contained.

² The first subdivision of this heading was covered in Chapter 2.

³ The heading numbering begins again with the new chapter.

I rejoice in the causal virtues that give respite from the sufferings of the lower realms to all sentient beings abiding in cyclic existence, and which cause them to attain special higher status.

The Tibetan text begins with the words *all sentient beings abiding in cyclic existence*. By specifying sentient beings who are abiding in cyclic existence the text is referring to sentient beings who have the contaminated aggregates, also known as the appropriated aggregates. Having these contaminated aggregates means taking uncontrolled rebirths in cyclic existence again and again. We need to relate *sentient beings abiding in cyclic existence* to beings who are still suffering and bound to samsara, such as ourselves. There are of course many sentient beings who have abandoned cyclic existence, such as the arhats or foe destroyers, as well as the bodhisattvas abiding on the eighth ground and above.

For sentient beings who are bound in cyclic existence, rebirth in a higher status gives some *respite from the intense sufferings of the lower realms*, so we rejoice in the virtues that are the cause for obtaining that high status. Here virtues does not refer to virtues that are held by renunciation; rather we are rejoicing in the virtues that are the cause for merely obtaining the good result of higher status. Seeing others accumulating such virtues is also an opportunity for us to rejoice.

We need to be mindful that when we rejoice in virtuous activities it doesn't mean that we are developing an egotistical pride in our achievements. Rather, rejoicing is an act of great humility, in which one acknowledges that one has had a great opportunity to accumulate some virtue. When one dedicates that virtue for the benefit of all beings then it becomes a pure practice.

Rejoicing has many qualities: when one rejoices in the virtues of others it serves as an opponent to jealousy, and it actually serves as an antidote to overcome jealousy we might feel in relation to the good deeds of others. In addition, as Lama Tsong Khapa mentions, rejoicing is the optimum way to accumulate extensive merit with the least effort. Furthermore, whenever one rejoices, it can help to increase whatever merit one has accumulated in the past, it gives an impetus to accumulate more virtue now, and further encourages one to accumulate virtue in the future.

As explained in the teachings, the merit that one accumulates from rejoicing is vast and extensive. It is said that when one rejoices in the merit of those who are superior to oneself, one will obtain at least half of the merit that they have accumulated, just by virtue of rejoicing in their merit. If the other is of equal status, one will achieve the same amount of merit as they have. When one rejoices in the merit of someone who is lesser than oneself, one will obtain even more merit than they have accumulated. This is explained in sutras that I mentioned previously regarding the offerings made by King Prasenajit to the Buddha.

One of the main points about rejoicing is that it helps to increase merit by acknowledging that one has had a great opportunity to accumulate virtues. One needs to focus on the fact that one has had a great opportunity to accumulate merit, rather than feeling pompous that one has done a great practice. Holding this kind of attitude

will help to overcome pride. Otherwise one might develop an egotistical pride about meagre attempts of accumulating merit. Developing pride defeats the purpose of engaging in virtue—far from achieving good results from one's practice it can bring harmful results. Whatever virtue and merit that one accumulates needs to serve the purpose of reducing pride, rather than increasing it by thinking, 'I have done a great deed! I have accumulated so much virtue'. One needs to adopt a sense of humility and rejoice in the great opportunity of creating merit, and generate the thought, 'May I further get such opportunities to engage in virtue and accumulate merit again'.

The essential point is to recognise the difference between egotistical pride and genuine rejoicing. With pride, one starts to feel pompous and self-righteous about one's achievements, thinking 'I have done great practice!'. Whereas, rejoicing implies a feeling of genuine modesty, of subduing the mind and making it more gentle. If one ensures that the effort one puts into accumulating virtue becomes a means to subdue one's own mind, then one's attempts to accumulate virtue have served their purpose.

The main point is that rejoicing serves as an antidote to the negativities or vices that may otherwise arise in our mind. Genuine rejoicing opposes pride, while rejoicing in the virtues of others helps to overcome jealousy. This text and other teachings mention that by the mere fact of rejoicing in a bodhisattva's virtues and great deeds we accumulate extensive merit. These are important points to keep in mind.

So we can see the great practical value of the practice of rejoicing. We don't have to exert ourselves and go to great lengths of engaging in extensive practices—it basically comes down to having the right attitude. We can accumulate great merit thinking about the great deeds of the noble beings and rejoice in their great deeds, even while lying down.

The first part of Gyaltsab Je's explanation relates to rejoicing in the cause of the higher status. The second part is rejoicing in the results of the higher status. As the commentary reads:

I also rejoice in the result, i.e. the abiding of the suffering sentient beings in the happiness of higher status.

Rejoicing in the result refers to rejoicing in the result of the virtues that one has accumulated, which is obtaining the higher status. Beings who are *abiding in suffering* refers to beings who are abiding in the three types of suffering: the suffering of suffering, and/or the suffering of change, in addition to pervasive conditioned suffering. When beings who are experiencing the immense suffering of the lower realms are placed *in the happiness of the higher status*, they are temporarily relieved of the suffering of suffering of the lower realms. However they are still in the nature of suffering. So, as a result of the virtues that have been accumulated, beings who would otherwise have to repeatedly experience sufferings in the lower realms have now been placed in a temporary state of happiness in higher realms.

In the human realm we are familiar with the qualities of high status. There are those who have great wealth, good

physical features, who are renowned, and those who have fame and power. These are all qualities that we normally admire and even wish for ourselves, because there is a certain amount of happiness and wellbeing associated with them. So if we see others who have any of these qualities, then we can rejoice in their qualities rather than being jealous. This can then prevent many unhappy states of mind.

The immediate benefit we gain from rejoicing is that it releases our mind from the pangs of jealousy, as well as being a means to acquire merit. As mentioned previously, if we find ourselves with any of the good conditions that promote our wellbeing, we should rejoice as a way to overcome pride. When we rejoice in these conditions rather than being proud, we are acknowledging that we enjoy these conditions as a result of the virtues we have previously accumulated, which becomes the means to accept the good conditions we have now. This will enhance our sense of humility about having obtained these good conditions.

What I'm attempting to explain here is that one rejoices in the happiness of higher status obtained by those who are otherwise still abiding in the suffering of cyclic existence. A more vivid example is our own condition of having been reborn in the higher status of a human being. While we have been born as human beings, nevertheless we still experience all three levels of suffering; the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change and pervasive compounded suffering. Yet the mere fact of being born as a human comes with conditions that can provide a certain amount of happiness and wellbeing. Many of us are not deprived of resources such as wealth, being renowned, or having good features, which are some of the qualities of the high status. So while we still abide in suffering, we nevertheless have these good conditions that allow us to experience a certain amount of happiness and wellbeing. Many others also experience these good qualities and conditions, and we should rejoice in their happiness too.

Another significant point to grasp is that enjoying the happiness of higher status also gives us respite from the suffering of the lower realms. While we would all have experienced the suffering of the lower realms in previous lifetimes, it is as if we are now taking a break and enjoying a rest from the otherwise intense suffering of those realms. So we need to acknowledge that. If we don't utilise this opportunity in a proper way, the immense suffering we have previously experienced in the lower realms might continue in the future. Therefore we can't afford to be complacent; we really need to take on board that this is just a mere rest from the otherwise intense sufferings of the lower realms, and that we need to utilise these conditions now to the best of our ability.

So rejoicing is an incredibly profound practice and we should not underestimate its value. There are many different ways of rejoicing in the virtues, good qualities, status and so forth of others, as well as our own good deeds, virtues and merits of the past, present and future. In particular, we should keep in mind that rejoicing is a really practical practice that helps subdue our own mind and relieve a lot of unnecessary angst.

If we think about it, whenever we feel mentally unsettled, we will notice that it is very much related to what we see

and hear about others. We may see others doing very well and being successful and so forth, or hear about their achievements, which can cause us to feel very uncomfortable and unsettled, and create much mental pain. Then, out of jealousy, we may start to engage in criticism and so forth. So a lot of vices arise out of not being able to bear the good qualities and successes of others.

If we can really take on board the practice of rejoicing, then all of this unnecessary angst can be overcome. The achievements of others will no longer bother us because our mind will be happy and joyful about their achievements. If, whenever we see or hear about others doing well, we can immediately relate that to the fact that they are experiencing the good results of their past virtues and merits, and feel joyful about that, then that can really help to settle down our own mind.

As mentioned previously, it is very easy to develop a sense of pride in our own good deeds, virtues and achievements. Such egotistical pride destroys whatever virtues and merits we have otherwise accumulated. It is said that all of the Buddha's 84,000 teachings serve as an antidote to overcome the ego. So we need to understand how the practice of rejoicing is a means to overcome pride. When we develop a genuine sense of rejoicing, it helps to subdue the mind. Rather than feeling elated and pompous, we should feel grateful about having this opportunity. We should not be content with whatever skill or virtue we have developed but rather foster a keen wish to engage in practices to further develop ourselves. In this way we can see there are great benefits in this practice.

It would be really wonderful if we could find the means to overcome that which causes mental agony, such as a strong sense of pride as well as jealousy. There are those who have confided in me, 'I suffer from a strong ego'. When one acknowledges how ego hinders one's development, one can see how it is a great obstacle. Any simple practice that overcomes the agony and pangs of pride and jealousy, like the practice of rejoicing, is truly wonderful and of immense benefit.

1.1.2. Rejoicing in the virtues that are the causes of mere liberation, and in their effects

Here the virtues that one is rejoicing in *are the causes for mere liberation*. One needs to understand that in this context liberation refers to the liberation of hearers and solitary realisers from samsara or the cyclic existence. The very meaning of liberation is freedom. What are hearers and solitary realisers free from? From being bound to cyclic existence by karma and delusions. The analogy is of a person who is bound by a rope to a pole, who will gain his freedom when freed from those bonds. In applying the analogy, karma and delusions are like the rope which binds the person to the contaminated aggregates, likened to the pole, and we are the ones who are bound to contaminated aggregates by karma and delusions. Thus we experience various types of suffering as a result of being bound by karma and delusions to our own contaminated aggregates. That is how we need to understand the analogy of being bound by karma and delusions, and thus having to experience the various

types of suffering in cyclic existence. So the state of liberation is freedom from cyclic existence.

Mere liberation indicates that the virtues specified here are the virtues that are the cause for liberation from the sufferings of cyclic existence, but not the ultimate state of liberation, which is enlightenment.

The verse relating to this outline is:

2. *I rejoice in the accumulation of virtue
That becomes the cause for enlightenment.
I rejoice in the definite liberation
Of embodied beings from the sufferings of
cyclic existence.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

I also rejoice in the accumulation of the virtue which becomes the cause for the enlightenment of the hearers and self-liberators, such as the virtues that harmonise with liberation.

As mentioned previously, in this context *virtue* refers specifically to the virtues that harmonise with liberation. The *accumulation of virtue* refers to all of the virtues that are held with renunciation. Hearers and self-liberators achieve liberation by engaging in the ten virtues and the practices of the three higher trainings, which are morality, meditation and wisdom, on the basis of renunciation. So here we rejoice in our virtues that are in harmony with liberation, without any sense of pride, and we develop a joyful state of mind in having had the opportunity to accumulate such virtues.

Next comes rejoicing in the result, about which Gyaltsab Je says:

I also rejoice in the attainment of definite liberation from the sufferings of cyclic existence by embodied beings as a result of that virtue.

The *sufferings of cyclic existence* refers in general to the suffering of cyclic existence, and more specifically to having overcome pervasive compounded suffering, which serves as the basis for the other two types of suffering. The state of liberation is obtained when one is completely free from pervasive compounded suffering. One *rejoices* in the *attainment of liberation from the sufferings of cyclic existence* by the *embodied beings*, arhats or foe destroyers, the hearers and solitary realisers. So here rejoicing does not relate to ourselves, as we have not yet obtained liberation. The term *definite liberation* indicates that we need to rejoice in others having obtained that state. As we have not obtained liberation it refers to beings such as the hearers and solitary realisers and arhats, who have definitely achieved this state.

The practical benefit of rejoicing in this way is that it will establish an imprint in our mind to obtain the state of liberation ourselves. When we feel joyful and happy about others obtaining that state, we are acknowledging the great value of the achievement of that state of liberation, which is the state of being completely free from suffering.

Rejoicing like this encourages us to accumulate virtues which are held by renunciation. Any virtues we accumulate that are not held or based upon the mind of renunciation will merely become a cause for obtaining higher status. Rather than being completely free from the actual sufferings of samsara, higher status is only a

temporary release from the intense sufferings of the lower realms.

In comparison, the virtues which are not held or based on the mind of renunciation are not of much value. This encourages us to ensure that when we engage in virtue, it is based on a mind of renunciation, which means directing one's virtues towards the goal of being free from all the sufferings of cyclic existence, rather than just a temporary release from the suffering of the lower realms.

From this presentation we can also derive a greater understanding of the presentation of the three principals of the path, which are renunciation, the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta, and the realisation of emptiness.

- Virtues cannot serve as a cause for obtaining liberation if they are not held by the mind of renunciation. So the mind of renunciation is an essential element of the path, because it will ensure that whatever practice one does becomes a means to obtain the state of freedom from the suffering of cyclic existence.
- For any practice to become a cause for obtaining enlightenment, it has to be accompanied by the mind of awakening or bodhicitta. This altruistic mind ensures our practice of virtues and merits becomes the cause to obtain enlightenment. In other words, enlightenment is achieved in dependence on the merit accumulated held with the altruistic mind of bodhicitta.
- The realisation of emptiness ensures that whatever practice we do becomes an antidote to the very root of all our suffering, which is grasping at the self. Without the realisation of emptiness, we cannot overcome the grasping at the self.

That is why renunciation, bodhicitta and the realisation of emptiness are referred to as the three principal aspects of the path.

1.1.3. Rejoicing in the causes of highest enlightenment, and in their effects

The next two verses cover this heading

3. *I also rejoice in the enlightenment of the protectors
And in the grounds of the conqueror's children.*
4. *In the ocean of virtue that is the mind generation,
Which works for the happiness of all sentient beings,
And in the actions benefiting sentient beings
I rejoice with pleasure.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

I also rejoice in the complete enlightenment of the protectors of migrants, and in the ten grounds of the Conqueror's children.

Here, *complete enlightenment* has the connotation that there is no enlightenment greater than the full enlightenment of Buddhahood. Nothing can surpass that final state of enlightenment.

The next part of the commentary reads:

I also rejoice with joy in the causes of these, the ocean of virtue that is the mind generation for complete enlightenment, which works for the happiness of all sentient beings, and also in the actions that benefit sentient beings.

Having presented the ultimate state of enlightenment and the ten grounds of the Conqueror's children, the commentary explains that *the causes of these* are firstly, *the ocean of virtue that is the mind generation for complete enlightenment*. The *mind generation of complete enlightenment* refers to the bodhicitta that is developed within the mental continuum of bodhisattvas. This bodhicitta is the cause of a great *ocean of virtues*, which indicates an incredible amount of virtue that bodhisattvas accumulate by working solely *for the happiness of all sentient beings*.

The second cause, *also in the actions that benefit sentient beings*, specifically relates to the actions or the deeds of the bodhisattvas which, as mentioned many times previously, are the six perfections. One thus acknowledges the great deeds of the bodhisattvas in practising the six perfections: the extent of their generosity, the deeds practised by the bodhisattvas to benefit sentient beings; the great extent of their morality and ethics that the bodhisattvas observe in order to benefit sentient beings; and likewise their patience, joyous effort, meditation and wisdom. Recalling the incredible deeds arising from engaging in the practices of the six perfections, one develops a genuine sense of appreciation and rejoices in the incredible deeds and merits of the bodhisattvas. As I have mentioned many times over, a glance summary of the bodhisattva path contains these two aspects: a being who is endowed with the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta, and who engages in the actions of the six perfections. The way to rejoice about this is then explained in the commentary:

On all of these I meditate with clear faith that is combined with mental happiness, and rejoice with pleasure.

So the way to rejoice is by *meditating* or contemplating these two aspects of bodhisattvas *with clear faith*. Of the different types of faith, clear faith refers to having a sound understanding of the qualities, combined with a sense of happiness and joy in acknowledging their great deeds. This is the way to rejoice in the causes of highest enlightenment and in their effects.

The different aspects of rejoicing are not too obscure. They are quite easy to understand and comprehend, so we can go through the following verses quite rapidly. Keep in mind that the practice of rejoicing is essential, a point specifically indicated when we take the bodhisattva vows when these lines are recited:

I take refuge in the Three Jewels
I confess all my negativities individually, and
I rejoice in the good deeds of myself and others.

As explained in the teachings, in order to develop even an aspirational mind of bodhicitta, the two main conditions need to be intact: purifying one's negativities, and accumulating merit. The rejoicing specified here is

one of the optimum methods for accumulating merit, and that is the significance of the practice of rejoicing.

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

Transcribed by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

19 November 2013

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

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment myself, so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

In previous sessions we went into quite a bit of detail about the significance and purpose of rejoicing, and it is important to remember those points.

1.2. Requesting to turn the wheel of Dharma

The verse relating to the next limb of the seven limb practice reads:

5. *To the buddhas of all directions
I request with my palms folded:
Please light the lamp of Dharma
For sentient beings confused in the darkness of suffering.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je begins his explanation of this verse as follows:

The respectful request is made with palms folded to the buddhas of all the directions, who became enlightened recently and have not started to teach the Dharma yet:

This also relates to the life story of Buddha Shakyamuni. After he became enlightened the Buddha didn't teach the Dharma right away but remained in meditation for seven weeks. It is said that the gods Brahma and Indra requested him to turn the wheel of Dharma. Brahma offered a thousand spoked golden wheel while Indra offered a right turning conch shell, which to this day is quite rare, and together they exhorted the Buddha to teach proclaiming, 'You engaged in amazing great deeds in the past and as a result have now surpassed all practices and have become fully enlightened. We, the people of Magadha¹, are capable of listening well, we are of sound mind and have intelligence and faith, request you to please turn the wheel of Dharma for the benefit of all'. The Buddha accepted this request and gave his first teaching, thus turning the wheel of Dharma. I have already explained this in detail in previous teachings, so you can refer to your notes and the transcripts.

Of course, because of their great compassion, enlightened beings will naturally and spontaneously teach the Dharma to benefit sentient beings, regardless of any request being made. However, requesting Buddha Shakyamuni to turn the wheel of Dharma illustrates the

eagerness to receive the Dharma. It also establishes an auspicious interdependent connection with the teacher, thereby ensuring that the Dharma teaching benefits the listeners and becomes the means to subdue their minds and accumulate great virtue. So making this request is very meaningful and of great benefit. As one of the seven limb practices, it is also the means for accumulating great and extensive merit.

While making the request, the physical gesture should be as indicated in the commentary; a *respectful manner with one's palms folded*. When doing this practice it is appropriate to visualise that one is presenting a thousand spoked golden wheel as an offering to request the buddhas and one's gurus to turn the wheel of Dharma. As explained extensively in the *gor chor* preliminary practice, when making the request to turn the wheel of Dharma, one visualises numerous bodies of oneself—as many bodies as there are enlightened beings—and a replica of oneself in front of each and every enlightened being requesting them to turn the wheel of Dharma. This visualisation is a supreme means to accumulate vast and extensive merit.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues with the actual request:

Please light the lamp of scriptural and realised Dharma that clarifies the path to liberation, for the purpose of sentient beings who suffer and who are confused in the darkness of ignorance.

Having said that one makes a respectful request, the commentary then indicates that the request is *for the purpose of sentient beings who suffer, and who are confused in the darkness of ignorance*. As indicated here, the request is specifically to *light the lamp of scriptural and realised Dharma that clarifies the path to liberation*. Here, the lamp is an analogy for the *scriptural and realised Dharma* that dispels the inner *darkness of ignorance* within sentient beings, which is the cause of all suffering. In accordance with the *gor chor* preliminary practice, a mandala is traditionally offered at this point to accompany the request. One then imagines that the buddhas are actually accepting the request.

We need to understand that this practice of requesting the buddhas to turn the wheel of the Dharma is a means to accumulate extensive merit for ourselves. It is also said to be a supreme antidote for overcoming the negativities of disparaging the Dharma, which is one of the heaviest negativities that one can incur. Engaging in this practice will purify such negativities. Furthermore, one's wrong views, held due to ignorance and so forth, will also be purified, so that in all future lives wrong views will not be generated in one's mental continuum. In addition, one will not be separated from the light of the Dharma.

1.3. Requesting not to pass beyond sorrow

This again establishes an auspicious interdependent connection with the buddhas and our teachers. Here we request them to remain with us, rather than showing the aspect of passing into nirvana or passing beyond sorrow. The explanation in the commentary is quite clear, so there is no need to clarify much.

Since we engage in the seven limb practice regularly it is really worthwhile to fully understand the practice and its

¹ Known today as Bihar.

significance. For example, we do the *Ganden Lha Gyama* prayer regularly in our sessions here, which consists of the seven limb practice. It is good to note however that in the *Ganden Lha Gyama* prayer the request not to pass beyond sorrow and remain steadily with us is presented before requesting to turn the wheel of Dharma.

The relevant verse is:

6. *Requesting with palms folded*
The conquerors wishing to pass beyond sorrow
To not place these migrators in blindness
And remain for uncountable eons.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The request with folded palms is made to the conquerors who wish to go beyond sorrow:

Please do not cause the wisdom eye of these migrators to be blinded by ignorance. Rather, please remain for uncountable eons to illuminate the darkness of ignorance.

As mentioned previously, the buddhas and the enlightened beings may show the aspect of *going beyond sorrow*. So here we are requesting them to remain with us as our guides and not pass beyond sorrow. Again, the request is made *with one's palms folded* at one's heart.

The actual request is, *Please do not cause the wisdom eye of these migrators to be blinded by ignorance. Rather, please remain for uncountable eons to illuminate the darkness of ignorance.* So we are requesting the conquerors to remain with us *for many eons* in order to remove the *darkness* from sentient beings who are *blinded by ignorance*.

The immediate personal benefit derived from this practice of requesting not to pass beyond sorrow is that one establishes the cause to attain the state of immortality. It is said that a supreme practice to ensure one's own long life is to request a lama to live long. Furthermore, it is an antidote to overcome the negativities that one has accumulated through losing faith in the guru, which might include disparaging or upsetting the guru, or inflicting any kind of harm on the guru's body and so forth.

We have covered the benefits in brief although there are many more benefits that can be enumerated.

1.4. Dedicating virtues

This is subdivided into four:

- 1.4.1. General dedication
- 1.4.2. Dedication for the sick
- 1.4.3. Dedication to alleviate hunger and thirst
- 1.4.4. Dedication for the fulfilment of all wishes

As we can see, these are really beneficial aspirations.

I recall that when the late Geshe Ngawang Dhargye was teaching at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, he would encourage his students to regularly recite the *Seven Limb Prayer* with a very melodious tune.

Geshe-la then sang the first two verses of dedication using a tune that he said was very similar.

1.4.1. General dedication

The verse under this heading reads:

7. *Having thus done all of this,*
Whatever virtue I have accumulated,

May through it all sufferings
Of all sentient beings be cleared away.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

Through these virtues, from making offerings up to making requests, as well as all other virtues that I have accumulated, may the suffering of all sentient beings be cleared away.

The virtues *from making offerings up to making requests* that are to be dedicated are those that are accumulated from the first six of the seven limb practices. The first three limbs, prostrations, offerings and confession, were the main focus of the second chapter, and we have just completed rejoicing, requesting to turn the wheel of Dharma, and requesting not to pass beyond sorrow. Now comes the final limb, which is to dedicate these practices.

As well as the specific virtues accumulated through these practices, one also dedicates all other virtues that one has accumulated in the past, thus dedicating all one's accumulated virtues to *clearing away all suffering of all sentient beings*. This suffices as a general dedication.

In summary, all of the virtues that have been accumulated, from the specific practices such as making offerings and so forth, are dedicated towards the end of completely clearing away all the suffering of sentient beings. This also shows the purpose for accumulating virtue. One accumulates virtue so that one can dedicate it to the alleviation of the suffering of all sentient beings. So here we are being shown in a very succinct way the purpose of accumulating virtue and merit.

As presented in the *yor chor* preliminary practice, dedications are made for the achievement of the ultimate state of complete enlightenment; for the long life of one's gurus; for one to be always held in the guru's care, i.e. always under the guidance of the guru; for the Buddha's teachings to expand and flourish; and to always be with the Buddha's teachings in all of one's future lives. This encompasses the general dedication of one's practice.

As I have explained previously, in order to dedicate a practice one has to have accumulated a root virtue. This means that one has to have accumulated some virtue in order to make a dedication. All dedications can be aspirations, whereas all aspirations are not necessarily dedications.

1.4.2. Dedication for the sick

The verse under this heading reads:

8. *Until all migrators who are sick,*
Are cured from their disease,
May I be their medicine, physician,
And their nurse.

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Through the power of these merits may I be the medicine, physician and the nurse for the sick migrators until they are cured from their disease.

Through the power of these merits can relate to the merits that one has accumulated with the specific seven limb practice as presented here, as well as all the merit that one has accumulated in the past. The specific dedication is that, due to *these merits*, *may I be the medicine, physician and the nurse*. These aspirations are not just a mere wish. By dedicating one's merits in such a way, we are implanting the seed in our mind to be able to actually help those who

are in need, such as the sick. By making such dedications now in the form of aspirations, we will be able to assist the sick as doctors, nurses and so forth in the future, when we acquire the right conditions. These aspirations by the great bodhisattva Shantideva to directly benefit those who are sick are incredibly vast. When we dedicate our merits it helps us to accumulate the causes to help others in this way.

Again, we can recall the life story of Buddha Shakyamuni, who personally nursed the sick. Out of his great compassion, Buddha Shakyamuni led by example and showed how to benefit others, such as by personally taking care of the sick and disadvantaged. So it is important for us to make dedications and aspirations such as, 'May I be able to assist those who are sick and impoverished', and 'May I be able to be of service to them until all sickness is completely alleviated'.

1.4.3. Dedication to alleviate hunger and thirst

The verse relating to this reads:

9. *With a rain of food and drink
May I clear the suffering of hunger and thirst.
During the intermediate eon of famine
May I become food and drink.*

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary is not too obscure and is easy to understand.

May I be able to clear away all harm of hunger and thirst with a rain of various foods and drink for all those that are hungry and thirsty.

At the time of the intermediate eon of famine, one of the three intermediate eons, may I be able to pacify the hunger and thirst of sentient beings by becoming food and drink for them.

As with previous dedication, the dedication is also in the form of an aspiration. One of the three *intermediate* eons is the *eon of famine*. So we are making an aspiration for that specific time, 'May I turn into *food* and *drink* to pacify the *hunger and thirst* of sentient beings'. We can see the great extent of the bodhisattvas' intention to benefit sentient beings just from these aspirations.

In the event that we become a skilled doctor or a nurse in the future, then when the conditions are appropriate we will be able to benefit those in our care. Even in these times we find doctors and nurses who are genuinely kind and caring, and who really benefit the sick and their patients really respect them. Their capacity to benefit others comes not just from their skills but from their compassionate mind, which is the result of previous aspirations and prayers. So if we develop these aspirations and make these dedications now, we will definitely have the capacity to benefit others at the appropriate time. There is an indication of this in the words *accomplishing magnificent prayers*, in the short long life prayer for Lama Zopa Rinpoche. As with any other practice, it is good to relate to what *accomplishing prayers* actually means.

1.4.4. Dedication for the fulfilment of all wishes

The root text reads:

10. *May I become an inexhaustible treasure
For destitute and poor sentient beings,
And abide as various requisites and necessities
In front of them.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

For the sentient beings who are destitute and lack the requisites and necessities of life, may I become a treasure that is inexhaustible despite being used. May I abide effortlessly in front of them as the various necessities they need.

Again, the dedication is in the form of an aspiration. Here the aspiration is that one's merits will be a means to fulfil the needs of sentient beings who *lack the requisites and necessities*, by becoming a *treasure vase that is inexhaustible*. In other words, we are aspiring to become an inexhaustible treasure vault, which will naturally replenish itself no matter how much you take out of it.

May I abide effortlessly in front of them as the various necessities they need means being able to spontaneously and effortlessly fulfil the needs of those who are deprived. The specific connotation of *effortlessly* is that, while one might have an inexhaustible treasure vault, there might be some hesitation in using that wealth if effort is required to do so. If there is effort involved we might not be so inclined to use those resources to benefit others. So *effortlessly* has the specific indication that one has no hesitation and will be naturally and spontaneously able to give to others in need.

1.5. An auxiliary of the perfection of generosity: training in the thought of giving away one's body, possessions and roots of virtue

In order to be generous we first need to train our mind in generosity, such as when we do the *tong len* practice of giving and taking, where we give away our body, possessions and virtues.

As indicated here, we are initially *training in the thought of giving away our body, possessions and roots of virtue*. The significance of training one's mind in doing these practices is that there will be no hesitation and no sense of miserliness when it comes to actually giving. Without that training we might develop miserliness or hesitation when we give to others. So training the mind in the thought of giving is most important.

Having covered some specific dedications, it is good to come back to the significance of dedication in general. It is said that dedication in general is an antidote for overcoming negativities that one has incurred through holding wrong views, specifically the wrong view that there are no past or future lives, and wrong views in relation to the cause and effect of karma.

When one makes a dedication towards the achievement of complete enlightenment then imprints are implanted in one's mind to obtain the four enlightened bodies of a buddha. We need to understand that someone who does not believe in past and future lives, and who has the wrong view about karma, would not engage in any kind of dedication to benefit the future lives. Because they have no belief in the positive effect of karma for good deeds, the thought of dedicating towards future lives would not occur to them. When we intentionally engage in a dedication practice it actually serves as an antidote for overcoming negativities otherwise incurred from these wrong views held in the past.

This section of the chapter is subdivided into three:

1.5.1. Training in the thought of giving away one's body, possessions and roots of virtue

1.5.2. Dedicating it to be the cause of inexhaustible virtue

1.5.3. Dedicating it to be the cause of enjoyment

1.5.1. Training in the thought of giving away one's body, possessions and roots of virtue

This is further subdivided into three:

1.5.1.1. The way of giving

1.5.1.2. The reason why one should definitely give

1.5.1.3. How to practice after the offering

1.5.1.1. THE WAY OF GIVING

The verse relating to this is:

11. *Also my body, possessions
And all virtues of the three times
I will give away without regret
To achieve the purpose of all sentient beings.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Also my body and possessions, such as food and drink, and all my virtues of the three times that are related to and contained in the three bases, I offer with a mind free from regret and dependence, to achieve the temporary and ultimate goals of sentient beings.

In relation to the explanations here, one is again training one's mind in the thought to give away one's body and possessions, such as food and drink.

The three times refers to the past, present and future. One could not however be generous with food that has already been consumed in the past. You can't say, 'Oh, I will give you the lunch that I had yesterday.' How could you possibly give away food that you have already consumed? However one can be generous with food in the present and in the future. You can say, 'I will share my lunch with you tomorrow', or 'I will give you some food tomorrow', and it would not be a lie if you actually intended to do that. So dedicating in this way has a sense of being a promise.

- One can definitely dedicate virtues accumulated in the past. Even though the actual accumulation of the virtue occurred in the past, what remains of those positive actions is their imprints. Whenever one creates karma, an imprint remains in one's mental continuum. Therefore, the virtues of the past, refers to the positive imprints of the virtues accumulated in the past.
- Likewise the virtues one is accumulating in the present can definitely be dedicated.
- Dedicating now is also a way to encourage oneself to accumulate more virtue in the future, which will be a very significant means to accumulate merit, which is definitely significant.

Another point to note is that when one mentally offers food, possessions and so forth to the Sangha or others, it is permissible to consume food that has actually been offered, if it is for the purpose of benefitting others.

The *three bases* refers to the practices of the three trainings, i.e. generosity, morality and meditation.

The purpose of engaging in the practices of giving away one's possessions, food and drink and virtues is to fulfil the temporary and ultimate goals of all sentient beings.

1.5.1.2. THE REASON WHY ONE SHOULD DEFINITELY GIVE

We can leave this for the next session.

My intention is to try to finish this chapter by the end of this year.

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

Transcribed by Bernii Wright

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

26 November 2013

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

[meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment myself, so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

1.5.1. Training in the thought of giving away one's body, possessions and roots of virtue

1.5.1.1. THE WAY OF GIVING (CONT.)

In our last session we introduced the topic of how we should give away our body, possessions and virtues of the three times.

The relevant verse reads:

11. *Also my body, possessions
And all virtues of the three times
I will give away without regret
To achieve the purpose of all sentient beings.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Also my body and possessions, such as food and drink, and all my virtues of the three times that are related to and contained in the three bases, I offer with a mind free from regret and dependence, to achieve the temporary and ultimate goals of sentient beings.

As explained in the commentary, one offers one's body, possessions and virtues to all sentient beings, for the purpose of *achieving the temporary and ultimate goals of sentient beings*. Giving should be *free from regret or dependence* on fame and so forth. Being free from regret, means that the gift should be free of any taint of miserliness. Any thoughts of, 'Oh, maybe I gave too much', or 'I wish I hadn't given that', would not be pure giving. Nor would giving in dependence on fame and so forth be a pure form of giving. In brief, giving should be done with the motivation of achieving either the temporary purpose of obtaining high status and liberation, or the ultimate purpose of achieving enlightenment. We need to keep that in mind.

One of the implications of being free from dependence is not to be dependent on a good result solely for ourselves, such as giving a meagre portion of our possessions with the intention of getting back more in return. Giving with such contrived intentions is not a pure practice of giving. Giving in dependence can also refer to giving in dependence on a greater return in the future, such as giving with the intention to accumulate the karma that will yield a good result in the future, just for ourselves.

That would be contrived giving because it is not free from self interest, i.e. it will be giving merely to achieve one's own purposes. The main point to understand is that if giving is contrived with impure thoughts of gaining good results merely for oneself, then that giving cannot be a cause for liberation and enlightenment. In fact, it is even doubtful whether it would be a cause for high status in one's future life.

We need to understand giving in the full context of the perfection of giving. As beginners we might not have developed the capacity to actually give away our body, possessions, and virtues right now; nevertheless these practices are presented as a significant method to help trainees develop the mind of giving.

As explained previously, the perfection of generosity can be divided into two stages. The *resultant state* of the perfection of generosity is where generosity has actually been perfected, thus reaching the stage of unsurpassed giving. The *causal aspect* of the perfection of generosity is to engage in acts of generosity while one is still training one's mind on the path to enlightenment. So the resultant name *perfection of generosity* is given to the cause—every act of giving, however meagre, being motivated by bodhicitta. Thus, we need to feel encouraged to practise generosity. We need to understand that this is how we train our mind to eventually have no hesitation in giving away our body, possessions and virtues for the benefit of others.

Another significant point is that this is a practice that overcomes self-grasping. Because of our self-grasping, we hold on to things very tightly, and so we are only able to give away limited amounts of our possessions and virtues, or our body. The stronger the sense of self-grasping, the more difficult it is to part from them.

If we begin by training in the thought of giving, then, as we develop the practice further, we can reach the point where we can give selflessly, without any hint of self-grasping. When one reaches the point where there is no hesitation in giving one's body, possessions and virtues for the benefit of sentient beings, then one has overcome self-grasping. If we are able to give away the very basis of our self-grasping, which is our body, our possessions and our virtues, then how could self-grasping exist alongside of that? It is just not possible. What we need to understand is that training in the perfection of giving is ultimately a means to overcome self-grasping, which is a much more profound way of understanding the benefit of practising generosity.

1.5.1.2. THE REASON ONE SHOULD DEFINITELY GIVE

This section is divided into two:

1.5.1.2.1. By giving up attachment to everything and offering one goes beyond misery or sorrow

1.5.1.2.2. Making offerings to sentient beings is appropriate as they are the supreme field for generosity

1.5.1.2.1. By giving up attachment to everything and offering one goes beyond misery, or sorrow

Here we can get the sense of the significance of the practice of generosity just from the outline. When the practice of generosity overcomes attachment, then by virtue of overcoming attachment at its very root, one will definitely obtain the state of liberation. As mentioned

previously, generosity is definitely connected with an understanding of selflessness, because without overcoming grasping at the self, one cannot possibly uproot attachment to one's body, possessions and virtues.

What I am sharing here is a more profound understanding of the practice, which is that by completely abandoning grasping at the self, one can overcome attachment to one's body, possessions and virtue. Then, as mentioned previously, there is no hesitation in giving, which in turn becomes a means to achieve the state beyond misery, or liberation. This is how we need to develop our understanding on a more profound level.

As we have learned from previous teachings, the essence of the path that is the main cause for achieving liberation, is gaining the realisation of selflessness, or emptiness. Thus emptiness, or selflessness, is the core realisation that one needs to obtain in order to achieve liberation. That is a key point to remember in this context.

The relevant lines of the root text are:

*12ab. Giving everything one goes beyond misery
My mind achieves the going beyond misery.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

My mind wants to achieve the non-abiding state beyond misery, and giving up one's body, possessions and all roots of virtue for the purpose of others, enables one to achieve that aim.

The *purpose of others* indicates that the giving has to be free from self-interest, and that one is giving entirely for the benefit of others. When it is free from self-interest, generosity *enables one to achieve one's aim*, which is to attain the *non-abiding state beyond misery*. From the very outset one practises with the aim of achieving that state beyond misery, which has two levels. One level of the non-abiding state beyond misery is where the deluded obscurations have been overcome. The other level is having overcome both the deluded obscurations as well as the obscurations to omniscience, i.e. the imprints of the delusions, and thus obtaining the ultimate state of enlightenment.

When taking the vows of ordination as a monk or nun the novice says, 'I take these vows with the intention of seeking liberation', so at the very outset the purpose of taking the vows is indicated. They are made with the intention of seeking liberation, which is why these vows are called the self-liberation vows. In fact any individual can seek liberation. If we have the mind that wants to achieve the non-abiding state beyond misery, then we can achieve that goal by engaging in the practice of giving up one's body, possessions and virtues for the purpose of others.

The commentary concludes with:

Hence it is appropriate to give up everything.

So giving one's body, possessions and merits is an appropriate practice.

1.5.1.2.2. Making offerings to sentient beings is appropriate as they are the supreme field for generosity

As sentient beings are the supreme field to accumulate merit, it is appropriate to make offerings to them.

The remainder of verse twelve reads

*12cd. To surrender everything at once
Is the supreme offering to sentient beings.*

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary is quite clear:

To surrender everything at once is equal to offering it, and to offer to sentient beings is the supreme offering, because through this offering one attains enlightenment.

Surrendering *everything is equal to offering everything*, but specifically making that offering *to sentient beings is the most supreme form of offering*. The main point here is that by offering to sentient beings, one attains enlightenment.

As explained here, the reason why sentient beings are supreme objects for practising generosity is because through the practice of generosity one will obtain the ultimate state of enlightenment. The very fact that we are able to engage in practices of purification and the accumulation of merit is due to the existence of sentient beings. As one of the lines in the *Eight Verses of Mind Training* reads, 'Sentient beings are more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel'. As explained in these teachings, sentient beings are extremely precious because by relying on them we will gain all our temporary and ultimate goals.

For example, meeting our temporary needs of food, clothing, and shelter is dependent on other sentient beings. Furthermore, the practices that are the causes for achieving liberation and the ultimate state of enlightenment are also dependent on sentient beings. Without sentient beings we could not engage in the practice of the six perfections—generosity, morality, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom. We engage in these practices only in relation to sentient beings, so sentient beings are the cause for us to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment.

If we wish to acquire wealth, we need to depend on others who have wealth—without the wealth of others how could we acquire wealth ourselves? Furthermore, to acquire knowledge we have to depend on teachers and instructors who can impart that knowledge. Thus, to achieve anything we have to depend on others.

As Shantideva mentions later on in this text, the moment we see sentient beings we need to generate the thought, 'It is through these beings that I will achieve enlightenment; thus I behold them with great love'. It is with this understanding that one looks at others with eyes of loving kindness. As Shantideva says so very succinctly, the moment we see any sentient beings we need to remember, 'These are the very beings that will help me achieve my ultimate goal of enlightenment'.

So the appropriate way to relate to any sentient being that we encounter is to recall their great kindness, and view them with loving kindness. Although these are very profound ways of training our mind they are quite easy to understand, and as we learn these techniques and methods we can slowly train our mind in appropriate conduct towards others. These are supreme methods to maintain our positive attitude towards other sentient beings.

If we are really keen on practising patience we will welcome those who test our patience! Otherwise how would we ever know what levels of patience we have actually developed? So rather than considering someone who irritates us as an enemy, or someone to be avoided, we can welcome the opportunity to further develop our practice of patience. Then we can definitely hold them dear, seeing them as a spiritual friend, a teacher, and an aid to our practice. When we really think about these truly amazing methods for developing our mind, we gain a sense of how astonishing the bodhisattva practices are. Then, at the very least, we can be inspired to undertake the same training. The great master Atisha was known to have a very irritating attendant. When others commented on that, Atisha said, 'It is thanks to him that I am rapidly developing my practice of patience!'

1.5.1.3. HOW TO PRACTISE AFTER THE OFFERING

Having made our offerings, how do we practise? What attitudes should we develop?

This has three subdivisions:

1.5.1.3.1. Henceforth I give up the idea of having control over my body

1.5.1.3.2. Explaining the meaning of this extensively

1.5.1.3.3. Relating it to suitable action

1.5.1.3.1. Henceforth I give up the idea of having control over my body

Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary on this section with this query:

How should one act after having offered one's body.

The answer to that is presented in this verse:

13. *Since I have offered this body
To all sentient beings, to do with it as they
please,
They can always kill it, criticise it,
Or beat it; whatever pleases them.*

The commentary goes on to explain:

Now that I have offered this body to all sentient beings to do with it as they please, it depends on what pleases them. They can always kill it, insult it with words or physically beat it and so on. I must give up attachment to my body and completely give up my anger towards others.

As the commentary explains, *I have offered this body to all sentient beings to do with it as they please*, which means you offer your body for others to do whatever they please with it. Since our body now depends on them, whether they choose to *kill* us or *insult* us or *beat* us is up to them. Thus by giving up attachment to one's body, one will *completely give up* any *anger* towards others when they inflict any kind of harm.

We can actually derive a great deal of inspiration from these words. We can see that that these extensive forms of dedications are also related to the practice of patience. When we reach the point of actually giving away our body, possessions, and virtues for the sake of others, then how could we become angry when this offer is taken up? There would be no reason to be angry when others harm one's body or criticise or insult one, because there is no longer any sense that one's body, possessions and virtues

belong to oneself. This is the optimal way to practise patience, as it gives us the means to not hold any grudge, or retaliate when others harm us.

Giving away our body, possessions and even our merits for the sole purpose of benefiting others is a supreme practice that prepares us for the last stages of our life. There will be no sense of attachment, because we will have already given up our body, possessions and even our merits, and dying with a mind free of attachment is the best way to experience death.

Giving away one's virtues for the purpose of others is, in fact, the best means to acquire an inexhaustible stock of merit. We can easily understand the process of using our body and possessions because they are tangible objects. But how do we use up our virtue? It is said that every pleasant experience is a result of virtue. So whenever we experience a temporary good result we are actually using up our merit and virtue. Whereas, if we dedicate our virtues for the benefit of all sentient beings, then whatever virtue we accumulate will be inexhaustible. So the act of selflessly giving away our virtue to all sentient beings is actually a supreme means to create an inexhaustible amount of virtue.

These practices are supreme methods to further increase our merits. When we understand the deeper benefit of this practice, we will develop a genuine sense of enthusiasm about engaging in the practice. Our strong sense of holding on to our possessions and body and virtues and so forth comes from a very narrow-minded and selfish attitude. Our self-cherishing is likened to an animal's horn, which is hard to its core. So, in order for this hard and tough attitude of selfishness to soften, we need to engage in these practices. When we take these practices to heart and gradually engage in them, then our strong sense of self-cherishing mind will start to loosen and become soft like wool. Indeed our whole demeanour will begin to transform to naturally become more gentle and kind.

1.5.1.3.2. *Explaining the meaning of this extensively*

14. *Whether they use it for play, amusement
Or to ridicule it,
Since I have already offered it
Why should it concern me?*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Since I have already unconditionally given my body to others, they should be able to do with it as they like. Henceforth, why should I concern myself with protecting it, even though they use it for play, amusement or ridicule it.

As the commentary explains, *since I have already unconditionally given my body to others they should be able to do whatever they like with it*. So *why should I concern myself with protecting it*, when others try to *ridicule* or *play* with it? There are times when people say things in jest that can go down the wrong way, which can be a source of hurt and so forth. If we have a strong sense of clinging to our identity, we are more vulnerable and prone to getting hurt.

The point here is that since we have given our body for the sake of others, then even though they use it for amusement or ridicule, it should not concern us—they

can do with it whatever they see fit. So here we can see the relationship between the practice of generosity and the practice of patience. As we have already given our body to others, we will willingly accept their ridicule or use of us as a source of amusement, and not retaliate by becoming angry.

1.5.1.3.3. *Relating it to suitable action*

This heading refers to ensuring that one's actions are suitable rather than inappropriate.

The next two lines of the verse read:

15ab. *I shall allow them any action
That does not harm them.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

I shall let them do any action with my body that benefits self and others and does not harm self or others at all times, now and in the future.

As the commentary explains, *let* others use *my body* with *any action* that will benefit self or others, and which will *not harm self or others*. Using the words *at all times* means now and in the future, referring to both temporary and ultimate benefits. One allows others to use one's body for whatever purpose they wish, as long as it does not cause harm, and brings benefit in this lifetime, as well as forming the basis to refrain from harm while benefitting others in future lifetimes.

1.5.2. *Dedicating it to be the source of inexhaustible virtue*

This heading has three subdivisions:

1.5.2.1. Dedicating it to be only the cause of the welfare of others

1.5.2.2. Dedicating the thought as the cause for inexhaustibility

1.5.2.3. Dedicating the action as the cause for inexhaustibility

1.5.2.1. DEDICATING IT TO BE ONLY THE CAUSE OF THE WELFARE OF OTHERS

This implies dedicating our practice to only benefit other beings and not cause them the slightest harm.

The next two lines of the verse are:

15cd. *May looking at me
Never be meaningless.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

May it never become the cause for sentient beings to be disappointed when they look to me for help.

These are really incredible aspirations which, if we reflect upon them, are really meaningful and inspiring. This dedication in brief is, *may* the mere sight of my body be *a cause* of benefit, and never a cause of harm, and *may it never* be a *cause* for others *to be disappointed*.

1.5.2.2. DEDICATING THE THOUGHT AS THE CAUSE FOR INEXHAUSTIBILITY

The verse relating to this is:

16. *Whether a mind of anger or faith,
Arises, directed at me,
May it become the cause for all their
purposes
To be continually fulfilled*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Regardless of whether it is a mind of anger or faith that has arisen, when directed at me may it become the cause that in all lifetimes all their temporary and ultimate aims are achieved.

Here *faith* can also refer to being appreciated by others. *Whether* others relate to me out of *anger* or out of appreciation, may that be *a cause* for the *achievement* of *all temporary and ultimate aims in all lifetimes*. So here is another incredible aspiration for the benefit of others.

1.5.2.3. DEDICATING THE ACTION AS THE CAUSE FOR INEXHAUSTIBILITY

The relevant verse reads:

17. *May whoever affronts me,
Harms me otherwise,
Or backstabs me
Have the fortune of enlightenment.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

May whoever affronts me verbally, or otherwise, physically harms me, or stabs me in the back, may all these actions become the cause for them to have the fortune of attaining the great enlightenment.

The Tibetan term translated here as '*affronts me verbally*' has a particular connotation of others criticising you to your face, rather than using slanderous, negative words behind your back. So the aspiration is that when someone harms me *verbally* in this way, or physically harms me, may all these harmful actions become the cause for them to have the fortune of attaining great enlightenment. We need to remember that these dedications are the great aspirations made by the Conqueror's children, the bodhisattvas.

1.5.3. *Dedicating it to be the cause of enjoyment*

This section is subdivided into three

1.5.3.1. Dedicating oneself to become the cause of necessities

1.5.3.2. Dedicating for time and expansive actions

1.5.3.3. Dedicating for uninterrupted continuum of object and time

1.5.3.1. DEDICATING ONESELF TO BECOME THE CAUSE OF NECESSITIES

There are three verses in this section of the text.

18. *May I become a protector for the unprotected,
A guide of those travelling along a path,
A ship, ferry or bridge
For those who want to cross.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

May I become thus a protector for those without a protector, in all lives a guide for those travelling along a path, a ship, ferry or bridge for those wishing to cross the waters.

The first aspiration is *may I become a protector* or refuge *for those without a protector* and who are in distress.

Next is *in all lives may I be a guide for travellers on a path*. In the past people like traders and so forth needed to travel long distances on foot, through treacherous, unfamiliar lands with many dangers. So, being a guide was a really useful and beneficial way to benefit others.

Furthermore, *may I also be a ship, a ferry and a bridge for those wishing to cross the waters*.

This relates to the distance to be crossed. To cross the oceans you need a ship. Over a shorter distance a ferry will suffice to make the crossing, while bridges can be built to cross small creeks and rivers. So the aspiration is to be a means for beings to cross over to the other side of the water.

Transcribed by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
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19. *May I become an island for those wishing an island*
A place of rest for those who wish to rest
A slave for all embodied beings
Who desire a slave

Here the commentary explains:

May I become dry land for those who wish for an island, a lamp for those who desire a lamp, a resting place for those who desire to rest, a slave for all those who desire a slave.

When people have been at sea for a long time they need to find land where they can rest and replenish their supplies. So for those who desperately need to find land, *may I be like an island* with nice trees and so forth, for them to rest and enjoy.

Next is *a lamp for those who desire a lamp*. In ancient times it would be hard, if not impossible, to read texts and so forth in the evening without a lamp. So a lamp is essential to be able to read and study, for example. Thus a lamp can provide the means to benefit others. A more subtle connotation of a lamp is that it that removes the darkness of ignorance.

May I be a resting place for those who desire to take a rest. The Tibetan word *mal* also implies bedding. So here the aspiration is not only a place to rest but also for bedding, such as mattresses, cushions and for those in need to take a rest.

Lastly the text says, *May I be a slave for those who desire to have a slave*. The Tibetan word *dren*, literally translated as slave, doesn't carry a negative connotation. The connotation is more like an obedient assistant. So the dedication is to be an assistant that does everything for those needing help - such as the sick, the impoverished, the weak and the aged - helping them to fulfil all their needs and providing them with what they wish.

After calling for a show of hands of those who would not be going away at Christmas, Geshe-la then asked everyone to make an effort to attend the puja marking the passing away of Lama Tsong Khapa which, he said, would be very beneficial. He said that since there were so many staying home over the break there should not be an empty gampa.

He reminded us that many have commented how beneficial it was that there were sessions being held over the teaching break. The leader of the puja and classes will be Allys Andrews and it would be good for her to have a few supporters.

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

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

3 December 2013

Based on the motivation we have just generated, we will engage in our meditation practice. [meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment myself, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

1.5.3 Dedicating it to be the cause of enjoyment

1.5.3.1. DEDICATING ONESELF TO BECOME THE CAUSE OF NECESSITIES (CONT.)

There are three verses under this heading, the first two of which we covered last week. The third verse reads:

20. *May I become a wish-fulfilling jewel, a pure vase,
A knowledge mantra or powerful medicine,
A wish-fulfilling tree or cow
For embodied beings.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je gives this explanation of the verse:

May I be a wish-fulfilling jewel and a pure vase for those desiring food and drink and the like; a knowledge mantra accomplishing the actions of pacifying and increasing and so forth for those wishing to achieve those actions; the great medicine called the extraction of essence, which dispels all sicknesses; a wish-fulfilling tree that gives what is desired, such as food and drink; and a wish-fulfilling cow that can give whatever is desired by embodied beings.

Dedicate in such a way repeatedly.

The first of the aspirations in this verse is to become a *wish-fulfilling jewel* and a precious or *pure vase for those desiring food, drink and the like*. A *wish-fulfilling jewel* is a metaphor for something that is able to provide whatever one wishes for. So dedicating one's virtues to become a wish-fulfilling jewel that fulfils all wishes, hopes and desires is an incredibly noble aspiration. The second metaphor is the mythological *pure vase*, which is an inexhaustible treasure-like vase that can provide all of the necessities such as food, drink and so forth.

The second aspiration is to be like a *knowledge mantra accomplishing the actions of pacifying and increasing and so forth, for those wishing to achieve these actions*. There are four specific actions that are accomplished through the great power of mantra as an aid to benefit sentient beings: they are the controlling, wrathful, *pacifying* and *increasing* actions. The dedication here is that one may be a knowledge mantra with which these beneficial actions are accomplished.

The next aspiration is to be like *the great medicine called the extraction of essence*. Medicines that extract the essence of all essentials are a panacea that *dispels all sickness*.

The next two lines of the verse refer to the mythological treasures of the *wish-fulfilling tree that gives what is desired, such as food and drink*, followed by the *wish-fulfilling cow that can give whatever is desired by embodied beings*. These are dedications to fulfil all the necessities of sentient beings. As you will recall, both the wish-granting tree and the wish-fulfilling cow are included in the *Long Mandala Offering*. The wish-fulfilling tree is also mentioned in the *Guru Puja* as part of one's visualisation of the merit field.

The final line in the commentary, *Dedicate in such a way repeatedly*, is an exhortation to dedicate over and over again whatever virtues one has accumulated in the manner indicated in verses eighteen to twenty.

1.5.3.2. DEDICATING FOR EXPANSIVE TIME AND ACTIONS

This heading refers to dedicating that our actions be expansive and timeless.

The relevant verse reads:

21. *Like the elements of earth and so forth,
And like space as well,
May I always be the basis for the many
necessities
Of the boundless sentient beings.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation of this verse reads:

May I always become, in many ways, the cause for the necessities of boundless sentient beings, like the four elements of earth, water, fire and wind are the basis for the actions of sentient beings, and similar to space, which is permanent.

From the *Stacking of Jewels*:

Bodhisattvas work for the welfare of sentient beings like the five elements.

As indicated in the commentary, when bodhisattvas serve sentient beings they become the *cause for the necessities of boundless sentient beings like the four elements of earth, water, fire and wind*. We can all relate to the fact that the basis of both ourselves and the external world is the four elements, and that nothing can be sustained without these four elements. So the four elements are incredibly vast causes of every material object. Using the four elements as an example indicates the expansive nature of the aspiration to provide the necessities for boundless sentient beings.

The next part of the aspiration is to be like *space which is permanent*. Just like time, space has no limits, and this is another example indicating the extent to which one aspires to benefit sentient beings.

The commentary quotes from the *Stacking of Jewels Sutra* as a source, indicating that these are suitable and valid ways of dedicating. The five elements are the elements of earth, water, fire and wind, plus the space element. So the extent of a bodhisattva's wish to benefit sentient beings is the same as that of the five elements, which serve as a basis for all phenomena to function.

The five elements serve as the basis of all phenomena to function, including ourselves.

- The *earth* element is said to establish the basis and firmness of our existence. It holds everything firmly together. For example, the earth element holds the components of a flower together, just as it does with our bodies;
- The *water* element nurtures that which is established;
- The *fire* element helps it to mature;
- The *wind* element helps it to increase. Another aspect of the wind element is that it allows external substances like plants and so forth and our bodies to remain fresh. Without the wind element, bodies and flowers, for example, would rot and wither away.
- The *space* element is said to be that which allows phenomena to be established. Without the space element nothing could be established, because there would be no space in which to establish it. For example, you can put a lid on a cup of tea, and it remains there even when the cup is full because of the presence of the space element. Generally within space there is compounded space and uncompounded space. The space in the sky above us is an example of uncompounded space, whereas very tiny particles make up compounded space. This distinction is good to note as well.

The extent to which bodhisattvas work for the sake of sentient beings by providing all the basic necessities is similar to the extent of the five elements establishing all existence. So this extraordinarily expansive dedication of one's merits is an extremely noble dedication. When one has accumulated virtues, then one can dedicate them in this way. However, even as an aspiration it is incredibly worthwhile and meaningful.

The dedications presented here are also a personal instruction on how to engage in everyday practice. People often ask, 'What kind of aspirations should I hold?', 'What are the kind of prayers that I should do?' So if you are in doubt about the kind of prayers, or the extent of how to dedicate your merit, then you need look no further than Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara* which explains very clearly how to make extensive dedications and aspirations. Furthermore, if you wonder about how to engage in the practice of prostrations, then again, you will find the explanation in Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara*. Likewise the *Bodhicharyavatara* explains how to do confession and purification practices. Rejoicing and requesting the gurus and the buddhas to remain is also explained in this very noble text, as is making requests for turning the wheel of Dharma to ensure the flourishing of the Dharma. So whenever we have a question about practice, we will find it explained very clearly in Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara*. The point here is that the benefit of studying this text is that it is the optimum resource on how to engage in our practices.

1.5.3.3. DEDICATING FOR UNINTERRUPTED CONTINUUM OF OBJECT AND TIME

Basically *uninterrupted continuum* means to continuously extend one's dedications and aspirations, without any interruptions. This means that nothing should come between one's aspirations, and to the extent they will

benefit sentient beings. The verse relating to this heading is:

22. *Likewise, may I be the cause for the livelihood
Of all the realms of sentient beings,
That stretch until the edge of space,
Until they all go beyond misery.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Likewise, may I also become the cause for the livelihood of all the realms of sentient beings, which extend to the edge of space, by benefiting them in infinite ways, until they go beyond misery.

Train the mind like this again and again.

Likewise, may I also become the cause for the livelihood of all the realms of sentient beings, which extend to the edge of space is an indication of vast numbers of sentient beings. *One benefits them in infinite ways, until they go beyond misery.* That is a reference to the uninterrupted time over which one extends one's dedication—until all sentient beings, who are infinite as space, reach the ultimate state of going beyond misery—which is complete enlightenment. Then the commentary exhorts us to *train the mind*, or meditate in this way, *again and again*.

The personal instruction is that we need to take every opportunity to make as many expansive dedications and aspirations as possible. It is through this sort of training that we implant the imprints to actually work for the welfare of sentient beings as extensively as the buddhas and bodhisattvas. We also gain an insight of how the buddhas obtained their state of enlightenment. Thus we get an inkling of the vast activities of the buddhas and bodhisattvas from the fact that they have surpassed these very extensive aspirations.

Here Gyaltsab Je is exhorting us to train our mind again and again. This means that we need to take every opportunity, not just once or twice, but again and again, to familiarise our mind with making these expansive dedications and aspirations. These are the means of a supreme practice.

2. ACTUAL

Having covered the explanations under the first heading in the chapter Preparation, we now come to the second heading, Actual, which explains how to actually take the bodhisattva vows. This is contained in the next two verses.

23. *Just as the previous tathagatas
Generated the mind of enlightenment
And continued in the gradual
Trainings of a bodhisattva,*
24. *I too shall generate the mind of enlightenment
For the welfare of sentient beings,
And train step-by-step
In the trainings.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

When the previous tathagatas generated the mind of enlightenment they initially generated the supreme wishing bodhicitta in front of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and then, to take the bodhisattva vows, they generated engaging bodhicitta. Subsequently, they trained and remained in the gradual bodhisattva trainings.

Likewise I, for the temporary and ultimate benefit of sentient beings, either in front of an actual preceptor

with pure bodhisattva vows, or in front of invoked buddhas and bodhisattvas, upon the request for attention, shall generate the wishing mind of enlightenment. Likewise, I shall train and remain in the gradual trainings upon having generated an engaging mind.

Repeat the verses three times, either after the preceptor, or, if there is none, after the invoked buddhas and bodhisattvas.

As the commentary explains, *we repeat these two verses three times after a preceptor if they are present, or if there is no preceptor, we imagine repeating them after the invoked buddhas and bodhisattvas.*

As you should know, there are two stages of generating bodhicitta: aspiring bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta.

It is when one generates the engaging bodhicitta attitude that one actually takes the bodhisattva vows with all the commitments. Generating the aspiring bodhicitta on the other hand, is not defined by the ritual of recitation. It involves merely generating an altruistic mind such as, 'May I obtain the state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings', accompanied by a commitment to not give up the altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment; and to adopt the four white dharmas, and abandon the four black dharmas or negativities. These eight dharmas were mentioned in chapter one and your homework then was to find out what they are.

Basically, generating aspirational bodhicitta involves making the commitment to generate that mind of enlightenment three times during the day, and three times during the night, and not to give up that aspiration. As it does not involve making a commitment to uphold all of the bodhisattva vows, it is a mere aspiration and not actually a vow.

Now, can those of you who do the *Six-session Guru Practice* tell me the line that comes after the four immeasurables?

Student: Not to give up the mind of enlightenment even at the cost of my life.

With aspirational bodhicitta one promises not to give up that aspiration, whereas with engaging bodhicitta, as exemplified in the *Six-session Practice*, one promises never to forsake those vows even at the cost of one's life. That's the main distinction between aspirational bodhicitta and the actual bodhisattva vows.

Aspiring bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta can be presented sequentially or simultaneously i.e. at the same time. This is a simultaneous presentation. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama indicated in Sydney earlier this year, when you take the vows sequentially, some lines relate to aspirational bodhicitta and other lines relate specifically to the engaging bodhisattva vows. He then very clearly distinguished the lines containing aspirational bodhicitta from the lines relating to the engaging bodhisattva vows. Do you recall that?

As presented in the *Six-session Guru Practice*, the manner of taking the vows is to first take refuge, followed by generating the four immeasurable thoughts and then generating aspirational bodhicitta, followed by engaging bodhicitta. Next comes the request to the gurus to please pay attention to us. Then one absorbs the deity and the

guru into oneself, and generates great joy. The main point is that the presentation in these two verses can be combined with the *Six-session Guru Practice* that some of you do regularly. Indeed, it is good to combine the two presentations to gain a complete understanding.

The purpose and manner of taking the vows

Returning to the commentary, *when the previous tathagatas generated the mind* refers to conquerors such as Shakyamuni Buddha, Mitrukpa, Amitahba, Medicine Buddha and so forth. At the beginning of chapter one there was an extensive explanation of what *tathagata* means.

Having generated *engaging bodhicitta the tathagatas subsequently trained in and remained in the gradual bodhisattva trainings*, which include the practices of the six perfections and the four means of gathering disciples. *Likewise I* indicates that just as the previous bodhisattvas generated aspirational bodhicitta, and then took the engaging bodhisattva vows, followed by engaging in the trainings of the six perfections and the four means of gathering disciples, I too will follow their example. The intention of this practice is *for the temporary and ultimate benefit of sentient beings*.

One way of taking the vows is *in front of an actual preceptor with pure bodhisattva vows*. Thus the preceptor should be someone who is endowed with pure bodhisattva vows. It is said that when one takes these vows in front of great pure masters who practise bodhicitta, it will help one to be conscientious about maintaining and upholding those vows. That is because the two mental factors of shame and embarrassment can easily arise when there is danger of breaching those vows. So taking the vows from an actual pure preceptor is quite significant.

If a preceptor is not present, one takes one's vows *in front of the invoked buddhas and bodhisattvas*. The commentary is clearly indicating that one does not have to rely on the presence of a preceptor in order to take the bodhisattva vows; one can also take the bodhisattva vows in front of the envisioned buddhas and bodhisattvas.

'*Upon the request for attention*' is another one of the elements of taking the bodhisattva vows. In the *Six-session Guru Practice*, there is this line: 'O lamas, buddhas and bodhisattvas, please pay attention to me'. So one seeks the attention of the lamas, the buddhas and the bodhisattvas in order to take the bodhisattva vows.

What follows from this is that, *I shall generate the wishing mind of enlightenment*. One generates the thought, 'For the sake of all sentient beings may I achieve enlightenment', which is aspirational bodhicitta.

Following that generation of aspiring bodhicitta, *I shall train and remain in the gradual trainings upon having generated the engaging mind*. Thus the engaging mind of bodhicitta is based on the earlier aspiration to achieve enlightenment for all sentient beings. What is added to the aspirational mind is the commitment, 'I will engage in the practices of the six perfections as way to develop my own mind, and engage in the practices of the four means of gathering disciples as a way to benefit others'.

As explained in the commentary, one *repeats* these two verses *three times*, and at the end of the third recitation the vows are actually established in one's mental continuum. As explained in the commentary, one repeats these verses either following a preceptor if a preceptor is present, or, if there is no preceptor, imagine repeating it after the invoked buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Of course, I have presented all of this previously, but I don't know how much you have retained. What also needs to be understood is that those doing, for example, the Nyung Nae practice, would take the eight Mahayana precepts in front of the preceptor if there is one present. If there is no preceptor present, then one takes those precepts in front of a visualised Avalokiteshvara; envisioning that one has taken those vows or precepts from Avalokiteshvara himself. Indeed, whenever one wishes to take the Mahayana precepts, it will suffice if one visualises all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and takes the eight Mahayana precepts in their presence.

In relation to *I shall train and remain in the gradual trainings*, the term *gradual training* is as explained by Gyaltsab Rinpoche. There are some variations in other texts, but most versions are quite similar.

The meaning of training gradually

Gyaltsab Je goes on to explain the meaning of training gradually.

The meaning of training gradually: Practices like the generosity of one's body should not be done with an impure mind. Otherwise it becomes a fault. It should be done when it does not become a fault and rather becomes a great accumulation of merit.

Using the example of the practice of generosity as an example, one needs to train first in practising generosity within one's comfort zone, i.e. begin with giving something small. Then increase that generosity gradually, so that even though there is a greater level of generosity it is still comfortable to give.

More specifically one is advised against giving one's body initially, as it could become a fault if one is not properly prepared. The perfect time to give one's body is when one has reached the level of training where it is only a means to accumulate great merit. When one reaches that level of training, it is permissible and appropriate to give one's body. So this presentation explains the meaning of training gradually by using an example.

Gyaltsab Je further clarifies:

Some opponents posit that the meaning of sequential training is that one trains sequentially in the three moralities according to boundary, and this is incorrect.

The three moralities are the morality of restraint, the morality of building up virtue and the morality of benefiting others. *According to boundary* refers to the fact that some have posited that the morality of restraint is practised during the first path, the path of accumulation; the morality of building up virtue is practised on the path of preparation; and the morality of benefiting others is practised on the Arya paths, from the path of seeing onwards. So the practice of training *sequentially* refers to

assigning each of the three moralities to one of the bodhisattva paths. However that is not correct.

As I have explained previously, all of the bodhisattvas' activities can be subsumed into two main categories: engaging in activities to ripen oneself and engaging in activities to ripen other sentient beings. There are no activities that are not combined in these two.

The morality of restraint and the morality of building up virtue are practices that specifically relate to ripening one's own mental continuum, whereas the morality of benefiting others is an activity of ripening other sentient beings. This is how all the bodhisattvas' activities are subsumed into the three moralities.

The six perfections can also be subsumed into two: those that are mainly to fulfil one's own purpose and those that are mainly practices to fulfil the purpose of others. I have explained this extensively in the past, however it will be presented later in this text.

Furthermore:

Others posit the meaning as having a separate ceremony for the generation of the engaging mind, and the engaging vows. This is also incorrect according to any of the great pioneers.

To take the engaging mind after having first taken the wishing aspiring mind and then training in the wish to practice the perfections is the supreme method that accords with the differences in different persons. It is also suitable to take the two minds sequentially in one ceremony.

Then Gyaltsab Je summarises his commentary on the actual method of generating the mind of enlightenment thus:

The way of taking them and so forth one can know from the earlier mentioned treatises of the great teacher.

The *great teacher* specified here refers to Lama Tsong Khapa.

Thus, I shall not elaborate on it here.

This is a reference to the explanations in Lama Tsong Khapa's texts, which I have also explained earlier. Perhaps it may seem that I elaborate too much, however it seems that whenever some point comes up I have already mentioned it somewhere else—but I don't know how much of it you retain.

What is important for us to really keep in mind is that these are the instructions on how to take the bodhisattva vows. For those who are inclined and who have previously taken the vows, it is permissible, indeed necessary, to take these vows throughout one's practices. As we have seen, we take these vows on the basis of refuge. So reciting the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Praye*, with the proper motivation and intention, and appropriate visualisation will suffice as a means to take the bodhisattva vows.

3. CONCLUSION

The conclusion is subdivided into two parts:

- 3.1. Rejoicing oneself
- 3.2. Inducing others to rejoice

3.1. Rejoicing oneself

This again is subdivided into two:

3.1.1. Achieving one's own purpose

3.1.2. Achieving the purpose of others

3.1.1. Achieving one's own purpose

This has three subdivisions:

3.1.1.1. Rejoicing by uplifting the mind

3.1.1.2. Meditating on conscientiousness after having found such a mind

3.1.1.3. Having found a mind that is difficult to find

3.1.1.1. REJOICING BY UPLIFTING THE MIND

There are two verses under this heading.

25. *After the wise ones*

Took very joyfully the mind of enlightenment,

To engage and increase

They praise the mind like this:

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

After the wise bodhisattvas have taken the two bodhicittas with a very clear joyful mind and faith, they engage in methods for it to not degenerate and to increase its practice. Towards this end they generate joy and praise the mind.

As the commentary explains, when *the wise bodhisattvas* take the *bodhicitta* vows they do so *with a very clear and joyful mind* that is full of *faith*¹. With this mind *they engage in methods for it to not degenerate and to increase its practice*. Thus, *they generate joy and praise the mind* that has been developed. In other words, when they see what they have generated, they develop a great sense of joy, and their mind is uplifted.

Gyaltsab Je introduces the next verse in this way:

If we explain how:

Then comes the verse.

26. *Today my life has become fruitful,*

The human existence was well attained.

Today I was born into the buddha family

Now I have become a child of the buddhas

Gyaltsab Je's commentary to this verse reads:

Today, as I generate the mind of enlightenment and take the vows, my life has become fruitful, my human existence has been well attained and the freedoms and endowments have become meaningful. Today I have been born into the family of the buddhas and become a bodhisattva.

In relation to the aspiration, 'When will I become a child of the Buddha', you generate joy by thinking 'Now I have become a child of the buddhas'.

As the commentary explains, the way to uplift the mind is by contemplating in this way: At this time, *when I have generated the mind and taken the vows, my life has become fruitful, my human existence is well attained and the freedoms and endowments have become meaningful*. This is indicating the great value and worthiness of generating such a mind. When we ask, 'How do we take the essence of a precious human rebirth?' then this is the most supreme way of taking the essence of this human rebirth with its freedoms and endowments — using it to generate that mind of enlightenment and taking the bodhisattva vows.

Our mind is uplifted when we contemplate how, by generating this mind, we have made our life most worthwhile and meaningful.

One further contemplates how, 'I have been born in the family of the buddhas and have become a bodhisattva'. The indication here is that generating bodhicitta and taking the bodhisattva vows is the hallmark of entering the path of the Great Vehicle. In fact, it is actually the doorway to the Mahayana path. So we contemplate, 'Today I have entered the Mahayana path, so I have actually entered the ranks of the Conqueror's children, and become a bodhisattva'. This is how one uplifts one's mind.

It follows that having developed these aspirations, one is keen about becoming a bodhisattva, thus generating the thought, 'When will I become a child of the buddhas? When will I become a bodhisattva?' The answer is, 'Today! Today is the day when I have fulfilled my repeated aspirations and endeavour to become a bodhisattva and thus become one of the Conqueror's children'. Thus, one generates joy by thinking, 'I have fulfilled my aspirations; now I am a child of the buddhas'.

If we wonder why the bodhisattvas are referred to as the Conqueror's or the Buddha's children, we need to recall that just as the crown prince who automatically succeeds the king carries on the lineage of his family, the bodhisattvas are those who carry on the lineage of the Buddha's doctrine. That is why they are referred to as the Conqueror's children'.

Even though Buddha Shakyamuni is not present in these times, we are definitely receiving his teachings and doctrines through his many lineage holders. Nagarjuna also explained this clearly in his commentary on bodhicitta—you would have received those teachings many times in the past.

Next Tuesday will be our last session for the year as I will be going to India earlier than I anticipated.

In any case, we have come to the auspicious point where we generate bodhicitta and joy about having generated that bodhicitta. Generating a sense of joy in partaking activities with a bodhicitta mind and attitude is the best way to really enjoy life.

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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¹ These are three points that are normally indicated in the teachings.

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

10 December 2013

The *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* that we have just recited will suffice as our motivation for the meditation practice, and so now we focus our minds on our meditation. [meditation]

It is important to engage in the practice of meditation, just as we have attempted to do in our short session.

Something that we really need to consider is using our precious human life with its eight freedoms and ten endowments meaningfully. So what does that mean? The worldly way of making life meaningful would be to exert oneself in amassing wealth, possessions, a good career, and to enjoy the status which that brings. But that is only a superficial view of a meaningful life. From the Dharma point of view, in order to make one's precious human life meaningful - which is also described as taking the essence of this precious human life - one needs to first generate the wish of wanting to do just that.

In order to generate that genuine wish to make one's precious human life meaningful, four types of attitudes must be generated. These are known as the four attributes for taking the essence of one's precious human life. I have explained these points previously and I find them very meaningful. The four attributes are: thinking about the need to practise the Dharma; thinking about the ability one has to practise the Dharma; thinking about how one needs to practise the Dharma in this very life; and thinking about why it is essential to practise the Dharma right now.

1. Thinking about the need to practise the Dharma

Why is there such a need? Put succinctly it is simply because we all wish for happiness and don't wish to experience any suffering. That simple fact has to be linked to the need to practise Dharma. In other words, we have to see how it is only through the practice of Dharma that we can fulfil our wish to experience genuine happiness and rid ourselves of all suffering.

Then we need to turn that understanding into a conviction that only the practice of the Dharma will fulfil that wish of gaining true happiness and eliminating suffering. Once that conviction is developed, we will spontaneously engage in accumulating virtues and shunning negativities. When we really think about this in detail we will be convinced that the only cause of happiness is virtue, while non-virtue or negativity is the cause of suffering.

What naturally follows is the conviction that it is only through the practice of Dharma that one establishes the means to accumulate virtue and shun negativity. To become a true Dharma practitioner, we need to contemplate these facts again and again and develop a deep sense of conviction in them.

2. Thinking about one's ability to practise the Dharma

Having contemplated at length on the need to practise the Dharma, and arriving at the conclusion, 'Yes, I definitely need to practise the Dharma', the next question that quite naturally arises, is, 'Do I have the ability to practise the Dharma?' So that question needs to be addressed. The reason that one does have that ability is because one has a precious human rebirth with the eight freedoms and ten endowments intact. That is the true meaning of a precious human rebirth.

The next step is to contemplate thoroughly the fact that one is free from the eight adverse circumstances in relation to personal favourable conditions, and thus endowed with the eight freedoms. In particular, one has the discriminating wisdom of being able to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. Furthermore, one is endowed with the ten endowments in relation to the external favourable conditions, such as meeting with the perfect Mahayana teacher and so forth.

Contemplating these factors again and again, thinking about the precious rebirth and how one has all of these faculties intact, is a very worthwhile meditation—in fact, it's an essential meditation practice. Contemplating in this way again and again, helps to calm down and subdue the mind, thus providing further encouragement to practise the Dharma.

I spent a lot of time contemplating like this when I was around 18 or 19 years old, and I can safely say that, even though I cannot claim to have any realisations about the Dharma, this practice definitely helped me. I didn't do it to become well versed so that I could become well known and famous through my understanding of these topics. That was not at the forefront of my mind at all! I was considering these points on a personal level as a way to help to subdue my mind, and to that effect I can safely say that it has definitely been of benefit.

It is really important to work with whatever helps one's mind in the moment, and to utilise whatever understanding one has of the Dharma, at whatever meagre level that may be. If a practice helps your mind, then make that your main practice, rather than aiming at higher forms of practice. Aiming high while putting aside the practical approaches can be quite destructive for one's own development. I'm not saying that one shouldn't aim high, but the point is that aiming to do high level practices, whilst neglecting more practical approaches, can definitely be harmful.

Last week we reviewed Gyaltshab Rinpoche's succinct explanation on how to practise in the correct sequence. We need to take that important instruction to heart. As you will recall, he said that it can be dangerous to aim at high level practices of generosity, for example, or adopt practices that are inappropriate. We need to take instructions like these to heart. They come from precious teachers, lamas, and great masters, so we need to take heed of them.

3. Thinking about the need to practise the Dharma in this very life

Having contemplated the need to practise the Dharma, and understanding that one has the ability to practise the Dharma, one might fall into the trap of thinking, 'Well,

maybe I can leave practising the Dharma to my next life'. To avoid that trap we need to think again and again about the rarity and difficulty of finding a precious human life. To contemplate the rarity and difficulty of finding a precious human life with the eight freedoms and the ten endowments intact, we need to consider the difficulty of acquiring the cause for such a precious human life.

The causes of a precious human life are the practice of morality aided by the practices of generosity and so forth, sealed with unstained aspirational prayers. So when we contemplate how difficult it is to acquire those causes, then we can see why the result, which is the precious human rebirth, is so rare and difficult to find.

When we really think about these points, asking ourselves, 'Do I have all of those causes intact?' and 'How difficult is it to obtain all of those causes?', then it will dawn upon us that obtaining such a precious human life with the eight freedoms and ten endowments intact is indeed very rare and will be difficult to obtain again in a future life.

4. Thinking about why it is essential to practise the Dharma right now

The fourth attribute of taking the essence of our precious human life is that we need to think about how this precious human life can so easily cease. We have already realised that we need to practise the Dharma in this life, but we might fall into the trap of thinking that we can practise Dharma next week, next month, or next year. To avoid procrastinating like that, we need to contemplate how the precious human life can so easily end in a moment.

How to take the essence of this precious human life

When we contemplate these four points again and again, then the outcome will be a genuine, unmistakable wish to take the essence of this precious human life, endowed with the eight freedoms and ten endowments. Having developed that wish, the next question that arises is, 'How, then, do we take the essence of our precious human life?'

As an answer to that we reflect upon the fact that there are three different levels of taking the essence of this precious human life: the small way, the medium way and the great way, and this is what we contemplate next.

To understand how these three scopes relate to what the Buddha taught, we need to recall that the Buddha taught the Dharma for the sole purpose of benefiting other sentient beings—the Dharma has no other purpose than that. There are three levels in which the Dharma benefits sentient beings. At the lowest level is the temporary benefit of being reborn again as a human or in the god realms; the medium benefit is becoming free from the cycle of samsara, in other words obtaining the state of self-liberation; and the optimum way to benefit sentient beings is to lead them to the ultimate state of supreme enlightenment.

These benefits can be grouped into temporary benefits and the ultimate benefit. With respect to the temporary benefits, the Buddha presented the unmistakable methods for obtaining high status, and most importantly that state

of nirvana or self-liberation. To obtain the ultimate benefit, which is supreme enlightenment, the Buddha further presented the paths and grounds and so forth. So if the question, 'How did the Buddha benefit sentient beings?' arises, then we know that these are the ways in which the Buddha benefits us.

So how do we take this as personal instruction? Beginning with the temporary benefits, by avoiding the ten non-virtues and adopting the ten virtues will definitely close the door to being reborn in the lower realms in the next life. While it may be difficult to overcome the causes for unfortunate rebirths entirely, we can at least affect the course of our next rebirth, ensuring that there will again be an opportunity to continue to practice to avoid being reborn in the unfortunate realms in the life thereafter. When we think in this practical way, we can see that we can definitely manage to engage in this practice.

Next, we need to consider what prevents us from engaging in the pure practices that secure the causes for obtaining the fortunate rebirth in the next lifetime. When we look into those opposing factors, we will see that from beginningless times we have had a strong clinging to the pleasures of life, and it is this strong grasping and clinging to the pleasures of this life that prevents us from working towards the goals of our future lives.

So the way to overcome this strong grasping at the affairs of this life is by contemplating and thinking about the need for taking refuge, the importance of karma and its effect, and engage in confession and purification practices with four opponent powers. When we engage in these practices, and change our attitude from one of clinging merely to the affairs of this life, to one of thinking about the purpose of our future lives, then we have actually engaged in the practice of Dharma. That is the true meaning of Dharma—when the mind is held fast against strong clinging to non-virtues.

The small scope

Dharma practice at the small scope is replacing the strong clinging to this life with an attitude focussed on the purpose of the next life. As mentioned previously, that involves avoiding the ten non-virtues, adopting the ten virtues, taking refuge, implementing the correct understanding of karma and engaging in purification practices. When the mind is transformed from a state of clinging to this life to one that holds the future life as being more purposeful and more meaningful, then that mind is being held by the Dharma. That is the Dharma practice of the small scope; this is taking the essence of one's precious human rebirth in a small way.

The medium scope

As presented in teachings, when one considers the pitfalls of samsaric or cyclic existence, and, with the aid of the wisdom realising selflessness and so forth, actually develops a strong sense of renunciation, then that will be engaging in the practice of the medium scope, and taking essence of one's precious human life in the medium way.

Here the practice of Dharma means replacing clinging to samsaric pleasures with a genuine longing for liberation, and this transformation comes as a result of the practices of the three higher trainings. That which actually

prevents us from having a true aspiration for liberation is clinging to the pleasures of samsara. For as long as we value the pleasures of samsara and cling to that, then the mind of longing for liberation will never arise. In fact, this clinging is the factor that obstructs the development of a true longing and aspiration for liberation. When one develops disenchantment with the pleasures of samsara, then that will be the antidote that overcomes clinging to samsara, and thus becomes an aid to developing a genuine aspiration for liberation.

The great scope

The supreme way to take the essence of the precious human life is to develop bodhicitta—if not actual bodhicitta right away, then a similitude of it. When that is developed and cultivated within one's mental continuum, and one engages in actions with that bodhicitta attitude, then that is the supreme form of practice. This was, of course, explained in earlier teachings.

The meaning of Dharma in accordance with the great scope practice is, when working for the purpose of merely oneself is replaced with an attitude of wishing to work for the benefit of all beings, when that mind of bodhicitta is generated, then that is the meaning of Dharma in accordance with the great scope.

Dharma in relation to the three scopes

We need to really understand how Dharma is defined in relation to the three levels of practice. The true meaning of Dharma is that it serves as an antidote for overcoming three types of attitudes. The Dharma of the small level serves as an opponent to clinging to merely this life's affairs. The meaning of Dharma at the medium level is when it serves as an opponent to overcome the clinging to the pleasures of samsara. Finally, when Dharma serves as an opponent to overcome the selfish attitude of clinging to merely one's own purpose, and replaces that attitude with one of working for the purpose of other sentient beings, then it becomes the Dharma of the great level.

The main obstacles for developing bodhicitta are these three attitudes of strong clinging to the affairs of this life, strong clinging to the pleasures of samsara, and clinging to merely one's own purpose. These selfish attitudes are definitely obstacles for developing bodhicitta. For as long as one harbours any one of these three attitudes, there is no way that one can develop bodhicitta. We need to consider these points thoroughly. There is nothing that prevents us from developing bodhicitta other than these three attitudes. So the more we develop ourselves and work towards abstaining from these three negative attitudes, and the more we distance ourselves from them, the closer we will get to developing actual bodhicitta. That's how the practice of Dharma works.

We can safely say that some are closer to developing bodhicitta than others. What determines that difference is none other than how closely the mind is related to these three opposing attitudes. The ones who are closest to the three opposing attitudes, holding them dear to their heart, are the ones who are furthest from developing bodhicitta. Those who are distant from these selfish attitudes, who don't hold them dearly in their heart, are

the ones who are closer to developing bodhicitta. No-one else determines that other than oneself. This, of course, is explained in great detail in the *Bodhicharyavatara*. As Shantideva says, 'What need is there to mention more? Look at where the Buddha is now. Look at where we are now!'

Using a more contemporary example, while there might be some in this room who have developed bodhicitta, generally we don't know if that is the case or not. However if we were to consider ourselves as being at the same level of not yet having developed bodhicitta, then who of the seventy-eight individuals in this room will be the first to become bodhisattvas and become enlightened first? The obvious answer is that it will be those who are genuinely striving to work for the benefit of others, thinking of the welfare of others and being more concerned about that than their own mere purpose. Those who are holding their own interest as being of primary importance, and who have minimum concern for the welfare of others, will be further away from developing bodhicitta. That is basically what Shantideva is saying — it is our own way of thinking and our own attitudes that determine whether we will develop bodhicitta and obtain the ultimate state of enlightenment. We need to take that as a personal instruction. In brief, Shantideva is saying 'Be careful or you might miss out'. So, to make sure that you don't, generate the appropriate attitudes and get rid of the opposing attitudes.

Taking the essence of this precious human life at the small scope means overcoming strong clinging to the affairs of this life. That is done by contemplating the purpose of our existence in our next life. The more we think about the importance of working for our future life, the more the strong clinging to this life's affairs will gradually be reduced. That is the way to slowly transform our mind and imbue it with the genuine practice of Dharma. We need to understand that the real meaning of Dharma is not merely counting the number of achievements, like how much one has studied, or the numbers of particular practices, but rather it is to slowly transform our mind.

Finally, what I wish to convey is that you have done very well with your attendance and study this year; you have definitely put an effort into your study. That of course is really fortunate, and I rejoice in that. From my side it has also been fortunate; I have presented the teachings with the best intention and motivation that I can. So I have definitely seen this year as being very fortunate for us all.

The material in Shantideva's text, the *Bodhicharyavatara*, which we have been studying, is quite incredible. It has been praised by all the masters as being a really great and masterly and succinct teaching. From whatever point of view we look at it—sutra or tantra—there is no greater teaching, in terms of personal instructions, than this text. We can contemplate how fortunate we have been in having this opportunity to attempt to explain and study and understand the *Bodhicharyavatara*. So we can dedicate the virtues we have accumulated from all of our efforts in studying and practising this text towards being able to continuously engage in the study, understanding and practice of this text again and again in all future lives, in the company of virtuous Dharma friends like ourselves.

We just might be able to meet with these conditions again in our future lives.

We can be certain that being able to assemble here, and enjoy each others' company, and study and practise in this way, is the positive outcome of previous karmic connections that we have had. We have created an appropriate cause in the past to enjoy our present conditions. That is definitely the case, and that's something we can be definitely be joyful and happy about!

This text, *Bodhicharyavatara*, is the supreme means for understanding bodhicitta, and indeed, it is a manual for actually developing bodhicitta—the mind of awakening. His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentions this again and again. Whilst I cannot claim that I have any experience of the intended result of this text, when a supreme being such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who is endowed with bodhicitta himself, confirms the importance of this text and mentions it again and again, then that helps me to develop a stronger conviction in it as well. So it is on that basis that I can confidently say to you that it is indeed a supreme means to develop bodhicitta.

It is good for each of us, individually, to generate the resolve to take the initiative to develop this altruistic mind, by first working on the seed of bodhicitta, which is a kind mind with a genuine concern for others—in short, developing loving kindness. When we work at developing loving kindness in our heart, being considerate of others as much as we can, and practise that with the intention of developing this altruistic mind of bodhicitta, then our attempts won't be meagre at all. In fact they will be a great practice.

In a practical way, we need to think about how the more we genuinely attempt to adopt virtues and practise kindness, the more happiness we will have in this very life, not to mention it being a cause for happiness in our future lives. So we really need to work on developing kindness, more specifically love and compassion, on a regular basis. We need to understand that love and compassion is the basis on which to develop bodhicitta. Therefore, we need to further cultivate that basis to develop that which is not yet developed. Where kindness and love and compassion have not been generated or developed, we need to work on developing it, and when it has developed, we need to further increase it. This is how we establish a sound basis for enjoying the accrued benefits in future lifetimes.

As I regularly mention, the attitudes of love and compassion are really our best friends. When we have secured them as our best companion then we will not feel too disturbed when we are separated from external friends. Without such an internal friend, being separated from external friends can bring so much suffering. As I have mentioned previously, I have not developed any experience of bodhicitta myself, but just thinking about the necessity of love and compassion, and contemplating on it again and again has really become my best companion, regardless of when I am with others or when I am alone. I can confidently say that I don't experience the suffering of loneliness, or feel a lack of connection with others and so forth. On the contrary, I feel quite joyful and happy even when I am alone in my room.

When I am alone, love and compassion suffice to uplift my mind. As Shantideva and other masters such as Lama Tsong Khapa have so succinctly mentioned, one needs to generate love and compassion, not just in meditation sessions, but also in the post-meditative sessions. We shouldn't restrict the development of love and compassion to some allocated time, but really take it to heart and make it our core practice in whatever we are doing, and wherever we are. That is how we familiarise our mind with these positive attitudes.

When one has developed a strong sense of loving kindness and compassion, then friends and companions will be loving and kind. Conversely, when that loving attitude and love and compassion begin to weaken, then others may seem to have become distant or even appear to be enemies. As we all wish to have good companions and friends, we might as well develop the causes for that.

As mentioned previously, we need to familiarise our mind with loving kindness in our everyday life, again and again. Putting that into practice means beginning with our Dharma brothers and sisters, ensuring that we try to help each other as much as we can, and, at the very least, avoid harming each other. In particular, we need to be very careful that we don't cause harm to other's Dharma practice. As mentioned in several texts, one of the heaviest negative karmas is to harm Dharma practitioners by obstructing their Dharma practices. Thus, we need to ensure that we don't create such negativity by having harmful intentions and hurting others in that way. So we begin our practice with each other—we try to help each other with the genuine attitude of kindness, at the very least ensuring that we don't hurt and harm each other. That is very important to keep in mind.

A very simple reason for not intentionally hurting or harming others is because we do not wish to be hurt or harmed ourselves. If hurting and harming others didn't incur any negative consequences for ourselves, then we might think that there is no reason to avoid doing that. However, since we do not want to experience harm and negative consequences ourselves, it is good to consider not harming or hurting others. A few individuals (not necessarily Dharma practitioners) have confided in me, 'I don't know much about karma, but it does seem that when you are kind to others, something good happens in return, and if I intentionally harm or hurt others, something bad happens to me. That is something I do notice'. These are people who confess that they don't know much about karma. So if people who are not religiously inclined, or who do not consider themselves to be Buddhist, appreciate there is such a thing as the consequences of one's actions, then we Buddhists, who have faith in karma, definitely need to give much more consideration to this point.

As I said earlier, you have all definitely put in a lot of effort this year, by coming to the classes and doing all of the related studies and so forth, and I definitely appreciate it. You have been extremely kind to me and I appreciate your kindness.

Christmas Program

On a another note, you will remember that last week I checked out how many of you are staying behind and

will be in Melbourne for the Lama Tsong Khapa Day puja. So, if you did raise your hands, then please make an effort to come to that puja on the 27th of December. I'll remember who raised their hands! Of course I can't really force you to attend, but if I later hear that you were not here then I might be a little bit disappointed! I might think, 'Oh, those who have not come to the puja may not be so keen about listening to my advice!'

The puja should begin with the recitation of the *Mig-tse-ma Prayer*, (the praise to Lama Tsong Khapa), followed by the guru puja itself. At the end recite the *Prayer for the Flourishing of Lama Tsong Khapa's Doctrine*, concluding with *Mig-tse-ma Prayer* at least eight or nine times. It would be good to begin with a silent meditation, generating your own good motivations. Rather than having someone speaking aloud, which could distract people, just sit quietly in meditation for a while before beginning the puja. Afterwards people can stay behind, have tea and interact with each other. It should be a joyful occasion, so you can announce, 'Geshe-la has said to stay behind and have tea, enjoy the company and have a good time'.

As there is also the tradition of staying up until midnight on New Years Eve, those who are so inclined might come together and do Tara Praises until midnight. You can take breaks for tea and so forth. However if you want to light firecrackers, then it's best to go down to the beach!

You will be aware that there will be a Medicine Buddha practice next Wednesday night, which will also be very beneficial, and another very good occasion for people to come together. I had thought about that anyway, before my change of plans.

Those who have family engagements at Christmas should generate the best motivation and intention, which will contribute to making it a joyful occasion. Some may decide to not engage in social or family gatherings. That's fine too, as long as you also generate love and compassion.

There are only two weeks where there are no sessions. Monday evenings begin on the 6th of January. My intention in having these sessions is so that you are able to maintain some kind of continuity in your practice. You could come and do your own practice if you don't feel like following what is being taught. Two of the Wednesday sessions in January will be Tara practice nights and the other two are Chenrezig meditation practices. These will be led by Allys and Jeremy, so that will also very good.

If those of you who live nearby want to gather for additional meditation sessions, you can take the opportunity to do those sessions here. When we were in St Kilda, there was a lady who would come regularly to the small gumpa that we had then, to do her meditation; she would come from her house, do her meditation and then go to work. So she was using the venue for her personal practice. Practising meditation in this gumpa will definitely make a difference because it is definitely a blessed place. The main thing to keep in mind is that the centre is always open and that there is a place to meditate if you want to come.

There used to be some people who would just come to sit in here for awhile. Apparently just spending a few minutes in this hall gave them a good feeling. So even though they might not have been meditating, just sitting here gave them some solace. I am not sure whether they still come or not.

So again, thank you everyone!

I have had to change my plans—I had no choice but maybe it has turned out for the better. The reason for the change of plans is that the reincarnation of one of my own teachers, Khensur Urygen Tseten, is being enthroned. The late Khensur Rinpoche was one of my main teachers; he really helped me to subdue my mind and I attribute this to his great kindness.

To give an indication of how close my teachers were to me, there was the occasion when I visited Khensur Urygen Tseten and Geshe Ngawang Dhargye in New Zealand. After spending some time there, when it came time for me to leave, Khensur Urygen Tseten and Geshe Ngawang Dhargye both wanted to come to the airport to see me off. I, who have no real qualities, was very moved that such great teachers wanted to see me off. At the airport, as I was waiting to pass through immigration and so forth, we spent the time chatting. As I went in, Khensur Urygen Tseten commented, 'Can't we come in there with you?' When they were told that they were not allowed to do so, Khensur Urygen Tseten commented, 'We will wait until we see your plane take off'. Apparently, as they saw the plane take off he commented, 'One of our friends has now left'. This shows how close we were, and the kindness my teachers showed to me.

Whenever I went to visit Geshe Ngawang Dhargye in Dunedin, he would always be there to greet me when I arrived. If I left early, he would excuse himself from accompanying me, saying, 'I have to finish my prayers'. But whenever I went there, he would always receive me, and his kindness was really remarkable.

Their consideration and care was really remarkable. They were never pompous. They never said, 'Oh I am the teacher', or felt there was no need to relate to their students. They really joined their disciples and showed their care in that way. Maybe some of those caring ways have rubbed off on me, as that is how I try to care for you too.

So as the volunteers bring in the tea, we can recite the Tara Praises. It is good to really make strong prayers to Tara—she is definitely unailing in providing assistance and help. I definitely have strong faith in, and a strong reliance, on Tara. This morning, for example, I did a Tara practice for over two hours, and tomorrow I also intend to do the same. She definitely brings a very swift result.

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

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