
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱུང་ལྷན་སྐྱེས་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

11 February 2014

As usual we will devote some time to meditation and we can base our motivation on the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer that we have just recited. [meditation]

Prior to taking up the practice of meditation it is very important that we understand both the conducive and the adverse conditions that affect meditation. Without recognising those two aspects, and making an attempt to overcome the adverse conditions and to adopt the conducive ones, our attempt to meditate will not be very successful. We may seem to achieve a temporary focus but apart from that we won't get much out of our meditation session. For a genuine meditation session, we really need to understand the way the conducive and adverse conditions affect a meditation session.

As mentioned regularly, the main purpose of engaging in the practice of meditation is so that one may be able to subdue one's mind. In order to subdue the mind we need to understand the process of gaining control over our own mind, otherwise we will maintain our habitual pattern of being controlled by our mind, which in turn is controlled by the delusions, and of the various delusions, the main culprit is the strong grasping at the 'I'.

We can assume that whatever activity we engage in is done with the intent of gaining happiness and eliminating suffering. Regardless of whether the activity actually serves that purpose or not, that is the ultimate goal. This is true for whatever activity human beings are engaged in—the pursuit of happiness and the elimination of suffering is always the goal. When we observe the activities of others we may notice that their activity is not serving that purpose. However, we can't tell them that, because everyone has the notion that they are using the correct methods to achieve their goal. Those methods are ingrained, and they believe that they will work for them, and so it is impossible to immediately change their approach, especially when they believe theirs to be the best method. So it is worthwhile for us to simply observe what others are doing and learn from that.

The practice of Dharma and meditation is a unique method for achieving happiness and eliminating suffering. However, we also need to understand that adopting meditation should not be presented to others as being contrary to leading a normal life in a worldly environment. Some may feel that adopting the meditation technique is a religious practice and therefore not related to their everyday life existence and wellbeing. If meditation is presented as having to lead a completely different kind of lifestyle, then it would be very difficult for ordinary people to see how meditation can benefit them. Rather, we need to present the meditation technique as being relevant to leading a happier life in their everyday existence. If one seemingly leads a normal lifestyle outwardly, but experiences a true inner transformation as a result of meditation and the practise of Dharma, then, based on that personal experience, we can share something of great value with others. Others from ordinary walks of life will

feel comfortable in our presence and easily accept what we present. This will be of real benefit to others.

It is by solving our own personal difficulties and problems through the practice of Dharma and meditation, and experiencing an inner transformation, that we will be able to confidently share the Dharma with others. And, as such, what we present will be accepted by others, because no-one can dismiss a personal experience of positive transformation—especially when it relates to overcoming problems and difficulties similar to the ones they are facing themselves. How can others say that meditation has no value when you share with them the fact that it has helped to solve your own difficulties and problems? No-one intentionally wishes to experience any kind of problem or difficulty and everyone appreciates a state of wellbeing. So when a genuine technique is presented from the basis of personal experience, it will readily be accepted by others. That is because they are also striving towards the same goal of happiness and wellbeing and not to experience any difficulties and problems.

The main point is to ensure that your practice hits the target of subduing and controlling your own mind. The great Gyalsey Thokmay Sangpo said in his *Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*:

If you do not analyse your own faults,
You might put on a Dharmic facade while
behaving in a non-Dharmic way.
Therefore, to continually analyse your faults and
then discard them,
Is the practice of a bodhisattva.

The essential point here is that one really needs to detect and acknowledge the faults within one's own mind and then strive to overcome them first. Otherwise, as the great master Gyalsey Thokmay Sangpo mentions, there is a great danger that we will completely mislead others by presenting them with a false appearance. If one does not attend to the real intention of the Dharma, particularly if one engages in actions contrary to the Dharma, then there will be great danger of creating doubt about the value of Dharma in the minds of others. It can cause others to think, 'How could someone behave and conduct themselves in a way that is contrary to what they preach?' If we create the conditions where others doubt the Dharma and generate a negative state of mind it is a grave fault on our part. We should strive for others to generate virtue and not more negativity.

So we need to really pay attention to the main cause of our own faults and mental unrest, which lies within our own mind, and not in external conditions and circumstances. When we are feeling a little down or depressed we may resort to going out with friends and having a good time, which may give some temporary relief. But when the enjoyment of being with others has faded away, the mental unrest and the uncomfortable feelings and negative emotions return. That is because we are not paying attention to applying antidotes to overcoming the root cause of our problems.

Seeking temporary relief each time we feel depressed and unsettled will not help to solve the real problem. Rather, we need to ensure that whatever meditation we do, and whatever Dharma practice we adopt, becomes an antidote for overcoming the real problem that lies within. Each one of us can detect a troubling state of mind, attitude or delusion in our mind that is always there to harm us. So it is

important for us to detect the cause of that, and work at overcoming the main culprit.

Of all the various delusions found in negative states of mind, the ultimate culprit is grasping at the self, an aspect of which is self-cherishing. There is some debate about whether the self-cherishing mind is actually a delusion but, regardless of that, it is quite clear that it harms us and hinders our happiness and joy. Grasping at the 'I' and self-cherishing are mutually supportive, and they work together like master and servant to cause us so much misery and pain.

Grasping at the 'I' is the root cause of all our problems, and when we are able to fully acknowledge that then the strong wish to overcome grasping at the self will develop. So what are the best methods and antidotes to overcome self-grasping? As the teachings present, the ultimate antidote for overcoming grasping at the self is realising emptiness or selflessness. There is no more supreme antidote to grasping at the self than to gain the realisation of emptiness. This is why the view of emptiness is held in such high esteem. It is considered a most precious realisation because it serves as the sole antidote for overcoming the root cause of all our problems, which is grasping at the self.

To see why grasping at the self is the cause for all unwanted misery and suffering we need to understand how it is the root cause of all other delusions and, in particular, the cause for the development of strong attachment and anger. This is not an obscure point. If we really think about it we will notice that this is true for ourselves. From strong clinging to the 'I' there naturally follows attachment to those things and individuals that are favourable to oneself, and aversion or anger towards those who oppose one's own interests. So, there is strong attachment to one's friends, relatives and the like, and anger towards enemies. Due to this strong attachment and aversion we engage in so many different activities that revolve around trying to please those who are close to us, while trying to subjugate those we consider our enemies and who oppose our interests, thus creating much heavy negative karma. In this way we come to understand how self-grasping is the root cause of all our unhappiness.

When we investigate further and look into how we carry these attitudes into our daily life we find that we make most of our decisions based on, whether 'I like this', or 'I don't like that'. Our strongly held opinions are based merely on the fact 'because I like this, I want it' or 'because I don't like it, I don't want it'. So, the driving force behind the decisions we make is mostly because 'I' like or dislike something.

We need to further investigate how that very strong opinionated 'I' appears to us. Through a sincere and thorough investigation we will come to realise that we view this 'I' as being independently existent; a very solid and unshakeable 'I' that does not depend on any other causes and conditions for its existence.

When we further investigate whether such an independent and solid 'I' actually exists or not, we come to realise that in fact such an 'I' does not exist at all. When we come to understand that such an independently existent 'I' does not actually exist, then one has identified the basis of the object of negation. Without abandoning the object of negation we cannot possibly overcome the grasping at the self. Thus, we come to understand the importance of realising selflessness.

When the Buddhist teachings present selflessness, it is not suggesting that the self does not exist at all and that there is no 'I'. Rather, it is a self-sufficient and independent 'I' that does not exist. Our wrong conception makes us believe and hold onto such a non-existent self or 'I'. However, when we

understand that there is no such self-sufficient and independently existing 'I', then we begin to gain the true understanding of selflessness and emptiness. We also begin to understand that we have to realise selflessness or emptiness because we need to overcome that grasping at the self, which is the main cause of our suffering. Furthermore, we begin to see for ourselves why the teachings on emptiness are held in such high esteem, and why it is necessary to gain an understanding of emptiness; to work on developing that realisation.

This also leads to the main point that His Holiness the Dalai Lama presented in his recent teachings in south India, which many of you attended. You might recall that he said that the purpose of this gathering can be summarised into two main points. 'The purpose of gathering here' he said, 'is to find a means to overcome grasping at the self and the self-cherishing mind. So if you can take this essential point with you and work on that, then it serves the purpose of the teachings'. He said that if you take these two points with you and think about them constantly, then coming to teachings will have served its purpose. So, it is good to take that succinct advice to heart and really try to implement it in our daily lives.

If we work on these two essential points, then the more we reduce grasping at the self and the self-cherishing mind, the greater our happiness will naturally be. Conversely, the more we hold on to grasping at the self and maintain a self-cherishing attitude, the more our happiness decreases and our suffering increases. This is very true. To give a small practical example: if, in a mutual relationship, you have to make a decision about something and the other person says, 'Let's do it this way', and you say, 'No, I don't accept that', then from that very moment the situation becomes tense and you both start to feel uncomfortable. The stronger that sense of 'I' or 'me', along with what 'I want' and 'don't want' becomes, the more we feel unsettled and uncomfortable. But if we say, 'OK, I accept and agree with you' then things settle down. There is no conflict and dispute with the other person and naturally the situation is calm. Indeed, the more we increase our genuine kindness and concern for others, the more our happiness will increase. Thus, concern for others and taking their interests into account opposes the self-cherishing mind. The more we rise above the self-cherishing attitude and think about the welfare of others the more our happiness will increase. This is the practical way to think about the benefit of overcoming self-cherishing.

Of all the antidotes for overcoming a self-cherishing mind, the optimum antidote is none other than bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment, and this is the subject matter of the text we are studying. In this very text *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* or *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Shantideva explains what bodhicitta is, how to develop bodhicitta and the benefits of bodhicitta and so forth. It is important that we have a deeper understanding of what we are studying and the purpose of this text from the very outset. Having such an overview and implementing it in our practice is really important for whatever studies we engage in.

Having earlier mentioned the importance of meditation, it is good to also understand how to develop a sound, genuine meditation practice. First of all, the mind has to have a *single-pointed focus* on the object, and secondly, it has to be a *sharp and clear state of mind*. Those are the criteria which need to be met in order to develop concentration.

It is also important to acknowledge the opposing factors to this sharp, clear state of mind that is single-pointedly

focussed. The opposing factors are excitement and laxity. *Excitement* causes the mind to waver and is the main opposing factor to developing single-pointed concentration; whereas *laxity* is the main opposing factor to having a clear and sharp state of mind.

The conducive factors for developing and maintaining concentration are mindfulness and introspection. *Mindfulness* is the state of mind where there is a constant recollection of the chosen object, i.e. constantly bringing to mind whatever meditation object one has chosen to focus on. *Introspection*, on the other hand, is a state of mind that is constantly vigilant of our state of mind and our focus. If the mind starts to waver (either becoming distracted by excitement or when it starts sinking into stupor and laxity), one immediately notices that and applies the antidotes. The state of mind which allows us to do this is called introspection. So mindfulness and introspection are the most important conducive factors.

When one understands that genuine meditation requires a single-pointed focus and a clear and sharp state of mind, then the real meaning of meditation becomes apparent. Meditation entails choosing an appropriate object to focus on and then intentionally withdrawing the mind from all forms of distraction. The meditation begins when we intentionally focus on the object and maintain that focus.

An appropriate object for single-pointed focus is one that does not give rise to delusions. Because we have chosen an appropriate object to focus on, and because the technique of focusing on that object involves withdrawing from engaging in the delusions, we will naturally experience a mind that is genuinely settled. So, during the time of the meditation, at the very least, the manifest delusions will subside, thus creating a virtuous state of mind. By acquainting our mind with this technique the delusions will begin to have less influence on our mind.

As Lama Tsong Khapa said, when one notices that the delusions have become weaker, then that is the true mark of one's practice of the Dharma. Furthermore, when this is complemented with a stronger faith in the gurus, the buddhas and in the Dharma itself, that is a true sign of the fact that meditation and Dharma practice have worked for us. If, despite our attempts to practise, we find that the delusions are not weakening and remain the same or worse, becoming even stronger, then we need to acknowledge that something is not right and that we are not hitting the mark with our practice. Perhaps it's because we are not making sufficient effort or that we are not adopting the correct methods.

If one's meditation practice serves as an antidote that weakens the delusions, then it has served its purpose and one's practice has born fruit. However if our delusions start to increase then this is a sign that we have to be very cautious about how we are adopting the practice and the effects it has on our mind. An example of how one's practice does not serve the purpose of overcoming the delusions and, in fact, actually feeds one's delusions to a certain extent is starting to feel proud about one's practice of meditation and so forth. Such a sense of pride can manifest in feeling jealous of those who are practising. That is a sign that one's practices have completely missed the mark, and that the delusions are increasing rather than decreasing. If one's attempts to practice have been genuinely applied, then far from feeling pompous and proud and thinking one is doing better than others, or looking down on others, or even feeling competitive or jealous of those who are practising,

one will feel very joyful and happy when one sees others engaging in practice. One might then rejoice in one's own attempts to practice, feeling 'I am very fortunate to have this opportunity to practise myself, and it's really great to see others engaging in practice too.' Wishing others well in their practice and encouraging them is a true mark of one's practice having a positive effect.

We also need to keep in mind how incredibly fortunate we are to have this opportunity to engage in these studies and practices. Most of you are still young and have the opportunity with all the right conditions intact, with the Dharma being available, and teachers presenting it. With all of these conditions intact, we need to really reflect upon having this great opportunity now, and understand how we really need to utilise and not waste this opportunity. We really need to cherish these ongoing opportunities to engage in study and practices, and remind ourselves again and again that the purpose of practising is to overcome the self-grasping and self-cherishing mind within us. That, in summary, is the purpose we need to always bear in mind.

We are up to the third and final part of Chapter 3, which is:

3.1. Rejoicing

Here the headings are:

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 is subdivided into three:

3.1.1.1. Rejoicing by eulogising the mind

3.1.1.2. Meditating on conscientiousness after having found such a mind

3.1.1.3. Generating joy because of having found a mind that is difficult to find

Having covered the first of these three we move on to:

3.1.1.2. MEDITATING ON CONSCIENTIOUSNESS AFTER HAVING FOUND SUCH A MIND

This refers to making use of this rare mind that is difficult to find, and applying conscientiousness to this mind.

The root text reads:

27. *From now on I shall as much as possible
Engage in actions befitting this lineage.
I shall act in a way so as not to sully
This faultless and holy lineage*

Gyalsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

If one thinks whether this alone is enough:

From now on I shall engage in actions of the three doors that befit the lineage of the father Buddha

I shall strive in the method in a way that does not sully this holy lineage, which is adorned only by qualities and is faultless in the beginning, middle and end, with the faults and downfalls of the wishing and engaging advice.

Having warned the reader, *lest one thinks whether having found this mind is enough* by itself, the commentary goes on to explain what needs to be done *from now on*, which is *I shall engage in actions of the three doors that befit the family lineage of the father Buddha*. As explained previously, the Buddha is like a father and, because bodhisattvas aspire to develop the enlightened mind, they are like his children. A prince who carries the lineage of the king has the responsibility of upholding that lineage in a manner that befits that lineage and without damaging it. Likewise, those who have now become the children of the Buddha need to engage in a manner that befits that lineage of the Buddha. That is the

point being made here. The commentary then explains that the commitment is to *strive in the method in a way that does not sully this holy lineage of the Buddha, which is adorned only by qualities and is faultless in the beginning, middle and end*. One would sully the holy lineage by engaging in *the faults and downfalls of the wishing and engaging advice* or instructions.

Generating the aspiring wish to achieve enlightenment entails recalling that wish three times during the day and three times during the night, refraining from engaging in the four black dharmas, and adopting the four white dharmas. Engaging bodhisattva vows has eighteen root downfalls and forty-six auxiliary or secondary downfalls. So the commentary is urging us to refrain from committing these faults and downfalls, and if one finds oneself doing so, to immediately engage in purification practices.

Having taken the engaging bodhisattva vows, one adopts the practices of the six perfections such as generosity and morality and so forth. Not sullyng the practice of generosity, for example, would be to ensure that whatever one intends to give is given without any sense of miserliness, or pride, or other ulterior motives. In other words, in order to ensure that the lineage is not sullied, one needs to ensure that one counteracts the adverse conditions for the practices of generosity and so forth. There is a Tibetan word used here, *tsunpa*, which has the connotation of being ethical. However, the main point is to ensure we are free from strong delusions whilst engaging in the practice.

Recalling the meaning of this verse on a regular basis would be a good practice in itself. It will be a personal pledge that, in itself, is very powerful as it reinforces one's dedication to developing the bodhicitta mind.

3.1.1.3. GENERATING JOY BECAUSE OF HAVING FOUND A MIND THAT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND

Here we are being exhorted to really generate that sense of *joy of having found a mind that is difficult to find*, which is, of course, the actual awakening mind or bodhicitta. We can definitely generate a sense of joy about having that aspiration. We can, at the very least, safely assume that we have some sort of contrived bodhicitta attitude within our mind. The analogy in the teachings for contrived bodhicitta is that it is like the bark of sugar cane; while the bark doesn't contain the full sweetness of the actual sugarcane it does have some level of sweetness. Likewise, while we have not yet developed actual bodhicitta we can still generate a similitude of the bodhicitta attitude.

As I regularly suggest, we can, at the very least, generate on a daily basis this thought: I will not engage in any action that harms any living being and I will try my utmost to engage in as many ways as I can to benefit other sentient beings. We can definitely manage to generate that thought which, in itself, is a very precious state of mind. However, that thought is not generated naturally or spontaneously, so we need to put some time and energy into generating it. When we do generate that thought, even just for a moment, it is a very precious state of mind. So, if on a regular basis we could work on developing the mind, 'I will not harm any sentient being and I will do my most to benefit sentient beings', it will be a mind that we can cherish and we can feel great joy about having generated that intention.

The root verse is:

28. *Just like a blind person finding a jewel
In a heap of rubbish,
I generated this mind of enlightenment
Just by coincidence.*

As the commentary explains:

This mind of enlightenment was born within me by pure chance, just like a poor and destitute blind person finding a jewel on a heap of rubbish by sheer coincidence. It must definitely be through the force of the buddhas.

In the Tibetan text the commentary begins with the analogy of *a poor and destitute blind person finding a jewel on a heap of rubbish by sheer coincidence*. Not only is this person destitute, but they are blind, which makes it even much more unlikely that they might actually find a jewel. And of course in a place of great poverty, finding jewels lying around is quite unlikely. If a person who is destitute and blind finds a jewel in a heap of rubbish, then how much joy would that person feel? They would feel incredible joy at the extraordinary fortune and coincidence of finding this jewel.

The generation of this mind of enlightenment is similar. An ordinary being can be likened to a blind person in that we don't have the wisdom realising emptiness. The heap of rubbish is analogous to the delusions that infest our mind. Yet despite being riddled with delusions and blinded by ignorance we have encountered this precious mind, the awakening mind of bodhicitta. This is like the sheer coincidence of a blind person finding a jewel in a heap of rubbish. This has *definitely occurred through the force of the buddhas*, which means that due to the buddhas' blessings we have had the great fortune to have had this opportunity to generate this mind. Thus we are exhorted to develop a sense of great joy in having had this opportunity to develop this mind.

One of the main points we need to consider here is that while bodhicitta is indeed a difficult mind to find, it would be a complete mistake to put it aside thinking, 'Oh, it's too difficult to generate' and not make any effort at all. Even though it is a difficult mind to generate, it is definitely possible, and because of that possibility we need to strive towards developing it. If it was not possible to be generated then we might as well cast it aside as being a waste of our time, but that is not the case. This is the main point that we need to bear in mind.

The new program for our study group evenings will be eight teaching sessions followed by a discussion and then an exam. Maybe Ven. Lhamo could keep track of the number of sessions because in my old age I may start to forget!

There is mutual benefit in combining the wisdom of the elderly and the energy and clear mind of the young. The elders definitely have a wisdom that arises from whatever experiences they have had, whilst the younger generation have not had the experiences to generate that wisdom. So the elders can share their combined wisdom and experience. The younger generation have a full life energy force and a clearer, fresher mind, so they are less likely to be forgetful. So the combination of youth and age can be mutually beneficial. I think this is usually the way it works.

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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Based on the refuge and bodhicitta prayer and motivation that we have generated, we can now engage in meditation.

The most important thing is to visualise sentient beings who are deprived of happiness and genuinely and sincerely wish them happiness and goodness. Focus on beings who are experiencing tremendous suffering, and develop a very strong intention to free them from that suffering; to do one's utmost to make it happen, for them to be free from suffering. So with that intention in one's heart, engaging in the practice becomes more meaningful. Without visualising sentient beings deprived of happiness and experiencing suffering, and wishing them to be free from suffering, then one's meditation practice is on the surface with no real substance. [*meditation*]

So we'll now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings, to lead them to ultimate happiness and free them from all sufferings, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. For this purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice well.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1. Rejoicing (cont.)

Having completed the topic Achieving One's Own Purpose we now turn to the second part of this section of the text.

3.1.2. Achieving the purpose of others

Achieving the purpose of others is based on aspiring to develop the mind of enlightenment, the bodhicitta attitude. What is being encouraged here is to develop that mind so that one will be able to benefit others. Benefiting others is really the ultimate point of why we are striving to develop this state of mind that aspires to achieve enlightenment. So, the main point is to familiarise one's mind again and again with the intention to benefit others. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentions regularly, at our beginners' level, whilst we might not have developed actual bodhicitta yet, we can definitely generate the intentions 'I will not harm any living being' and 'I will engage in benefitting others as much as I can'. His Holiness says that even generating this state of mind at a beginners level can serve as a substitute for bodhicitta. Thus, focusing on this intention regularly and establishing it firmly in our minds is highly meaningful.

When we intentionally devote ourselves to cultivating this state of mind and further strengthen it, then as it becomes firmly established the result is that our mind naturally becomes happier and more joyful. Through this familiarity one is in fact establishing all the right

conditions to develop actual bodhicitta, whereby the joy and happiness in our minds will increase unceasingly.

Indeed, developing this intention directly opposes the self-cherishing mind; an attitude that is completely obsessed with one's own self interests and which has a strong focus merely on 'I' or 'me'. As this positive state of mind that intends to benefit others opposes the self-cherishing attitude, it also serves as an antidote for overcoming the manifest levels of grasping at the self. Whilst it is not an actual antidote for abandoning the grasping at the self at its very root, it does serve as a means to minimise an otherwise strong sense of grasping at the self. For as long as one maintains a firm intention to benefit others and not to intentionally harm them in any way, there is no room for anger to arise, no room for jealousy to arise and no room for the strong sense of 'I' or 'me', that which focuses merely on one's own personal interests, to arise. Thus, whilst directly opposing the self-cherishing mind, it can also loosen the strong hold of the self-grasping mind.

If we were to sincerely investigate, we will come to notice that on a daily basis most of our thoughts, ideas and attitudes are driven by a strong grasping to the 'I'. An exception may be when we are sleeping, but in the waking period during most of our activities, if we were to ask ourselves, 'What is the driving force behind my actions?' we will find that it is mostly driven by self-interests which are related to a strong sense of grasping to the 'I'. As such, familiarising ourselves with a state of mind that opposes such a strong focus on the 'I' becomes a very high level practice. We need to adopt practical ways to cultivate the means to help overcome our chronic obsession with the self-cherishing mind.

Generating a positive attitude in one's mind and trying to maintain it becomes an optimum meditation practice in itself. As one becomes familiar with this positive attitude and maintains it, the mind naturally settles down to a clear and calm state. It is also an optimum Dharma practice because one is actively following the core advice of the Buddha: not to harm any living being and only benefiting sentient beings. This is really the ultimate intention and advice of all buddhas and bodhisattvas. Buddha Shakyamuni clearly mentions in the sutras: 'if you harm sentient beings you are harming me; if you benefit sentient beings you are benefiting me'. Notice the Buddha doesn't say, 'if you harm me then that is negative'. Rather, he says: 'If you don't wish to harm me stop harming sentient beings. If you wish to benefit me then benefit sentient beings'. So this shows the unequalled love and compassion that Buddha has for all sentient beings. Intentionally generating this state of mind and focusing on it becomes an optimum means to benefit oneself in this and future lives. In relation to both short-term and long-term benefit, it is really the optimum practice because it serves the purpose of fulfilling the wishes of all sentient beings. We can all relate to the fact that every single sentient being only wishes for happiness and does not intentionally wish to experience any suffering. So, when we actually generate a state of mind that wishes all sentient beings to experience happiness and further engage in ways to benefit them, whilst wishing all beings to be free from suffering and actively

refrain from harming them, then one is actually fulfilling the needs and wishes of *all* sentient beings. One is not leaving any sentient being out, because every sentient being ultimately has this same wish. Thus, the practical approach to understanding the great benefit of generating this state of mind is to remember that you are ultimately fulfilling the wishes of all sentient beings.

By understanding this we can relate to how the bodhisattvas are always engaged in fulfilling two purposes: their own purpose, which ultimately is to fulfil the purpose of benefiting other sentient beings. Thus cultivating this state of mind benefits oneself by calming one's own mind. While I cannot personally claim that I have much experience, I do spend significant time generating this state of mind. I find that it really helps to settle and quieten the mind and make it more receptive to being virtuous. To that extent it becomes a very practical means to induce a positive and pure state of mind. If one makes a genuine attempt, one will definitely see the practical benefit on one's own mind. Thus, I encourage you and remind you again and again of the practical benefits that such a state of mind brings.

This outline, *Achieving the Purpose of Others* is subdivided into three categories.

3.1.2.1. It can eliminate the sufferings of sentient beings

This points out again that serving the purpose of others requires eliminating their sufferings and very succinctly shows how this is done.

3.1.2.2. It can eliminate its cause (its obscurations)

Again, not only does this mind eliminate the suffering of sentient beings but also the very causes which are the obscurations. Even though it is not explicitly presented here, we can relate this to the Four Noble Truths, particularly the first Noble Truth of suffering, and the second Noble Truth, which is the origination of suffering. If you can relate generating the bodhicitta attitude to the Two Truths it helps to eliminate suffering of sentient beings as well as the cause, the origination of suffering.

The obscurations here relate specifically to the deluded obscurations and the obscurations to omniscience, which encompass the origin of suffering. We derive a deeper understanding when we relate it to the Four Noble Truths.

3.1.2.3. It can achieve all benefit and happiness

Take special note that this relates to not only being able to achieve some minor level of happiness, but all benefit and happiness. So this is the extent to which the bodhicitta mind can benefit.

3.1.2.1. It can eliminate the sufferings of sentient beings

This is further divided into five sub-categories:

3.1.2.1.1. It can destroy the lord of death

3.1.2.1.2. It destroys poverty

3.1.2.1.3. It destroys sickness

3.1.2.1.4. It destroys the suffering of existence in general

3.1.2.1.5. It destroys specifically the sufferings of the lower realms

3.1.2.1.1. It can destroy the lord of death

Amongst the various sufferings we experience e.g. suffering of birth, sickness etc. this heading relates particularly to the suffering of death.

The first two lines of the verse relating to this point are:

*29ab. It is also the supreme nectar
Destroying migrator's lord of death.*

The commentary explains:

This bodhicitta is also the supreme nectar that destroys the lord of death through whom migrators die without freedom of choice.

Dying without freedom means that sentient beings have no choice over their mortality and have to experience death. That is the meaning of dying without freedom.

Bodhicitta serving as *the supreme nectar that destroys the lord of death* indicates that while there are other kinds of nectars, like those produced through the achievements of humans and gods, bodhicitta is the most supreme, as it is the one able to destroy the very lord of death. Thus, bodhicitta is likened to nectar of immortality. The *Prayer to Maitreya* reads:

Bodhicitta bars the way to unfortunate destinies;
It is the great teaching that leads to the highest realms;
And even to the state beyond old age and death.
To the mind of enlightenment, bodhicitta, I prostrate.

We can relate here to how bodhicitta is the supreme method for overcoming the lower rebirths, the supreme means for achieving the higher realms, and the supreme means to overcome aging and death.

In praise of bodhicitta, His Holiness the Dalai Lama quoted this very verse in the teachings in Sydney last year. This verse definitely summarises the qualities of bodhicitta. This is exactly how it is presented in the text here — developing bodhicitta becomes the means to overcome all unfortunate rebirths, leads one to the higher realms and to the state of being free from aging and death. Here the ultimate state of immortality is liberation, and the ultimate liberation is enlightenment. While it is possible to obtain the self-liberation of the lower vehicles without developing bodhicitta, i.e. the hearers and solitary realiser's state of liberation, there is no way that one can achieve enlightenment without first developing bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the optimum cause for achieving enlightenment, and by relating to the benefits of developing it and maintaining it in one's continuum, a strong sense of awe can be generated in one's mind. Thus, one contemplates how wonderful bodhicitta is and the extensive benefits it brings. By developing bodhicitta one is able to achieve the most incredibly profound goal. Thus, by relating to the benefits of bodhicitta in this way, one will develop a great sense of awe, and a real inspiration that will leave the strong positive imprints to develop bodhicitta in one's mind. One will be inclined to develop bodhicitta oneself, because one sees the great value in it.

One needs to understand the explanation here in its proper context. When it says it can *destroy the lord of death* it is not referring to obtaining a miraculous feat, such as going around destroying suffering in other beings and freeing them from death without them having to create

any causes and conditions; this is definitely not what is being implied here.

Developing bodhicitta will definitely have a great positive effect upon others. As the great Khunu Lama Rinpoche mentions¹:

The sheer fact of having bodhicitta within one's own mental continuum,
Naturally brings great solace to others
Even animals feel a great sense of comfort and fearlessness,
Not to mention humans and other beings alike.

So, developing bodhicitta oneself, even without any intentional activity on one's part, can bring so much comfort and ease to those around oneself.

However, the actual way that it eliminates sufferings and destroys the lord of death is by imparting the methods and teachings to others, particularly the teachings on what to adopt and what to discard. By presenting beings with the unmistakable teachings of how to accumulate virtue and abandon negativities, and when they adopt those teachings and practices, they will overcome their own sufferings and the causes of sufferings, ageing and death. Imparting advice to others needs to be in accordance with understanding their mental disposition and with a loving and kind attitude. Thus, presenting the unmistakable teachings to others with love and compassion is dependent on having developed bodhicitta oneself first. So this is how developing bodhicitta oneself actually helps to eliminate sufferings and death in other sentient beings. This is the proper way to understand this point.

As mentioned in the commentary, the way bodhicitta destroys the lord of death is by leading sentient beings to the ground which is free from old age and death.

3.1.2.1.2. *It destroys poverty*

The indication here is that bodhicitta becomes a cause to overcome or destroy poverty. The next two lines of the verse read:

29cd. *It is also the inexhaustible treasure
That eliminates sentient being's poverty.*

The commentary meaning is that

Because it gives inexhaustible material and Dharma, this mind generation is an inexhaustible treasure that eliminates the poverty of migrators.

Actually the meaning of the verse and explanation is quite clear. Generating bodhicitta also becomes the ultimate means for achieving the state where one has complete control over material gain as well as Dharma. When a bodhisattva reaches the eighth ground they obtain complete control over material wealth and knowledge of Dharma, and thus it becomes inexhaustible. It is like having an *inexhaustible treasure* house that can *eliminate the poverty of migrators*.

So this is how bodhisattvas benefit sentient beings. Initially, through their acts of generosity and kindness to others, they gather sentient beings close and then they impart their knowledge of the Dharma.

Other benefits touching on the same point are presented by Khunu Lama Rinpoche as:

The nectar of the mind is bodhicitta,
The jewel of the mind is bodhicitta,
The moon of the mind is bodhicitta
The sun of the mind is bodhicitta.

We can see that the way Khunu Lama Rinpoche presents the benefits of the bodhicitta from his own experience is aligned to how Shantideva presents the same meaning of the benefits of bodhicitta. Through his work from his own experience, we can definitely see that Khunu Lama Rinpoche was definitely a great practitioner of bodhicitta. Khunu Lama Rinpoche also said:

Bodhicitta is the optimum way to benefit others,
Bodhicitta is the optimum means for guiding others,
Bodhicitta is the optimum means to teach others.

It is presented in poetic form with very succinct meaning regarding the benefits of bodhicitta. Furthermore, he mentions:

If one wishes to benefit other sentient beings, that is done through bodhicitta;
If one wishes to be the friend of others, then the best way to do that is through developing bodhicitta.
Being a source of reliance, then that is achieved through bodhicitta.

Khunu Lama Rinpoche also mentions that if one wishes to be a virtuous teacher to others, then the optimum way is by generating bodhicitta. This is in line with what Lama Tsong Khapa mentions—without generating the wish for others to be free from suffering and for others to obtain happiness there is no way that one can really benefit others. So, the wish to benefit others is based upon wishing others to be free from suffering and to gain happiness.

3.1.2.1.3. *It destroys sickness*

The verse which relates to this is the next two lines:

30ab. *It is also the supreme medicine
Pacifying migrators' heavy diseases.*

The commentary reads:

It is also the supreme medicine that thoroughly pacifies all diseases of migrators.

The meaning of the verse is very clear here. The commentary explains *bodhicitta is the supreme medicine that thoroughly pacifies the disease of migrators*. The meaning here is linked to the earlier explanation, that the way it pacifies the diseases of other migrators is by presenting them with teachings of what to adopt and what to discard, to achieve the state of being free from disease.

As explained in the teachings, the ultimate source of migrators' sickness and disease is basically the three poisons: attachment, anger and ignorance. These really serve as the basis for all kinds of diseases and all sufferings. So the way bodhisattvas benefit beings to eliminate their sicknesses is by presenting antidotes to the three poisons. To overcome attachment, meditate on the unattractive features of the object of attachment. To overcome anger, meditate on love. To overcome ignorance, meditate on interdependent origination and emptiness. Presenting specific antidotes overcomes specific delusions, which are the very causes of all sufferings and diseases. Meditating on them and applying the antidote becomes the means to overcome the particular diseases of attachment, anger and

¹ Khunu Lama Rinpoche, *Vast as the Heavens, Deep as the Sea*.
Chapter 3

ignorance, thus overcoming all sickness. This is how bodhicitta becomes the means to eliminate the sicknesses of other beings.

3.1.2.1.4. *It destroys the suffering of existence in general*

The verse which relates to this is the next two lines:

*30cd. It is the fruit tree that is a resting place for
migrators,
Who wander the paths of existence and are
tired.*

The commentary reads:

It is also the fruit tree that provides a cool resting place for the migrators who are wandering on the paths of existence and are tired.

The analogy presented in the commentary is that like a tree that provides a cool resting place, those who need that rest are *migrators*, endlessly wandering on the path of existence and extremely tired. The teachings refer to the three types of existence: birth, death and the intermediate state. So, endlessly cycling through the three types of existence, migrating from one existence to the next, beings are extremely tired. Just as a large fruit tree would provide a cool resting place for those travelling in the heat and sun, bodhicitta is the optimum means for providing that ultimate rest for beings who are wandering in cyclic existence. Some texts would relate this explanation to the path of the medium scope, so bodhisattvas would show the path of the medium scope to those who are trainees in the medium scope, particularly solitary realisers and hearers. General existence is explained here and it means destroying the sufferings of the existence in general by leading to the optimum state of liberation.

The main point is that bodhicitta serves as a means for beings who are wandering on the path of cyclic existence to obtain that ultimate rest of achieving liberation, being free from all samsaric existence.

3.1.2.1.5. *It destroys specifically the sufferings of the lower realms*

The verse which relates to this is the next two lines:

*31ab. It is the universal bridge that liberates
All migrators from the lower realms.*

The commentary explains that

Generating the mind of bodhicitta is also the universal bridge that liberates all migrators from the lower realms.

The analogy of the universal bridge indicates presenting teachings on adopting the ten virtues. Beings then follow this advice, adopting the ten virtues as the means to free themselves from the lower realms or to be reborn again in the lower realms. So this is how to understand how the bodhicitta attitude becomes the supreme means to present the teachings in accordance to beings' capacity and mental disposition; to present unmistakable methods and ways to be free from various types of sufferings, particularly the lower realms. It shows that when bodhicitta has been developed, it spontaneously helps sentient beings without much effort from one's own side. Also, it establishes a very suitable foundation for those who listen to the advice and teachings to naturally be able to adopt that advice and benefit from it. So this again

shows the way by which bodhicitta becomes the supreme means to benefit others.

In summary, the main points that have been presented here are how bodhicitta serves as an optimum means to overcome the various levels of sentient beings' sufferings; that it destroys the sufferings of existence in general and particularly helps to destroy the sufferings of the lower realms. This is done by benefiting others. The first step of benefiting others is when bodhisattvas lead sentient beings to the state of liberation from the sufferings of cyclic existence in general. The next step of benefiting sentient beings is when bodhisattvas lead them to the higher status, free of the suffering of the lower realms.

Other commentaries explain the analogy of bodhicitta serving as a universal bridge. The connotation is from a Tibetan word for an actual bridge or platform from which you cannot go back. Providing this platform reverses beings from the lower realms and establishes them in higher rebirths to serve as the means to obtain the highest goal of liberation and enlightenment. This becomes the very basis for beings to further develop the causes which liberate them from samsara and the ultimate liberation of enlightenment.

3.1.2.2. IT CAN ELIMINATE ITS CAUSE

Cause refers specifically to the causes of a suffering existence (samsara) and a rebirth in a lower realm. The two main causes are explained in the subdivisions of this outline:

3.1.2.2.1. Eliminating afflictive obscurations

3.1.2.2.2. Eliminating the obscurations to knowledge

3.1.2.2.1. *Eliminating afflictive obscurations*

The verse which relates to this is the next two lines:

*31cd. It is the moon shining in the mind
That eliminates migrator's misery of the
afflictions.*

The commentary reads:

This mind generation is also the shining moon that eliminates the heat and misery of the afflictions of migrators. That is, it has the power to eliminate all afflictive obscurations.

As mentioned previously, Khunu Lama Rinpoche's verse indicated that bodhicitta is the moon of the mind and the sun of the mind. This explanation also relates to moonlight or the cooling light of the moon.

The commentary explains that this mind generation is like *the shining moon, eliminating the heat and misery of migrators' afflictions*. This is because *it has power to eliminate afflictive obscurations*. Using this analogy, moonlight has a cooling effect which eliminates the suffering of the heat felt during the day when it is very hot. As soon as the sun sets and the moon rises, the moon's cooling light eliminates the suffering of extreme heat. Likewise here, the heat is an analogy for the actual misery (or afflictions) of the migrators, all their sufferings. The analogy explains that bodhicitta is that which eliminates all the afflictive obscurations of sentient beings. The main afflictive obscuration is grasping at the self and the delusions in general, but particularly grasping to the self. When bodhicitta has the power to eliminate this, there is no way for sufferings to be

experienced, because when the cause of suffering is completely eliminated from the mind there is no way to experience the result, which is suffering. This is how bodhicitta serves to bring this about.

It is good to note here the descriptions of specific symbols, such as the moon, sun and lotus. For example, whenever images of deities or buddhas are presented on the moon, the symbolism of the moon represents bodhicitta. The symbol of the sun represents wisdom realising emptiness. Enlightened beings seated upon a lotus, sun and moon disc actually represent the significance of developing bodhicitta and the wisdom realising emptiness so the individual beings obtain the ultimate state of enlightenment and become a Buddha, an enlightened being.

3.1.2.2.2. *Eliminating the obscurations to knowledge*

The verse which relates to this is the next two lines:

32. *It is the great sun that dispels
The vitreous humour of not knowing.*

The commentary reads:

It is also the great sun that dispels from the root the non-afflictive not knowing of migrators, the cataract-like obscurations to knowledge. The reason for this is that the wisdom realising emptiness is adorned with great accumulations that exhaust the seed of the obscuration to knowledge.

As explained in the commentary, *it is also the great sun that dispels from the root the non-afflictive not knowing of the migrators, the cataract-like obscurations to knowledge*. Firstly, *the non-afflictive not knowing of migrators* refers to the obscurations to knowledge (which as the analogy refers to here, are like cataracts that causes the eyes not to see clearly). What obscures one from seeing ultimate reality directly is the mistaken appearance that obscures one from clearly seeing both truths simultaneously. For as long as one has obscurations to knowledge, one will not be able to see the Two Truths simultaneously, and one's current mistaken view serves like a veil to have mistaken appearance. Because bodhicitta serves as a means to overcome this obscuration to knowledge and remove the veil of mistaken appearance, it is like the great sun.

To further explain this analogy, the sun becomes the means to eliminate darkness because as soon as it rises darkness is completely eliminated. In a similar way, bodhicitta removes the cataract-like obscurations to knowledge completely. The commentary explains that *the reason for this is that the wisdom realising emptiness is adorned with great accumulation, and this exhausts the seed of the obscurations to knowledge*. Bodhicitta serves as the means for obtaining a great accumulation of merit. The merit based on love and compassion is generated when engaging in the practice of the six perfections; also extensive practice of generosity. All can be accomplished through the power of bodhicitta.

Furthermore, extensive practices of morality are accomplished through bodhicitta, also patience and joyous effort and meditation and finally, the wisdom realising emptiness. When the wisdom realising emptiness is complemented with bodhicitta, it becomes the optimum means to accumulate extensive merit and completely exhausts the seeds of the obscurations to

knowledge, by completely eliminating it from the mind stream.

It has now been explained that developing bodhicitta is the ultimate means for overcoming all faults and obscurations and acquiring all qualities to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment. It shows how bodhicitta serves as a means, and from the moment it is developed along the path, it achieves all the realisations and leads to the ultimate state of omniscience. This is all based on having developed bodhicitta; it becomes the very root and cause.

We'll conclude for the evening by reciting the prayer *The Eight Verses of Training the Mind* and dedicate it to the late Norman Henderson who, while he might not have been a member of Tara Institute, was definitely a very diligent student, coming here regularly. I have known him from when I was at Chenrezig Institute in Queensland. He used to come when I was up there, so I remember him and have known him for a long time; he is like an old friend. As he passed away recently, we'll dedicate the merit of the recitation of the prayer to him and also to Liam's grandfather who passed away recently.

I had already explained the visualisation that we can adopt for this practice, so I don't need to do that again. So, we try to do that visualisation as we recite the prayer.

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

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

25 February 2014

The *Refuge and Bodhicitta* prayer that we have just recited should suffice to generate the proper motivation for our meditation practice.

Indeed the *Refuge and Bodhicitta* prayer is the most profound prayer that we say. If, while reciting the profound words through our mouth, we can also adopt the respectful physical gesture of prostration, and mentally go for refuge and generate the bodhicitta attitude then, within just a few minutes, we will definitely collect extensive merit. There is no doubt about that at all.

What needs to be purified are negativities, which we definitely have. But we also have the means to purify those negativities. And as explained previously, the optimum method to purify negativities is to rely on the objects of refuge and generate bodhicitta. We need to keep this point in mind.

If, after going for refuge wholeheartedly as we recite the prayer, we can visualise the objects of refuge merging into ourselves and thus blessing our mental continuum, our minds will definitely settle down. There is no question that any disturbing thoughts will definitely be appeased by taking refuge in this way.

Bearing that in mind we will now engage in the meditation practice for a few minutes. *[meditation]*

Now we generate the motivation to receive the teachings, by developing this strong intention:

In order to free all sentient beings from suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself, so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

During the *tong len* practice that we engaged in earlier, our intention was to take upon ourselves all the sufferings of all sentient beings, as well as the causes of that suffering and the very imprints giving rise to those causes, whilst in return giving them our happiness and virtues. With that intention in mind, we generate the motivation for the teaching, to reaffirm that having taken on the sufferings of sentient beings we generate the intention to lead them to the ultimate state of happiness i.e. enlightenment. The motivation 'I need to engage in the practice of listening to the teaching' complements the *tong len* practice that we have just done.

Indeed, engaging in any activity with that motivation in mind will ensure that one's life becomes most meaningful.

3.1.2. Achieving the purpose of others

3.1.2.2. IT CAN ELIMINATE ITS CAUSE

3.1.2.2.2. Eliminating the obscurations to knowledge (cont.)

The relevant verse reads:

32ab. *It is the great sun that dispels
The vitreous humour of not knowing.*

We concluded the teaching last week with these lines, which indicate how bodhicitta serves as a means to remove the obscurations to knowledge, even the very subtle imprints in our mind that are the root of non-afflictive not knowing. This shows that it is our own responsibility to eliminate those imprints by applying the antidote to the obscurations to knowledge. We need to realise that we cannot expect others to remove our obscurations and that we need to take the initiative to do so ourselves. This is what we need to derive as a personal instruction.

3.1.2.3. IT CAN ACHIEVE ALL BENEFIT AND HAPPINESS

This is subdivided into two:

3.1.2.3.1. Achieving all benefit

3.1.2.3.2. Achieving every happiness

3.1.2.3.1. Achieving all benefit

This heading relates to achieving the ability to benefit all other sentient beings, and the lines that relate to this heading are:

32cd. *It is the essence of butter
That is derived from the milk of Dharma.*

We need to see the connection between what is presented here and what we are attempting to do in our own practice. Our earlier meditation was based on wishing to bring about benefit and happiness for all sentient beings and eliminate all their suffering. *Achieving all benefit* through developing bodhicitta relates to the same intention, and it is good to remember this point.

As you know, one of the methods for developing bodhicitta is the technique of exchanging self with others. In order to engage in that practice one needs to train the mind to the point where we have no hesitation in exchanging self-interest with the interests of other sentient beings. Thus the *tong len* practice of giving and taking serves as a basis for training the mind in exchanging self with others. When we actually attain that state of being able to exchange self with others and then develop bodhicitta, we will experience tremendous joy. That is because we will have achieved what we are striving to achieve, which is a state of mind that works for the welfare of other sentient beings. That naturally brings us great happiness and joy.

We need to understand how all of these practices - beginning with the meagre attempts of training our mind now - lead to the higher state of actually developing this incredibly precious state of mind called bodhicitta. We need to see the connection between what we are attempting to do now and the ultimate result we intend to achieve.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of this verse quite succinctly:

This mind generation is the butter essence arising from churning the great ocean of milk that is the holy Dharma, with the churning wood of wisdom arising from listening and contemplating.

It is the essence of butter that can generate the taste of achieving each and every benefit, and therefore everybody should strive in it.

Here, the teachings or the doctrine of the Buddha are likened to a great ocean of milk. Butter is created by churning the milk with a wooden paddle, likewise listening to, contemplating and meditating on the Buddha's doctrine, is analogous to using a wooden paddle. Just as butter arises from churning the milk with a wooden paddle, wisdom arises from listening to, and contemplating and meditating on the Buddha's doctrine. Butter is actually a coarse substance that can be further refined to its essence by boiling it, and just like clarified butter, bodhicitta is the very essence of the Buddha's doctrine. This is similar to the presentation in *The Three Principles of the Path*, which states that bodhicitta is the very essence of the Buddha's doctrine that is praised by all the buddhas.

As the analogy explains, just as the tastiest part of butter is the essence of butter, the tastiest part of the Buddha's doctrine, its essence, is achieving the benefit of all beings through having cultivated bodhicitta. Therefore, one needs to develop that which serves as the very essence of the Dharma.

Developing the essence of the Dharma, which is bodhicitta, begins with the meagre attempts we make now of generating a genuine mind of consideration for others, with a genuine wish to help and benefit others. Part of our training is to develop that intention now to whatever extent we are able to. It would be quite lame to think, 'Oh, since I haven't yet developed bodhicitta, there is not much point thinking about it'. It is because of the very fact that we haven't yet generated bodhicitta that we are being exhorted to strive to develop it.

As mentioned previously, we do that by cultivating loving and kind attitudes to others with whatever means we have now. Then, slowly through our training and familiarity our mind will gradually become more and more attuned to having a genuine sense of concern for the wellbeing of other sentient beings. This then serves as a basis to further develop a genuine sense of love and compassion. This is how we make progress, and further develop the mind of bodhicitta.

The peerless instruction on the generation of bodhicitta by means of listening, contemplating and meditating is none other than this very text that we are studying now, the *Bodhisattvacharyavataara*. This is the best source of advice to listen to, contemplate on and meditate on. So we have the most supreme instructions at hand on how to develop bodhicitta.

3.1.2.3.2. *Achieving every happiness*

This section of the text is explained in the following verse:

33. *The migrating guests wander on the paths of existence
And wish to engage pleasant enjoyments;*

*It abides close to supreme happiness
And satisfies the great samsaric guests*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The migrating guests wandering in cyclic existence on the paths of the three existences wish for the pleasant enjoyments of gods and humans.

This mind generation abides close to the supreme method for establishing happiness, and satisfies the many guests from cyclic existence because it establishes the higher status and definite goodness of all sentient beings.

I have explained many times what *cyclic existence* connotes. As teachings explain, that which binds one to the appropriated aggregates again and again through the influence of delusions and karma is cyclic existence. In other words, the contaminated aggregates that we possess now are an example of cyclic existence. Over countless lifetimes we have uncontrollably obtained such contaminated aggregates, through which we experience the shortcomings of sufferings and so forth. So the real cycle is obtaining the appropriated contaminated aggregates again and again through the influence of delusions and karma. It is as if we are bound to these appropriated, contaminated aggregates which serve as the basis for all unwanted misery and suffering. This is the real meaning of cyclic existence.

The migrating guests are those who are bound by delusions and karma to this existence of obtaining the contaminated aggregates again and again. The *paths of the three existences* are the desire, form and formless realms. Thus, beings circle in these three different realms again and again. All those beings in the cyclic existence *wish for the pleasant enjoyments of the gods and humans*. So, not only does bodhicitta bring the ultimate benefit and goodness of liberation and enlightenment, but it also serves as a means to bring about the temporary benefits of humans and gods while circling in samsara.

Furthermore, *this mind generation abides close to the supreme method for establishing happiness, and satisfies the many guests from cyclic existence*. The reason for that is that *it establishes the higher status and definite goodness of all sentient beings*. So bodhicitta serves as a means to establish beings in the temporary wellbeing of the most fortunate rebirth in cyclic existence, and while bringing that temporary pleasure and enjoyment, it ultimately brings the definite goodness of the state of liberation and ultimately, enlightenment.

Thus bodhicitta is the supreme method to benefit sentient beings because the generation of this mind brings about the temporary and ultimate wellbeing of sentient beings; that is the main meaning of this verse.

Satisfying many guests also has a connotation of being a most supreme offering. There are explanations in the teachings that one of the best ways of gaining merit is making unsurpassed offerings to the enlightened beings and benefiting sentient beings. Of all the offerings that one can make to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, offering bodhicitta is the best, because it brings benefit for all sentient beings. So the generation of bodhicitta is the most supreme offering and method for accumulating merit.

We need to really contemplate these points, remembering how the generation of the mind of bodhicitta is dependent on first developing love and compassion. Thus, we need to really think about the great value of developing love and compassion again and again and train our mind daily in the development of love and compassion. This means that in whatever activity we engage, whether it is eating or drinking or going about our daily business, we constantly remember, 'I am doing this as a means to benefit sentient beings'. When we eat something, we offer it first to the objects of refuge and then we remind ourselves that we are consuming it to sustain ourselves for the purpose of benefiting sentient beings. When we drink something, we accumulate merit by offering it, and then drink it to quench our thirst and nourish us as a means of supporting ourselves so that we can benefit sentient beings.

If we can relate to every activity this way, seeing it as a means to benefit sentient beings, then we are familiarising our mind with the wish to benefit sentient beings and actually utilising our daily activities for that purpose. So, in this way we slowly and gradually establish a firm foundation for developing bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is not developed instantaneously; it requires effort and a great amount of training.

Of course, in explaining this I am not implying that I have obtained any great experiential levels from practising in this way, but I can assure you that I do attempt to practise in this way. So if you ask me whether I attempt to do these practices then the answer is definitely, 'Yes, I do try to practise like this in my daily life'. If you ask whether I have achieved any great realisation from this practice then the answer will be, 'No, I have not'. However I find that there is great benefit derived even from my genuine attempts to practice. Thus, I entreat you to really familiarise your mind again and again with these practices, and then, through constant familiarity you will gradually see a transformation taking place.

When the commentary says *this mind generation abides close to the supreme method*, the Tibetan word *nyi-war-ne*, has the connotation of 'definitely abiding'. So the meaning here is that the mind generation of bodhicitta definitely abides as the supreme method for establishing happiness.

Thus, the generation of bodhicitta is an unsurpassable offering to the supreme enlightened beings, as it is the supreme means to satisfy the many guests in cyclic existence. Why? Because, it establishes high status and definite goodness for all sentient beings.

3.2. Inducing others to be joyful

What is being explained here is that by generating the mind of bodhicitta, one induces joy in others. This can be understood with the analogy of someone who has the potential and ability to take care of all our needs by promising us, 'I will take responsibility for establishing your wellbeing and I will give you everything you need for your happiness'. Hearing such a promise would make us feel extremely joyful. Just the thought, 'Oh, I have someone who is going to take care of me', brings great solace and joy.

What actually is implied here, and this will be explained in the verse, is that someone who aspires to develop bodhicitta is making this promise to establish all beings in happiness: I will take responsibility for establishing all beings in a state of ultimate state of happiness and free them from all suffering. That is the vow that one makes.

The verse relating to this heading is:

34. *Today I have, in front of all protectors,
Served migrators the hospitality of
A tathagata and intermediate happiness.
The gods, demi-gods and so forth should rejoice.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Today, in the presence of all the protectors, the conquerors and their children, I have invited all migrating sentient beings as guests and serve them the hospitality of becoming a sugata, one who has accomplished all ultimate benefit and happiness, and until they obtain that state I also give them the permission to satisfy themselves with the intermediate happiness of gods and humans.

'I' refers to oneself, and the time when the vows are taken is *today*. These vows or promises were made *in front of all the protectors, who are the conquerors and the children*, i.e. all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Then one continues, *I have invited all migrating sentient beings as guests and serve them the hospitality of a sugata*, which indicates that one has made the pledge to lead all sentient beings to that ultimate state of a sugata *who has accomplished all ultimate benefit and happiness*.

As indicated in the commentary, the ultimate intention is to lead all beings to the ultimate state of buddhahood, but until that state is obtained, one offers all beings the permission to be satisfied with the intermediate happiness of gods and humans.

Then Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

As such I have offered the supreme hospitality and from today onwards the gods, demi-gods, serpent kings and so forth should be happy.

This is to induce joy in others.

So others should be joyful because of the pledges that one has made today, in the presence of all the protectors, buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Then Gyaltsab Je exhorts us:

Preceding the generation of the two minds, as explained in this commentary:

This means that as a precursor to developing *the generation of the two minds* i.e. aspiring and engaging bodhicitta, one needs to:

Understand that mind generation upon having purified the disrupting conditions of the obscurations and building up the conducive conditions of the accumulations of merit, is the supreme way to take the essence of the precious human rebirth with freedoms and endowments, and strive in it.

This is an exhortation that the supreme means to develop the mind of bodhicitta is to engage in the practices of accumulating merit and purifying one's negativities. That is the supreme means to take the essence of one's precious human rebirth with its freedom and endowments. That is what we need to strive for.

Summarising Verse

Gyatso Je offers this summarising verse as a final exhortation:

They who understand they have attained a human
rebirth with freedoms and endowments
Should strive in generating the two bodhicittas,
The essential meaning of all the teachings of the
conquerors,
The sole path traversed by the tens of millions of their
children.

Anyone *who understands that they have attained such human rebirth with its freedom and endowments* indicates that those who have the wisdom to understand the value of the precious human rebirth, definitely need to strive in generating bodhicitta, which is *the essential meaning of all the teachings of the conquerors, and the sole path traversed by the tens of millions of their children.*

II. THE NAME OF THE CHAPTER

The root text concludes the chapter with:

This is the third chapter on taking the mind of enlightenment, from Introduction to the Actions of Bodhisattvas.

The commentary reads:

This is the commentary on the third chapter called Taking the Mind of Enlightenment, from the commentary on the *Introduction to the Actions of Bodhisattvas*, called *The Entrance for the Children of the Conquerors*.

Now we come to the fourth chapter, the title of which is Applying Conscientiousness. To explain the context of this chapter, we need to return to the subdivisions introduced in chapter 1.¹

2. THE ACTUAL EXPLANATION OF THE STAGES OF THE PATH

2.2. The method for taking the essence

2.2.2. Explaining the individual meanings²

2.2.2.2. THE WAY OF TRAINING IN THE PRACTICES OF GENERATING THE TWO MINDS

2.2.2.2.1. Taking the mind of enlightenment

This was the content of the last chapter. Now we come to:

2.2.2.2.2. The Way of Training in the Actions, the Perfections

This has four subdivisions:

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

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

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

¹ See the teaching of 26 March 2013.

² The following two subdivisions were listed in the teaching of 2 July 2013.

³ Covered in chapter 4.

⁴ Covered in chapter 5.

⁵ Covered in chapters 6 to 9.

2.2.2.2.2.4. Explaining the way of practising the generosity of offering one's body, possessions and roots of virtue to others, by way of the limb of dedication⁶

This list encompasses all the remaining chapters.

The first three chapters of the text, as you would recall⁷, present the means of generating bodhicitta, which has not yet been developed. The next three chapters, Conscientiousness, Mindfulness or Introspection, and Patience present the means of maintaining the bodhicitta that has been generated. Chapters 7 to 9 present the means of increasing bodhicitta, and the final chapter dedicates the merits of bodhicitta.

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

This section also includes other practices that are needed for developing bodhicitta.

Conscientiousness is defined as state of mind that prevents one from being influenced by the delusions, and by maintaining enthusiasm it protects one from contaminated states of mind and increases virtue.

This definition has two main elements:

- It is a mental state of mind that prevents delusions from arising
- While maintaining enthusiasm it protects one from contaminated states of mind and increases virtue

That which encompasses all these attributes is called conscientiousness. Without conscientiousness, it said that one will not be able to engage in any of the three trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom. Therefore conscientiousness is an essential state of mind that we must develop if we wish to engage in our practice properly.

CHAPTER 4: APPLYING CONSCIENTIOUSNESS⁸

The chapter has two elements.

- I. Explaining the text of the chapter
- II: The name of the chapter

I. EXPLAINING THE TEXT OF THE CHAPTER

The chapter has three subdivisions

1. Short explanation of the way to meditate on conscientiousness
2. Explaining it extensively
3. Summary

1. SHORT EXPLANATION OF THE WAY TO MEDITATE ON CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

The first verse of the chapter reads:

1. *After the children of the conquerors,
Have very firmly accepted bodhicitta,
They should unwaveringly strive always
To not transgress the trainings.*

Gyaltso Je's commentary explanation of this verse reads:

⁶ Covered in chapter 10.

⁷ See 12 February 2013.

⁸ To keep things manageable the numbering system starts again.

After the children of the conquerors, the bodhisattvas, took very firmly the two minds of enlightenment as explained earlier, they should unwaveringly protect them with conscientiousness, so as not to wander from them for even a second.

They should also unwaveringly protect the trainings of the six perfections and the four ways of attracting disciples, so as not to waver from them, and that they never decrease.

I have already explained in the past the connotation of *children of the conquerors*, and also what *conqueror* refers to, so you may recall that. Having *very firmly* established *the two minds of enlightenment*, which were *explained earlier*, we must *unwaveringly protect them with conscientiousness, so as not to wander from them for even a second*. Furthermore *they should also unwaveringly protect the trainings of the six perfections and the four ways of attracting disciples, so as not to waver from them, and that they never decrease*.

What we need to understand from this is that once a bodhisattva generates the two states of mind of bodhicitta, there are only two activities that they will engage in from then on—activities that encompass fulfilling their own purpose, and activities that encompass fulfilling the purpose of others. The *six perfections* are specifically the means to fulfil one's own ultimate purpose, although they also directly benefit others. *The four ways of attracting disciples* are the activities that specifically and directly benefit other beings. Bodhisattvas have no other activities than these two.

The six perfections serve as a means to fulfil one's ultimate goal of achieving enlightenment, solely for the purpose of benefiting other sentient beings. As explained in the teachings, having generated a state of mind of bodhicitta, bodhisattvas are committed to striving to achieve enlightenment, which takes many eons of practice. So bodhisattvas need to ensure that they are not deprived of good conditions and that they have sufficient wealth and so forth over the many lives needed to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment. Because that takes many eons, one has to ensure that all the conditions are in place so as to be able to continuously engage in the practices until achieving the state of enlightenment. The supreme means of ensuring that one has the appropriate conditions of sufficient wealth and so forth is none other than engaging in the practice of *generosity*. That is how the practice of generosity is the optimum means to establish those necessary favourable conditions.

In order to engage in the practice of generosity to amass sufficient means in good conditions one needs to have a basis, which is a perfect physical body. This is obtained through none other than the practice of *morality*. Thus, morality is the main cause of obtaining a perfect body.

Furthermore, having amassed the perfect conditions of sufficient wealth and so forth, and having the perfect base of a sound body, one needs to have a good retinue if one is to make use of those conditions. In both a worldly context and for the Dharma, one needs to have an appropriate retinue to help us to utilise those good conditions. What brings about a perfect retinue is none other than the practice of *patience*. That is why the practice of patience is said to be essential.

We also need to ensure that whatever activity we engage in is completed. That which ensures that any activity reaches completion is none other than the practice of *enthusiasm* or joyous effort.

Then we need to make sure that all the earlier good conditions that we have obtained do not become a condition for delusions to arise. So we need to adopt the practice of *meditation* to ensure delusions do not arise.

Being able to discern what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded is essential, and the unmistakable discriminating *wisdom* is acquired through the practice of wisdom.

We can see the relevance of all of this to our own practice. By seeing the practical benefits of engaging in these practices of generosity, morality, patience, joyous effort, meditation and developing wisdom, we are further encouraged to engage in these practices to accomplish our ultimate goal.

The purpose of obtaining the perfect conditions we enjoy now is twofold: ultimately it is to benefit other sentient beings, and to achieve one's own ultimate goal. The first three perfections, generosity, morality and patience are a direct means of fulfilling the benefit of other sentient beings.

Our own ultimate purpose is gained through the wisdom that leads one to obtaining the bliss or happiness of liberation. However, if the mind is distracted and wavering then it is not possible to develop that wisdom. So, in order to cultivate that wisdom one needs to have a very stable and undistracted mind, which is established through meditation, in particular concentration.

The ultimate concentration is calm abiding and based on calm abiding one achieves the wisdom of special insight. The union of calm abiding and special insight can only occur after having first obtained calm abiding. So we need to understand that special insight is preceded by calm abiding. However concentration and wisdom cannot be established if one is lazy. Therefore the perfection of joyous effort is essential to achieve both one's own purpose as well to benefit other sentient beings.

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

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Edited Version

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

4 March 2014

Based on the motivation we had just generated, we can engage in the practice of meditation.

[meditation]

In our last session we started Chapter 4, which is Conscientiousness.

1. SHORT EXPLANATION OF THE WAY TO MEDITATE ON CONSCIENTIOUSNESS (CONT.)

The importance of applying conscientiousness was explained earlier as being essential to prevent bodhicitta from declining after it had been generated. I also explained how the bodhisattvas' activities are encompassed in the practices of the six perfections and the four means of gathering disciples.

Although I have already identified and explained the four means of gathering disciples previously, I will list them again. They are: giving whatever is necessary; speaking pleasantly; helping others; and consistency between words and deeds. Here we will notice that the incomparably kind Buddha presented these ways of benefiting others in very practical manner.

The first is giving people what they need through generosity. By engaging in giving, you develop an acquaintance with them where they begin to feel comfortable and develop a bond with you. Along with that, if you utter kind and pleasant words, that will really appeal to them.

We can all relate to the benefit of giving, however generosity needs to be accompanied with kind and pleasant speech so that the recipients can receive it gracefully, without fear or hesitation. For example, when you give food to animals, if you do so with pleasant words it creates a gentle atmosphere that makes them feel comfortable, and then they come close to you and gracefully accept the food. If even animals can appreciate this kind and gentle gesture, then there is no need to mention how humans would relate to it as well.

As you would know, generosity is classified into two types: generosity with material wealth and generosity with the Dharma. Likewise, speaking pleasantly can also be related to a worldly context—such as greeting and welcoming people with pleasant words, and presenting the actual meaning of the Dharma.

The third way of gathering disciples, helping others, particularly relates to presenting the Dharma. Taking the example of helping animals again, when an animal has been treated kindly (with food and pleasant words) it develops trust in the owner, who can then explain things which it will follow, like certain behaviour patterns or even tricks. Animals can learn quite a lot of skills willingly from their owners or trainers that they trust. In

the context of bodhisattvas helping sentient beings, it refers not only to temporary benefit, but that which will benefit sentient beings in all future lives, up until achieving the ultimate state of enlightenment. As part of the means to benefit other beings, you can see that these ways of gathering disciples play a very important role in developing a good relationship with other beings. It is very much in line with the worldly concepts of enacting good deeds for others, thus we can easily relate to this as being a practical ways and means to benefit others.

When we see how the teaching presents these points so meticulously and logically, it gives us the initiative to implement and integrate them in our own practice. It gives us a deeper sense of understanding, and entreats us to use our intelligence, our reasoning and logical way of thinking. For me it definitely provides very good ways to think critically and logically; I am sure you can relate to it as well.

As explained to me by my own teachers and previous masters, the fourth means of gathering disciples, consistency between words and deeds, means to act in accordance with the Dharma. This relates to both entreating others to act in accordance with the Dharma and to follow the advice of the Dharma oneself. So, the third means is to help others by explaining the meaning of the Dharma while the fourth is to implore others, as well as to follow the Dharma oneself.

In our last session I explained how the six perfections serve as a means to acquire good conditions. It is important to also take note of the opposites to each of the six perfections, as the exact opposite is a hindrance to engaging in the practice. For example miserliness is the opposite of generosity, so when we are affected by miserliness this obstructs us from being generous. We will not be able to perfect the practice of generosity if we don't overcome miserliness. Thus, we need to apply an antidote to overcome miserliness to become more and more accustomed to being naturally generous.

We can definitely relate to the ill effects of strong miserliness. Some are not able to make offerings because they are too miserly to use their resources. Furthermore, out of miserliness some are not able to benefit others with their wealth and may not even be able to use their own wealth to benefit themselves. So we can see in a very practical way how miserliness obstructs one from using one's wealth in an optimum way. The antidote for overcoming miserliness is none other than actually engaging in the practice of generosity, by seeing the advantages and benefits of being generous. As we gradually increase acts of generosity, we will begin to overcome miserliness.

To list the other opposites: the opposite of morality is corrupt morality; the opposite of patience is anger or hatred; the opposite of joyous effort is laziness; the opposite of meditation (concentration) is mental wandering and the opposite of wisdom is corrupt wisdom.

So identifying the opposites of the six perfections and overcoming them is necessary to engage in the actual practices. By relating to a bodhisattva's practice of generosity we can definitely understand how it enables a

bodhisattva to fulfil the purpose of others as well as one's own purposes. That should encourage one to also overcome miserliness and begin to practise generosity and so forth.

2. EXPLAINING IT EXTENSIVELY

This is subdivided into two.

- 2.1. Meditating on conscientiousness for bodhicitta
- 2.2. Being conscientious of the trainings

2.1. Meditating on conscientiousness for bodhicitta

This is further subdivided into two.

- 2.1.1. The reason why it is unsuitable to give up bodhicitta
- 2.1.2. The fault of giving it up

The first explains that having taken the bodhisattva vows and making that pledge, it is unsuitable to give up bodhicitta. The reason presented is encompassed in the second point, the fault of giving it up. That is, if one were to give it up, what would the faults be?

2.1.1. The reason why it is unsuitable to give up bodhicitta

The next two verses explain the meaning of this heading.

The first verse reads:

2. *Any action done in the spur of the moment,
Or done without having been considered
carefully,
Although having already committed to them,
It is appropriate to analyse whether to act or to
leave it.*

The commentary explains the meaning of this verse as follows:

Actions that were just engaged in impulsively, without consideration of their benefits and drawbacks, or actions that were minimally analysed but not well investigated before engaged in, are actions that are suitable to be investigated later on, to decide whether to continue them or not, despite having made an earlier commitment.

The first part of the translation reads *actions that were just engaged in* and uses the term *impulsively* which relates to the Tibetan term that has the connotation of not taking any measures to check whether the action one is about to engage in has any advantages or disadvantages, or benefits or drawbacks i.e. just engaging in an activity without first checking. For example, compare taking the bodhisattva vows without first checking the benefits and drawbacks, with first doing some analysis and then taking them. Taking the bodhisattva vows after analysing and understanding them is proper practice, whereas taking the bodhisattva vows without first analysing and understanding what they are would be improper and a fault.

The point to note here is that *without consideration of the benefits or drawbacks or actions that were minimally analysed but not well investigated, are suitable to be investigated later on to decide whether to continue or not, despite having made earlier commitment.*

The Tibetan commentary begins with *despite having made an earlier commitment*, which implies that one has already made a promise to do a certain action. However even if one has made a promise, there are actions that are

suitable to be investigate later on, and decide whether one should continue doing them or not.

The point being presented here is in relation to a bodhisattva's promise. While this may not apply to us directly, as we have not actually developed bodhicitta yet, nevertheless we can still relate this to other aspects in our everyday life. As I regularly share with you, don't be hasty making promises or commitments to others prior to fully understanding what you are committing to. I have often heard people speak of a commitment in a lamenting way such as, 'Oh, I have to follow this through now because I have already made a promise'. A promise is taken very seriously and even though you no longer find the action suitable, because of a promise you feel an obligation to do it. So my advice, which is in line with what is being presented here, is don't be hasty making promises or commitments prior to investigating whether it is something suitable or manageable for you do to. You need to apply this advice into your everyday life situations.

The main point being presented here is that if normal activities that need further investigation are not given up because a promise is made, then what need is there to mention not giving up bodhicitta! This is explained further in the next verse.

What is explained here can also be understood in terms of the two types of trainees on the path: those of intelligent faculty and those of dull faculty. Those of intelligent faculty investigate thoroughly before they actually undertake any activity or practice etc. whereas those of dull intelligence or faculty don't really have the means to thoroughly investigate. They just accept and engage in the practices without too much investigation.

It is explained in the teachings that when those of intelligent faculty make a promise, the commitment is much more firm and stable than from those with dull faculty. That is because the promise or commitment is made after employing thorough investigation and analysis.

However, there is also a phrase in a text which says that siddhis or attainments may be obtained more swiftly by those with dull faculty because they immediately engage in the practice. By taking much more time to investigate and analyse, those with intelligent faculty sometimes get held back and don't engage in the practice right away. So there can be some drawbacks in taking a longer time to achieve their goals.

This relates to stories about some trainees who actually investigated bodhicitta for twelve years before finally feeling committed enough to engage in the practice, whereas those who did not have much intelligence but strong faith, just engaged in the practice, and would have developed bodhicitta sooner.

In comparison to actions done without considering the benefits and drawbacks, or minimally analysed with further room to be investigated and decided upon, the next verse points out:

3. *But how can I discard that
Which has been analysed
By the buddhas and their children with great
wisdom*

And also analysed by myself repeatedly.

The meaning of this verse is explained with a quote from a sutra. It reads:

As it is stated in the *Sutra Requested by Subahu*, the buddhas, and their children such as Maitreya, ...

At this point you can relate to an earlier explanation about the close children or disciples of the Buddha, such as Maitreya, Manjushri and so forth, who

... investigated with great wisdom the mind, praised its qualities and taught it to be indispensable in the *Array of Stalks Sutra* and others. One had also investigated with various reasons why one should definitely take this mind, by thinking about its benefits and so on.

The sutra says *investigated with great wisdom the mind*, which refers to the mind generation of bodhicitta. The close disciples of the Buddha investigated with great wisdom the benefit of bodhicitta, praised its qualities and thought it to be indispensable in *Array of Stalks Sutra* and other sutras. Likewise one had also investigated with various reasons why one should definitely take up this mind by thinking about its benefits.

So, what is being explained here is that if one had already investigated and analysed the various reasons why one should definitely generate the mind of bodhicitta, by thinking of its numerous benefits (which were explained in the first chapter) then one should definitely see reasons to actually adopt it. Having taken such action to consider the benefits of bodhicitta, how can one discard it? One needs to protect it from degenerating until attaining enlightenment.

2.1.2. The fault of giving it up

This outline is further subdivided into three:

2.1.2.1. The fault of going to the lower realms

2.1.2.2. One will degenerate from the welfare of others

2.1.2.3. One has become far from attaining a ground

The thought of *giving it up* refers to the two stages of bodhicitta: aspiring and engaging. When one first takes the vows, one generates a genuine aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and to bring about ultimate benefit and remove all suffering. Based on this very sincere and very strong intention, the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for that purpose is developed. So the aspiring bodhicitta is developed first and then based on that, one goes further and makes a commitment to actually engage in the practices of a bodhisattva in order to accomplish one's aspirations. So the pledges one makes when one takes the bodhisattva vows have great benefit in themselves. It is a great fault to give up bodhicitta after having taken the vows.

In one prayer about generating this mind, it mentions that one invites all sentient beings as guests to partake in the ultimate happiness and bliss of enlightenment. So having invited all sentient beings as one's guests, one then makes a further commitment to engage in the practices to serve the invited guests, to help them partake in ultimate happiness.

The fault, if one were to give up bodhicitta, is going to the lower realms. As one will have degenerated from the welfare of others, one has become far from attaining a ground.

2.1.2.1. THE FAULT OF GOING TO THE LOWER REALMS

This is subdivided into three

2.1.2.1.1. The reason for going to the lower realms

2.1.2.1.2. Stating supporting evidence

2.1.2.1.3. Refuting objections

2.1.2.1.1. The reason for going to the lower realms

The text reads:

4. *After having made this promise
If one does not engage into the actions,
Then one deceives all sentient beings.
How could one become a migrator?*

The commentary clearly explains the meaning of this verse:

Having made the promise to place all sentient beings in the state of enlightenment, if one then does not practice the path to achieve this aim, then one will have deceived all sentient beings. How will one then become a migrator, as one will never go beyond the lower realms?

The first part of the explanation begins with *having made the promise to place all sentient beings in the state of enlightenment, if one then does not practice the path to achieve this aim*. Many of you, who have already taken bodhisattva vows, will recall that taking the vows initially involves making the promise of generating the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Based on that strong aspiration to free all beings from suffering and lead them to ultimate state of happiness, you then generate the mind, 'I definitely need to achieve enlightenment myself'. So, based on that aspiration, the promise involves willingly making the pledge to engage in practices of the six perfections and the four means of gathering disciples.

The pledge one makes when taking the vows is done in the presence of all enlightened beings, the conquerors and their children, i.e. all buddhas and bodhisattvas, so it is in their presence that one generates the aspiration to achieve enlightenment. If it were just an aspiration then there wouldn't be much more responsibility than just being an aspiration, but the pledge involves making a conscious commitment to engage in the practices to achieve enlightenment. So since these vows and pledges are willingly made in presence of all buddhas and bodhisattvas, one has already taken upon oneself the commitment.

One has already promised sentient beings that one will do that. So having made a pledge, if one gives it up, then one will have deceived all sentient beings. Why? Because it is a lie. One promised to do something but one is not keeping that promise. One is not just deceiving one being. Telling a lie to one being is a non-virtue, so you can imagine the negativity one would incur by deceiving all sentient beings. *How will one then one become a migrator* implies how then could one ascend to higher and more fortunate realms? One would not. Having incurred the negativity of deceiving all beings one is certain to take rebirth in the lower realms. It is commonly accepted in all religions traditions that lying and deceiving others is a non-virtuous act, and that is what is being explained here.

2.1.2.1.2. Stating supporting evidence

5. *If one will become a hungry ghost
When one does not give to the person
Even the common objects
That one already offered in one's mind,*

In explaining the meaning of this verse, the commentary reads:

Regarding not giving the object of offering that one has already given in one's mind, even if it is just one morsel of food, it states in the *Sutra of Close Placement by Mindfulness*:

The sutra presents the faults of this mind using a particular example, the fault of not giving something that one has already promised to give. The fault relates to not giving even to one being something as small as a *morsel of food*. In relation to pledges made to provide happiness to all the sentient beings invited as one's guests; in the presence of all buddhas and bodhisattvas, one has made the pledge to offer them the temporary happiness of high status of humans and gods, and ultimate happiness which is the definite goodness of liberation and enlightenment. That is what one has promised to do for all sentient beings in the presence of all buddhas and bodhisattvas. The commentary next gives explanations from the sutras about the fault of not giving even a small object, such as a morsel of food.

The quote here from the *Sutra of Close Placement by Mindfulness* reads:

If they do not give even the little they intended, they will take rebirth as a migrator in the hungry ghost realm. If they do not give what they promised, then the sentient being will go to the hell realm.

The *Sutra Dividing Migrators* also states:

Whichever person, by not giving the rice and vegetables, the roots and fruits they intended to, they will experience the hungry ghost world and terrifying suffering.

The meaning of the sutra is quite easy to understand. It states quite clearly that for *whichever person, by not giving the rice and vegetables, i.e. the roots and fruits they intended to give*, but does not give it afterwards, the consequence is that *they will experience the hungry ghost world and terrifying suffering*.

The next verse in relates to this same subheading:

6. *Then how could one go to a happy migration
If one deceives all sentient beings
Concerning the highest happiness
To which one invited them from the depths of
one's mind*

The commentary explains the meaning of this verse:

If this is regarded as a cause to be reborn in the hungry ghost realm, then if one deceives all sentient beings with regards to the highest happiness and the temporary happiness of gods and humans, to which one invited all sentient beings, not just in mere words, but respectfully from the depth of one heart with a loud and clear voice, by discarding them, then how can one migrate to the happy realms? One will not.

The commentary clearly explains that when one makes a pledge and then does not give one's own food to others as intended, it creates the cause to be born in the hungry ghost realm.

If one deceives all sentient beings with regards to the highest happiness and temporary happiness of gods and humans, to which one invited all sentient beings, not just in mere words but respectfully from the depth of one's heart with a loud and clear voice: One has actually made a pledge, analysed the benefits and seen the purpose, so *the decision is made from the depth of one's heart* and one is not taking it lightly. One has considered the vows in all seriousness, not just mumbled them barely audible, but made the pledge in a clear loud voice. This relates to when we took the bodhisattva vows, when we all knelt down and put our palms together respectfully and we repeated the vows quite loudly after the master.

This point relates to those of us who have taken the vows and made those promises. We have followed in these footsteps, so while there are benefits in having taken the vows we also need be mindful of the faults of not upholding them.

2.1.2.1.3. Refuting Objections

As the text explained that the fault of giving up bodhicitta is that one will go to lower realms, an objection is raised:

The commentary first states the objection:

Question: The superior Shariputra, after having previously generated bodhicitta, was engaged in the practice of the perfections when he was asked by a demon for his right hand. Shariputra cut off his right hand and gave it to the demon with his left hand. Because of this he was severely abused by the demon and so Shariputra became sad and gave up bodhicitta. Yet he later attained the state of an Arhat. Does this not contradict what is taught in the quotes?

The objection here is that Shariputra apparently had given up bodhicitta, so Shariputra should have gone to the lower realms instead of attaining liberation.

The commentary explains that Shariputra, having previously generated bodhicitta, was engaged in the practice of perfections. When a demon disguised as Brahmin asked for his right hand and then abused him for giving it him with his left hand, Shariputra became disheartened thinking, 'I can't even help or please one sentient being', and that is when Shariputra gave up bodhicitta. So, we need to take notice that if one gives up the intention to benefit even one sentient being, one is giving up bodhicitta. From this account, we need to understand that giving up on one sentient being becomes a cause for giving up bodhicitta.

The objection here is how could Shariputra later attain the state of an arhat? *Does that not contradict what is taught in the sutras?*

The verse explains:

7. *Whichever person who gave up bodhicitta,
Their striving for liberation
Is karmic beyond thought,
And only known to the omniscient.*

In explaining the meaning of this verse, which refutes that objection, it explains that

Answer: When Shariputra, or anybody else for that matter, attains Arhatship despite having abandoned bodhicitta, then that is a karma that is beyond the knowledge of ordinary beings and can only be

understood by an all knowing Buddha. It cannot be understood by anybody else.

The point here is that despite having given up bodhicitta, Shariputra attained arhatship. This is actually a result of previous karma, but it is an aspect of karma that is beyond the knowledge of ordinary beings. Only a Buddha with an omniscient mind is able to see the subtlety of the karma which became the particular cause for him to attain arhatship. It is generally explained in the teachings that the subtleties of karma are known only by an omniscient mind.

The subtleties of karma are inconceivable in relation to the time a particular karma was created, the individual who created it, and particular circumstances under which it was created. These details are said to be known only by an omniscient mind, the all-knowing Buddha. Consider a contemporary example such as a glass. It is a fact that glass is a combination of many billions of atoms. How many atoms make up this glass and where they came from? It is not something that we are not able to know. It is only something that the mind of a Buddha would know. Likewise, karma with subtleties of time, duration, manner and location, details of previous karmas committed a long time ago, is only known by an omniscient mind. I recall one of the previous masters in Sera monastery, Gyalrong Khensur Rinpoche often used to mention the quote 'karma is unconceivable' is something.

Despite Shariputra having given up bodhicitta at a particular time, and later obtaining the state of arhatship, he not only obtained that state of arhatship as a personal liberation but also to benefit many others who had particular karmic connection with him. They definitely benefited from Shariputra after he had obtained arhatship. So these factors then, the karma that Shariputra would have created in the past to obtain those results is really something which is said to be inconceivable, something which just cannot be known and conceived by ordinary minds.

There are various other explanations as to why, rather than falling to lower realms, Shariputra actually obtained liberation. One explanation is that when Shariputra gave up bodhicitta it was only the conventional bodhicitta he gave up and he did not give up the ultimate bodhicitta which is the realisation of emptiness. And so because he did not give up the realisation of emptiness that is what caused him to obtain the state of liberation. Another explanation is that even though he had given up bodhicitta, it actually became the cause for him to obtain liberation because he hadn't given up his determination to obtain liberation. Both explanations are valid. The first explanation, that is because Shariputra didn't give up ultimate bodhicitta (the realisation of emptiness), is in accordance to Gyaltsab Rinpoche, the author of this commentary. It actually has a profound meaning.

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

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Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་མེད་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

11 March 2014

As usual we will now spend some time in meditation practice.

[meditation]

Now we can generate the motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines:

In order to liberate all sentient beings from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I definitely have to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

If we carefully think about the meaning of this very brief motivation, we will realise that it encompasses both the aspirational bodhicitta attitude as well as the engaging bodhicitta attitude. It is aspirational in the sense of making a determination to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, whilst listening to the teachings and making a commitment to practise well encompasses engaging bodhicitta.

2.1. Meditating on conscientiousness for bodhicitta

2.1.2. The fault of giving it up (cont.)

2.1.2.2. ONE WILL DEGENERATE FROM THE WELFARE OF OTHERS

It is good to keep the essential points of the chapter in mind by relating to the outline.

There are three sub-divisions under this category:

2.1.2.2.1. If one's bodhicitta degenerates, then it is a heavy downfall and one's work for the welfare of others will degenerate

2.1.2.2.2. Even if one obstructs the virtue of another bodhisattva it is similar to that, and one will go to the lower realms

2.1.2.2.3. The reason why this is so

2.1.2.2.1. If one's bodhicitta degenerates, then it is a heavy downfall and one's work for the welfare of others will degenerate

If one's bodhicitta degenerates, then it is a heavy downfall, because it is one of the eighteen root downfalls of the bodhisattva vows. Relinquishing bodhicitta is said to be one of the heaviest of the eighteen root transgressions. One's work for the welfare of others will degenerate refers to the fact that if one gives up bodhicitta then that entails giving up the pledge to engage in the practice of the six perfections. As the very basis for benefitting sentient beings, i.e. bodhicitta, is uprooted, one will not be able to adequately benefit sentient beings.

The verse relating to this outline reads:

8. *This is for bodhisattvas
The heaviest of downfalls.
Therefore, if one receives it
One harms the purpose of all sentient beings.*

In his commentary Gyalsab Je gives this explanation:

To degenerate from bodhicitta is for bodhisattvas, out of the root downfalls, the heaviest one. Since the wish to benefit degenerates, if one receives this downfall, then it harms the welfare of all sentient beings, because the basis for practice degenerates.

As the commentary clearly explains, allowing *bodhicitta to degenerate is the heaviest of the root downfalls of the bodhisattva vows*. Giving up bodhicitta *harms the welfare of sentient beings* because one's bodhicitta has degenerated as a result of having given it up. One harms the welfare of sentient beings because one breaks the pledge to help sentient beings. It is good to take note that giving up bodhicitta is one of the three ways in which a bodhisattva's vows degenerate. Another is giving up working for the welfare of even one sentient being; and the third is having an inclination to follow a path of the Lower Vehicle, e.g. the hearer's path.

Gyalsab Je further explains that *it harms the welfare of all sentient beings because the basis for practice, which is bodhicitta, degenerates*. When bodhicitta degenerates, then the very basis for the practices of the six perfections, which are the means to bring about the welfare of sentient beings, is harmed, and hence the welfare of sentient beings is harmed.

Then the commentary quotes from a sutra:

From the *Superior Compendium*:

Although one has practised the path of the ten virtues
For 10 million eons, if one generates the wish to be a self-liberator arhat,
At that moment morality has received a fault and degenerates.
Generating such a mind is heavier than the defeat of a fully ordained monk's vows.

As explained here, if one generates the wish to be a self-liberator arhat (a state of liberation in the Lower Vehicle) then, at that moment, morality has received a fault and degenerated, even though *one has practised the path of the ten virtues for millions of eons. Generating such a mind is heavier than the defeat of a fully ordained monk's vows*.

Here we need to take note that bodhicitta degenerates the moment one generates the mind of a Lesser Vehicle goal, by thinking, 'Alas, achieving enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings is too hard'.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously, one gives up bodhicitta if one develops the thought, 'I will never, ever do anything to bring about benefit for this particular sentient being'. It is mentioned in another text that if one part of something degenerates then the whole is affected. The analogy given in the teachings is that if just one bead of a rosary falls off or is damaged, then the whole rosary is incomplete. Those of you who do the six session guru practice will recall that it mentions that giving up bodhicitta is a downfall of the root bodhisattva vows. Also, the tantric vows are broken if one gives up love for sentient beings.

The promise made in the bodhisattva vows is to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, who are as vast as space, and for that purpose one promises to engage in the practices of the six perfections. Thus, taking the bodhisattva vows encompasses all sentient beings. If

the promise made was to help only some sentient beings, then not working for the welfare of one sentient would not necessarily be giving up bodhicitta. But a pledge has been made to work for all sentient beings, so if, at some stage, one decides from the depths of one's heart, 'I am not going to benefit this sentient being or engage in working for their welfare', then the bodhisattva promise has been broken. It's good to know why giving up on even one sentient being is giving up bodhicitta.

Gyaltsab Je then explains the meaning of the quote:

As it is stated, if a bodhisattva with vows gives up bodhicitta, he receives a root downfall. If he has no vows, then his negativity is still heavier than the root downfall of the vows of individual liberation.

In Tibetan the last line of the verse, translated here as *one harms the purpose of all sentient beings*, contains the word *men*, which has a connotation of being inferior. As some commentaries explain, a bodhisattva, overwhelmed by the goal of achieving enlightenment for the purpose of all sentient beings, might change their goal to that of achieving the liberation of the Lower Vehicle. If they give up bodhicitta in that way, and then attain the state of an arhat, they will, of course, still benefit beings to their capacity. However, compared to the buddhas' ability to benefit sentient beings it is quite inferior; after all, buddhas are able to help liberate countless sentient beings with just one ray of light emanating from their body; that is one explanation of the meaning of this verse.

2.1.2.2.2. Even if one obstructs the virtue of another bodhisattva, it is similar to that and one will go to the lower realms

The verse relating to this reads:

9. *When another, even only for one instant,
Obstructs their merits,
They harm the purpose of sentient beings,
There is no other possibility than to go to the
lower realms.*

Gyaltsab Je begins his explanation with:

Whoever obstructs the merits, which are the virtues of a bodhisattva for even just one moment, harms the ability of that bodhisattva to accomplish the welfare of sentient beings. Where else could he go but to the lower realms infinitely?

Here Gyaltsab Rinpoche is emphasising a point made in the teachings, a point that I have presented several times in the past. The meaning of *whoever obstructs the merits, which are the virtues of a bodhisattva for even just one moment, harms the ability of that bodhisattva to accomplish the welfare of sentient beings* is quite clear. The consequence of this is that *there is no other possibility than to go to the lower realms many times over*.

Since any activity of a bodhisattva has the sole purpose of leading all beings to the ultimate state of enlightenment, anyone who obstructs the activities of a bodhisattva is obstructing the cause for the ultimate happiness of sentient beings. Such a person definitely creates the cause to take infinite rebirths in the lower realms. Another way of understanding *obstructing the merits* is that it refers to causing the bodhicitta of a bodhisattva to degenerate. As mentioned previously, that would be a very heavy

misdeed, which will be a cause for infinite rebirths in the lower realms.

The main point being emphasised here is that every deed of a bodhisattva is a cause for the unsurpassable happiness of all sentient beings, and if one obstructs those deeds even for a moment then one is obstructing the unsurpassable happiness of all sentient beings; that incurs great negativity.

To back up this explanation Gyaltsab Je quotes from a sutra.

From the *Sutra of Magical Emanations Definitely Pacifying*:

It is heavier to obstruct the virtue of a bodhisattva of offering one instance of food or drink to an animal, than to rob all sentient beings of Jambudvīpa of their food and kill them.

As the quote says: *It is heavier to obstruct the virtue of a bodhisattva of offering one instance of food or drink to an animal, than to rob all sentient beings of Jambudvīpa (or the world) of their food and kill them*. This clearly explains that obstructing a bodhisattva's deeds incurs much more heavy negative karma than actually robbing others of their food and life.

Then Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

Because there are quotes like that, one should be careful regarding this point. One does not know who is a bodhisattva and so it is very easy to make this mistake. If one is able to protect oneself from this, then one is able to abandon the door of creating most faults with regard to people.

Here Gyaltsab Rinpoche is re-emphasising a point that he makes in his other works. We cannot judge other people from their appearances, and we cannot know another person's status just from their appearance. In other texts he says that one has to be very mindful and careful about judging and criticising others, because it could be similar to walking over a pit of fire that has been camouflaged with branches. If one is unaware of the pit of fire and, based on the external appearance, steps onto the branches, one will fall into the pit of fire and will be consumed by it. This analogy illustrates how we need to be very careful when it comes to judging and being critical of others, because we cannot know who is a bodhisattva. As Gyaltsab Rinpoche emphasises here, we cannot know who is actually a bodhisattva, because real bodhisattvas hide their qualities, and would appear as anything but a bodhisattva.

Here we can consider the example of the great Khunu Lama Rinpoche. When I had the great privilege of meeting him in Bodhgaya, he was wearing very simple clothes, almost rags really, and living very simply with only basic needs. If you saw Khunu Lama Rinpoche walking around in the street, you might think he was an ordinary beggar. People who didn't know him would not see his great qualities, but he was in fact a great practitioner of bodhicitta and a real bodhisattva. Even though I have not received any formal teachings from him I definitely had the opportunity to make a good Dharmic connection with him. When I went to see him he gave me a seed from the bodhi tree, and said I should recite the mantra of the Buddha and eat the seed as, 'That will be really good for you'.

Even though I didn't take particular note of it at that time, when I look back I really feel that it was a very significant gesture. Receiving that seed and instruction from Khunu Lama Rinpoche was almost a prediction that I would really try to take strong interest in teachings such as the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*. I received teachings on the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* from His Holiness, who received it from Khunu Lama Rinpoche. So it is a very close lineage—I received the teachings from a bodhisattva who received it directly from Khunu Lama Rinpoche himself. I have had that privilege of studying the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* and now I have the opportunity to teach and share it with you.

When I met Khunu Lama Rinpoche I definitely had the opportunity to make a good connection with him. Even though I did not have much money I did have a silver coin with me which I was able to offer to Khunu Lama Rinpoche; it was the greatest offering I could make at that time. And in return Khunu Lama Rinpoche gave me that seed from the bodhi tree.

To return to the commentary, since one doesn't know who is a bodhisattva and who is not, if one refrains from this misdeed of criticising and being judgemental of others, or, worse, harming them and their good deeds, one is able to avoid the great misdeed of potentially harming a bodhisattva.

Also, as explained in the *Precious Garland*, harming others who are engaged in virtuous deeds such as Dharma practice is a great misdeed, because one is depriving them of the opportunity to create the causes for their happiness over many future lifetimes. So we also need to be really mindful about not harming the Dharma practice of others by causing them to give up the Dharma and so forth; we really need to be mindful of these points.

So we really need to take on board this succinct advice from Gyaltsab Rinpoche and try implement it in our own lives, then we won't create those misdeeds.

2.1.2.2.3. *The reason why this is so*

Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary on this section with a question.

Why are the abovementioned actions of infinite negativity?

The relevant verse reads:

10. *If one degenerates just by harming the happiness
Of even one sentient being,
What need is there to mention
Harming the happiness of beings infinite like
space?*

Then Gyaltsab Je states:

If one destroys the happiness of abiding with life of just one sentient being, one degenerates from one's high status.

What need is there to mention that one will be reborn in the lower realms if one destroys the cause for the highest happiness of all sentient beings equalling space?

If one destroys the happiness of abiding with life of just one sentient being is basically saying that if one robs just one sentient being of their life, then *one's high status degenerates*. This is an unequivocal statement that the

consequence of taking the life of just one sentient being isn't restricted to the loss of life of the other, but has the inevitable consequences of causing one's own high status to degenerate. That being the case with the life of one sentient being, *what need is there to mention that one will be reborn into the lower realms if one destroys the cause for the highest happiness of all sentient beings equalling space?* Again, we have a very clear explanation of the great negativity that one will incur in that instance; we need to be very mindful of that.

These explanations explain why obstructing the merits and virtues of a bodhisattva are a cause for infinite rebirths in the lower realms. If one creates a great misdeed of harming the happiness of even one sentient being, then by implication, obstructing the happiness of infinite numbers of sentient beings, who are as vast as space, will definitely be a cause for infinite negativity and infinite rebirths in the lower realms.

This is another very meticulous presentation: first there is an explanation, which is followed by logical reasons, which are illuminated with analogies and examples. It is important that when we read a text we are able to make that connection between its earlier and later parts, and so derive the full meaning of the text. It is good for us to know how to relate to the texts we study in this way.

The explanation we have just covered is also a profound explanation of the cause and effect sequence of karma. As mentioned earlier, one's high status degenerates if one destroys the happiness of abiding with life of just one sentient being. The implication is that those who are ignorant of the cause and effect sequence of karma will engage in acts of negativity, such as taking the life of others. It is basically through the ignorance of the law of karma that one incurs the fault of allowing one's high status to degenerate. So we can regard ourselves as being extremely fortunate to have been introduced to the law of karma. Through having some understanding and faith in the law of karma we are protected from creating misdeeds that would be the cause for one's own high status to degenerate.

2.1.2.3. ONE WILL BECOME FAR FROM ATTAINING A GROUND

As will be explained in the verse and in the commentary, it is implied here that if one generates very strong bodhicitta at one point, gives it up later and then strongly regenerates that bodhicitta, one will still be far from attaining a ground.

The verse relating to this heading reads:

11. *Thus, those with the heavy downfall
And with strong bodhicitta,
Should they further alternate in cyclic existence
Shall be far from attaining a ground.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Thus as explained earlier, those who have received the heavy downfall of abandoning bodhicitta, as well as those who re-generate bodhicitta strongly afterwards, will further circle in cyclic existence alternately, by taking alternate rebirths in the lower realms and in the higher realms due to afflictions and karma. It will take a long time to obtain the grounds such as Very Joyous and so forth. Therefore one

should strive to avoid the degeneration of one's bodhicitta, even at the cost of one's life.

This is clearly explaining that for anyone who has incurred the heavy downfall of abandoning bodhicitta, as well as those who regenerate bodhicitta strongly afterwards, will further take alternate rebirths in the lower realms and higher realms due to afflictions and karma. Thus, as explained here, *it will take a long time to obtain the grounds such as Very Joyous and so forth.*

This explanation is quite specific: once bodhicitta has been developed strongly it has to be maintained without degeneration to obtain the intended result of enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Even though this explanation is directed towards bodhisattvas who have developed bodhicitta, it is also relevant to us. We sometimes have a strong aspiration to develop a good attitude and meditate, and we try to practise the Dharma with a lot of zest. But sometimes we completely forget about that and allow the delusions to run rampant. This is particularly the case when we leave this room. During a session we might assume a pious aspect of meditating and so forth, and then as soon as we leave we become completely crazed with attachment. We need to take the advice given here as personal instruction, which is to maintain continuity in our practice. The habit of vacillating between practising and not practising does not bear any fruit.

2.2. Being conscientious in the trainings

This section is divided into three:

2.2.1. Conscientiously abandoning faults

2.2.2. Conscientiously meditating on virtue

2.2.3. Conscientiously abandoning the afflictions

2.2.1. Conscientiously abandoning faults

Here there are five subheadings:

These are quite empirical points; it is good to have a general understanding of the structure and sequence of the sub-headings.

2.2.1.1. If one does not abandon negativity and downfalls one will stay in the lower realms

This shows us the importance of recognising negativities and downfalls. Then we can protect ourselves from committing them, and if they are created, we need to purify them. Otherwise we will have to endure the consequence of staying in the lower realms for a long period of time.

2.2.1.2. The buddhas and bodhisattvas will remain impartial

This indicates that if we don't take the initiative to develop and to uphold the bodhicitta vows and so forth from our own side, then the buddhas and bodhisattvas will remain impartial because there is not much more they can do for us. They can't do anything extra for us if we don't take the initiative to implement these vows in our own practice.

2.2.1.3. The freedoms and endowments will be difficult to find

2.2.1.4. If reborn in the lower realms one has no opportunity to generate virtue

2.2.1.5. Why it is difficult to find freedoms and endowments

2.2.1.1. IF ONE DOES NOT ABANDON NEGATIVITY AND DOWNFALLS ONE WILL STAY IN THE LOWER REALMS

Again, this is a personal instruction; it is really important to ensure that whatever activities we engage in become a cause for attaining liberation and enlightenment. Thus it is important for us to check whether an activity is in line with creating the causes for liberation and enlightenment, or whether it could become a cause to be reborn in the lower realms. One needs to investigate and analyse one's activities in this way to protect oneself from these unwanted consequences.

The verse that relates to this outline is:

12. *Therefore I should practice respectfully
According to my promise.
If I do not strive starting from today
Then I will go from low to low.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

Therefore I should practise respectfully the trainings to attain enlightenment for the welfare of sentient beings according to my promise.

If, after having generated bodhicitta and taken the vows, I do not make an effort, I will continuously go from lower realm to lower realm due to heavy downfalls.

As the commentary clearly explains, because of the reasons explained earlier, *I should practise respectfully the trainings to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings according to my promise.* Having considered the consequences of giving up bodhicitta (or allowing bodhicitta to degenerate), one commits here to practise *respectfully*, which means with great reverence, and one practises and engages in the training with *great humility* to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings in accordance with the *promise* that one has made earlier. So this is what is clearly explained.

Furthermore, *if after having generated bodhicitta and taken the vows, I do not make an effort, I will continuously go from lower realm to lower realm due to heavy downfalls* reminds us again of paying heed to avoiding the downfalls. Here, downfalls refer to breaching a commitment of the bodhisattva vows. Likewise for those who have self-liberation vows, one incurs a downfall if one breaches a commitment of the self-liberation vows.

2.2.1.2. THE BUDDHAS AND BODHISATTVAS WILL REMAIN IMPARTIAL

The root text is introduced with this rhetorical thought:

One may think: I shall be all right because the buddhas and bodhisattvas will rescue me.

This section indicates that one cannot be complacent and think in this way. It is also indicating the unique manner in which the Buddha's teachings benefit sentient beings. You should take note of this.

The main point presented here is that we cannot be complacent, thinking, 'Even though I've not managed too well to date, things will be better later on'. We often fall into this habit of thinking, 'Oh, maybe I didn't do so well this year, but that's fine. I will do better next year' or 'Next time round, I will do better!' We often procrastinate in this way and rather than taking the initiative to put everything into practice now, we leave it for later.

Here, the fault is along the same lines: even if I have incurred some faults and so forth, the buddhas and bodhisattvas who are comparatively kind, will definitely rescue me and I will have no problem.

The verse which relates to this is:

13. *Although innumerable buddhas benefiting
All sentient beings have passed,
Due to my faults
I was not an object of their help.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with:

Innumerable buddhas and bodhisattvas who have worked for the benefit of all sentient beings have passed already, but due to one's own fault of degenerating bodhicitta and the trainings, one did not become the object of their cure.

As the commentary explains, *innumerable buddhas and bodhisattvas who have worked for the benefit of all sentient beings have passed*, which means that they have come to this world and have passed on. But *due to one's own fault of degenerating bodhicitta and the trainings, one did not become the object of their cure*.

This is also in line with a verse in the *Guru Puja*, which states

Even with the countless buddhas who have
descended,
I have not been able to be subdued.

The implication of the heading *The buddhas and bodhisattvas will be impartial* is that if one allows one's bodhicitta and practices to degenerate then even though they are kind and have descended, one will not be an object of benefit from the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Then, Gyaltsab Je quotes this line:

From the *Ornament of Clear Realisation*:

Although the king of gods shower rain, and so forth

This is an analogy: even though the gods may send down heavy rains, if the seed in the ground is actually faulty or rotten then no matter how much rain descends, it will not be able to sprout. The fault is not the lack of rain, but lies with the seed. Likewise, the rain of Dharma from innumerable buddhas has fallen, but because of their faults many sentient beings have not benefitted from that, and thus realisations and so forth have not sprouted in their minds.

Then Gyaltsab Je continues his commentary with this:

One may then think: I will be all right because they will rescue me later.

Then follows the second verse under this sub-heading:

14. *If I continue to act like this
It will be the same again and again.
I will experience sickness, bondage,
Being cut and mutilated in the lower realms.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation of the meaning of the verse reads:

If I continue to act recklessly, I shall not become the object of their cure and will have to experience suffering continuously. I will have to take rebirth in the lower realms and even if I take rebirth in the happy realms I will have sickness and lack of freedom.

Either that or I will have sickness in the lower realms, and experience innumerable sufferings there, such as my arms and legs being cut off, and my body being lacerated.

This is explaining that after having made the pledge and generated bodhicitta, if one actually gives it up and acts recklessly, then one will *not become an object of their cure*. Rather, one will have to experience suffering continuously.

In relation to the ripened results, one *will have to take rebirth in the lower realms*. The environmental results are that, *even if I take rebirth in the happy realms*, such as the human realm, *I will have sickness and lack of freedom*. Even when reborn in the human realm, one may still *experience innumerable sufferings such as arms and legs being cut off and my body being lacerated* and so forth. So these are the types of sufferings that can be experienced even in a higher rebirth.

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

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