
Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

26 March 2013

Based on the motivation that we generated when we recited the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in our meditation practice, which encompasses the basis of love and compassion. [meditation]

That will be sufficient for now; if the meditation session is too long, there is the danger that the meditation turns into sleep.

The meditation practice that we have just engaged in is one that establishes, and further develops the basis of love and compassion within oneself. Indeed, this practice is an essential one, in that without a basis of love and compassion there is no way that we can truly benefit other beings. Love and compassion is our best companion and brings us great solace, because it protects our minds from negativities. We can safely conclude that the practice of love and compassion is essential throughout life and not restricted to meditation sessions. So we need to try to incorporate love and compassion into all aspects of our daily life.

It is not as if we lack the basis of love and compassion, or that we need to develop it afresh because the basis of love and compassion exists in all human beings. That is true regardless of whether we are religious or not. You can see how even animals express love and compassion, so it is should be more pronounced among humans. What we need to do is to further develop and cherish the love and compassion that we already have within ourselves.

Love and compassion are the fundamental basis of Dharma practice. To neglect developing love and compassion and engage in some other form of practice, while assuming that one is practising the Dharma is completely missing the point! In fact, such a person would be an object of the great compassion of the noble and enlightened beings. Neglecting to develop love and compassion shows they have not understood the essence of the Dharma. It is really important to understand that if we wish to engage in Dharma practice, we need to know the essential basis of Dharma practice, which is to cultivate love and compassion. We can sit rigidly through long hours of meditation and say many prayers, but we won't be actually practising the Dharma unless our practice is based on the cultivation of love and compassion. That is what we really need to keep in mind.

Out of love and compassion one will take the initiative to avoid intentionally causing harm to others. Non-violence is practised on the basis of love and compassion, and when further developed it will provide the impetus to extend that love and compassion to benefit all sentient beings. The practice of not harming, but benefiting others in every situation, is the very foundation of Dharma practice.

If, after many years of engagement in some form of Dharma practice, one finds that one is not becoming kinder and more gentle, then that is an indication that one is neglecting a very important element of the Dharma. If we have practised developing love and compassion as part of our Dharma practice, we will definitely see some improvement in our

conduct and behaviour. But if we find we still lack a gentle nature and a genuinely kind heart, then that shows that we have neglected to focus on developing love and compassion. This is a really important point to understand.

As Lama Tsong Khapa has so very kindly exhorted us to do, we need to put whatever teachings we have heard and validated by thinking and investigating it, into the practice of meditation. That is the approach we need to take if we are to engage in the practice of the Dharma. To merely acknowledge, 'Oh that makes sense' or 'that is a good point' but not actually applying it to our own life, would mean that the Dharma we have heard has not been of much benefit, and a deeper transformation will not take place.

An analogy to illustrate how the Dharma practice can help to transform one's mind is that just as a mirror reflects what's on our face, the Dharma can reflect what lies within our own mind. The mirror is serving its purpose when reflecting dirt on our face so that we can clean it up. Likewise, the Dharma reflects the faults in our own mind, which we would otherwise be unable to detect. Thus through the medium of the Dharma, we are able to clearly see the dirt-like defects in our own mind.

Having recognised these defects as faults, we then need to take the initiative to start clearing them away and thus work on transforming our mind. When we take the initiative and begin to apply the Dharma in our practice, we will begin to see a true transformation taking place as our minds naturally become kinder and calmer. If, however, one tries to practise the Dharma without first gaining a proper understanding, then at a certain point when one realises that a true sense of change and transformation has not taken place, then there is the great danger of criticising and forsaking the Dharma. One may end up thinking 'There is no real value in the Dharma as it doesn't work and it doesn't serve any purpose'. At that point there is the grave danger of entirely giving up the Dharma.

We need to take the initiative to analyse our own mind and investigate what is going on within, and try to differentiate between the positive and the negative states of mind. When we notice a negative mind, we need to actively engage in trying to overcome that negativity, while further increasing the positive states of mind. If one applies that measure on a regular basis, then a true transformation will gradually but definitely take place.

My meagre attempts to engage in Dharma practice have definitely benefited my own mind. I am not in any way claiming that I have done any great practice, but I have made genuine attempts to practise developing love and compassion, really thinking about how to strengthen and further develop love and compassion within myself. So at this stage in my life, I can safely say that I have experienced real benefits as a result of my meagre efforts—I have witnessed some transformation taking place in my mind.

If this has been true for my meagre attempts, then there is no question that there will be a great transformation and tremendous positive results for those who are able to engage in a serious practice of developing love and compassion, meditating on it extensively, and dedicating their whole life to developing love and compassion. My meagre practice has not only confirmed the benefits of this practice, but it has also given me great respect and reverence for those who have actually perfected love and compassion, such as the buddhas and the bodhisattvas. They are the objects of our faith and veneration and we can see why that is the case—they have completely perfected love and compassion to the

point that they are actually an embodiment of love and compassion. They have become enlightened beings and bodhisattvas because they have developed and increased their love and compassion. So they have become a great inspiration for us to follow their example, and that is the real reason why we pay respect and venerate the enlightened beings. Of course you must not misinterpret this to mean that I am claiming to have developed any great qualities. That is not the case at all!

The great master Atisha said that we need to hide any qualities that we may possess while proclaiming our own faults, and proclaim the qualities of others and hide their faults. This is very practical advice. If we fall into the normal pattern of focusing on others' faults, then the only their faults will appear to us. So others will always appear to us in a negative light as we are focussing only on their faults.

Regardless of whether or not others have faults, we need to make an attempt to acknowledge their qualities, and then they will appear to us in a positive light. That will, in turn benefit our own mind, helping it to maintain a positive outlook. This also relates to the recent findings of scientists who have claimed that when you see a fault in any object, for example when you are angry, only 5% of that fault lies in the object whereas the other 95% is a projection from one's own mind. That is definitely in accord with what the teachings present—when we see faults in others it is mostly our own projection. Understanding this point is extremely beneficial for our own mind. If we constantly focus on the faults of others then how will we be able to get along with them? We need to get along with so many other people, and focussing on their qualities is the most practical way to deal with the situation in a most effective manner.

Now we need to get on with the study of the material that we have in front of us.

2.1. Exhortation to take the essence of the basis with its freedoms and endowments

In our last session there was a presentation of how a precious human life is very rare and difficult to obtain. This is explained here with an analogy which shows how the causes for obtaining the precious human life are so rare. A more detailed explanation of this will be presented in the fourth chapter.

The Difficulty of Achieving Freedoms and Endowments

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je introduces this heading and then quotes from Nagarjuna's *Letter to a Friend*:

Like a golden yoke on a great ocean in motion
And a turtle meeting it; it is more difficult to be an
animal
And to become human even more difficult. Work
with the human power
To achieve this aim by practising the holy Dharma.

The analogy presented in this verse indicates the extreme unlikelihood of taking a fortunate rebirth. The yoke of an ox's harness has a hole in the middle where the ox's head goes in. In this analogy the yoke is drifting on the surface of an ocean. It is just about impossible for a blind turtle, which rises to the surface once in a hundred years, to meet the yoke and putting its head into the hole.

In the analogy the term *golden* is used to indicate something that is very precious. Thus, the *golden yoke* represents the Buddha's teachings, which are very precious.

The yoke not remaining in one place but *drifting* in different directions indicates that it is not certain that the Buddha's teachings will remain in the one place for too long.

The *turtle putting its head into the hole of the yoke* is an indication of taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, which is considered a doorway to adopting the Buddha's teachings, and putting them into practice.

The turtle *surfacing every hundred years* indicates the rarity of obtaining a precious human rebirth. If it were to come to the surface regularly, it would have a greater chance of placing its head into the yoke. But surfacing every hundred years indicates the rarity of obtaining a precious human life with all the conditions—the eight freedoms and ten endowments—intact.

This analogy reminds us that it is a very rare coincidence to have met with the Buddha's teachings with all of the conditions intact. As we have actually achieved this rare state we must now seize this opportunity and utilise it to make it most meaningful, by putting the teachings we have received into practice, as it is very unlikely that these conditions will recur in the future. The main point is that we must seize the opportunity that we have now to derive the essence of this life.

We should not regard what is being presented here merely as a fancy narration. Rather we must take the meaning to heart and apply it to our own situation. We need to understand that we must seize the opportunity provided by these precious conditions and utilise them for our own practice. If one has no inclination to practise the Dharma, then of course all of this is irrelevant. But if we are inclined to practise the Dharma, then we need to see the relevance of what is being presented here and take it as a personal instruction. There will be no better opportunity to practise Dharma other than now, when we have all of these conditions intact.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je follows his quotation from *Letter to a Friend* with this statement:

By abandoning the eight states of non-freedom one achieves freedom.

As explained previously, *freedom* or *leisure* refers to being free from certain adverse conditions.

Gyaltsab Je then continues:

[Nagarjuna's] *Letter to a Friend* states that the eight states of non-freedom are:

Holding wrong views and birth as animal,
Hungry ghost or hell being,
Without the conqueror's teachings and birth as
barbarian
In a border country and being deaf and dumb,
And birth as long life god, being born as any of
these,
Is called being born without freedom.
Having found freedom free from those,
Strive to become free from birth.

The specifics of the eight freedoms are clearly presented in other sources such as Lam Rim teachings. We can refer to those more extensive explanations to gain a clearer understanding of them. The essential point Nagarjuna is presenting here is that *having found freedom, free from those eight adverse conditions* (in which one would not have the opportunity to engage in the practice of Dharma), we must *strive to become free from birth*, which means to be free from being reborn with these adverse conditions. In accordance

with explanations given in the past we first need to contemplate the great sufferings that are experienced under those eight adverse conditions, such as the suffering of being born as an animal. Then we need to personalise that and consider how unbearable it would be if we were born in that situation. Out of the fear of being born in those suffering conditions, we take refuge in the Three Jewels. Then, based on our sincere reliance on the Three Jewels, we adopt the practice of avoiding non-virtue and accumulating virtues. This is how we strive to be free from being reborn in such uncomfortable and unfavourable situations in the future.

These eight adverse conditions can be subdivided into two main categories: four of which are non-human rebirths, such as being born an animal and so forth; and four adverse conditions while being born as a human, such as being born where the teachings have not occurred, as a barbarian, or as a deaf and mute. If we were reborn with any of these adverse conditions there would be no possibility for us to properly understand the Dharma. We can safely assume that our current freedom from these adversities is our great fortune. Not utilising these conditions would be a complete waste of a wonderful opportunity.

Having quoting Nagarjuna's text, Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Because there is no freedom to practice the Dharma in these eight states they are called states of non-freedom.

As explained in the commentary, these eight states are called freedoms because they are the opposites of the adverse conditions of not having the freedom to practise the Dharma. At this point, one can ask, 'What are the good conditions needed to practise the Dharma'? The good conditions are referred to here as the ten endowments, which can be divided into two categories: five that are related to personal favourable conditions and five that relate to external favourable conditions.

Next, Gyaltsab Je states:

The Hearer's Grounds states that the ten endowments are:

The five endowments of self:
Human, central born, complete faculties,
Not having transgressed the limits of karma, faith in the source

Not having transgressed the limits of karma means not having committed or not having induced others to commit the immediate actions. Having faith in the source means to have faith in the three baskets of the teachings

The first endowment is to be born *human*. Unlike some other rebirths, the very fact of being human means that one has the capacity and intelligence to be able to understand what is being presented. Actually, the definition of a human is 'a being who is able to speak and understand'. This means being able to communicate whatever one feels and wishes to express, as well as being able to understand what others are expressing. Thus, being born as a human means that we have the capacity to understand the Dharma.

Being central born means being born in the central land, which is a land where the Buddha's teachings are prevalent.

Having *complete faculties* clearly means having all the sense faculties intact.

Not having transgressed the limits of karma (which will be explained in the text itself) basically means that one has not

committed any of the five heinous crimes, meaning the five actions of immediate retribution.

Faith in the source means having *faith in the three baskets of the Buddha's teachings*.

With respect to the last five endowments that relate to external conditions, Gyaltsab Je again quotes from *The Hearer's Grounds*:

A buddha has come and taught the holy Dharma; the teachings abide, and those following; there is affectionate compassion for others.

A buddha has come refers to the Buddha actually having come to this world.

And taught the holy Dharma refers to having given the teachings or turned the wheel of Dharma

Although we have not been born in the actual presence of the Buddha, we have been born at the time of the Buddha in a sense, because we live at a time when the Buddha's teachings are prevalent. That is due to the unbroken lineage which has been passed them down.

Teachings abide means that the teachings are being actively taught and practised.

Those following refers to the hearers, solitary realisers and the bodhisattvas who created the unbroken lineage of the teachings.

Affectionate compassion for others, indicates that there are affectionate and compassionate individuals who are willing to support us as we follow and practise the Dharma.

If the Buddha had not come to this world then, even though we have been born as a human, we would not have met all the necessary conditions that are conducive to ensuring a fortunate rebirth. So we meet the requirement of having been born at a time when *the Buddha has come*. Not only that, but he has *given the teachings*. If he had not given the teachings, we would not benefit from them. And the teachings have not only been presented, but they still *abide at this time*. *Those who follow the teachings* refers to the great practitioners such as the bodhisattvas, the great meditators and so forth. As they have gained significant realisations from having practised and followed the Dharma, they serve as a great inspiration for us. Even if all of the other conditions were intact, we still need others whose love and *compassion* will support us and encourage us to engage in the practice of the Dharma. And we are living at a time where there are those who actually support us in our practice and so forth. If one wholeheartedly dedicates one's life to practising the Dharma, there will be no need to worry about finding the means to support oneself, because there will definitely be others who will render that support. We can feel incredibly fortunate because we have met all the conditions mentioned here.

There is a saying in Tibet that initially when one sincerely begins to practice the Dharma, one's resources can be so meagre that it is as if the mouth can't find food! But later on, having practised and endured many hardships, one reaches a point where there is so much food around that it doesn't find enough mouths to feed! When we apply that example to our time, we can witness so much food going to waste, which is because it has not found adequate mouths to feed!

2.2. The method for taking the essence

This is the next of the meticulously presented headings. Having described the appropriate conditions to achieve a human rebirth with the eight freedoms and ten endowments

intact, and exhorting us to take the essence of that to make our life most meaningful, the question that then arises is, 'Well how does one actually take the essence of one's life to make it meaningful?'. Hence this heading, which has two main parts:

2.2.1. The general presentation

2.2.2. Explaining the individual meanings

2.2.1. The general presentation

Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary on this section thus:

This text [*Bodhisattvacharyavatara*] shows the complete stage of the path to enlightenment. It shows the training in the thoughts of the small and middling beings as preliminaries for the training in the thought of the great capable being. It shows that having generated the mind of supreme enlightenment, one then trains in the six perfections of generosity and so forth.

Then Gyaltsab Je goes on to summarise the contents of each of the chapters.

Initially, to generate the mind of supreme enlightenment, one needs to strongly increase joyful strength through contemplating its benefits well. This is described in the first chapter, which also shows the training in the thoughts of the small and middling being as auxiliary limbs for the generation of the mind of enlightenment.

In order to generate the mind of supreme enlightenment or bodhicitta, one first needs to develop a strong joyful strength by contemplating the benefits of bodhicitta. That is the main topic of the first chapter, which is a presentation of the benefits of the mind of supreme enlightenment or bodhicitta. The term *auxiliary limbs* means, that this chapter also presents the practices of the small and middling scopes.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Then, to generate the mind of supreme enlightenment, which has the root of love and compassion, one must confess the opposing conditions, i.e. the negativities, and one must build up the conducive condition, i.e. accumulate merit.

This is done on the basis of having cleaned the place of practice, as if one is expecting a wheel-turning king to visit one's house. Then one needs to take the mind of enlightenment. The former is explained in chapter two and the latter in chapter three.

Thus chapter two describes how to purify the negativities, while chapter three presents the conducive conditions for the accumulating merit to develop the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta. As conducive conditions refers to the accumulation of merit chapter three is based on the means of accumulating merit.

Next, Gyaltsab Je's commentary describes the fourth chapter:

The fourth chapter demonstrates the need for conscientiousness, the factor that prevents the degeneration of virtues gained from training in generating the perfections.

Thus the subject matter of the fourth chapter is how to develop conscientiousness as a way to protect the mind gained from training in the perfections from declining.

Gyaltsab Je then concludes his commentary on this section:

The next chapters provide the way of training in the six perfections. The fifth chapter gives extensive instructions on the way of training in morality by way of protecting one's mind with mindfulness and

introspection. The way of training in patience, enthusiasm, mental stabilisation and wisdom are explained in the next four chapters.

The tenth chapter gives a comprehensive overview of the way of training in generosity, with extensive notes on how to train in the mind of giving by dedicating one's body, possessions and virtues to others. The training in generosity is also explained at the time of taking the mind of enlightenment and so forth. The resulting buddhahood is explained in the ninth chapter.

With this general presentation, the commentary clearly explains how the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* divides its subject matter—how to develop the awakening mind or the mind that aspires to achieve enlightenment—into different chapters.

In order to present a guide for developing bodhicitta, the benefits of the awakening mind or bodhicitta need to be understood, and that is the subject matter of the first chapter. In order to be able to develop bodhicitta, one needs to first purify one's own mind of negativities, which is the subject matter of the second chapter. The third chapter relates to establishing the conducive conditions for accumulating merit. Then, having developed the bodhicitta or the awakening mind we need to ensure that it doesn't decline, for which we need conscientiousness and mindfulness, and those are explained in the next two chapters. The six perfections are then presented in the remaining chapters. This is a concise summary of the subject matter of the whole text.

Thus, the concise presentation of the Mahayana path or the Great Vehicle is that it consists of a mind that is an awakening mind or a mind of bodhicitta, and the practice of the Great Vehicle is the six perfections. This is the subject matter of the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*.

We will now recite the *Eight Verses of Mind Training* and dedicate the merits of the recitation to Susan Coates' father, who has passed away.

I explained the visualisation when we did the *Eight Verses of Mind Training* in our last Easter course. As explained at that time, we visualise the Buddha Amitabha on the top of our crown. Then as we make requests to Buddha Amitabha, light emanating from his body descends into us and purifies the negativities of the deceased person. So we can base the visualisation on that.

I know Susan Coates to be very modest and good person, who is one of the older students of our study group. Personally, she has been very kind to me, and she always makes very nutritious and delicious food when she provides meals for me. Of course every time I receive a meal I also make strong prayers and dedications. Yesterday I happened to have a meal with her and when I asked 'How is your dad?', she said, 'Actually, he has passed away'. Last Thursday Llysse told me that Susan's father was critically ill, and I was already doing prayers. Susan told me that his passing away was very gentle and peaceful.

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

Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

© Tara Institute

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྣོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

2 April 2013

Based on the motivation that we have just generated with the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in the meditation practice. In particular we generate this intention: In order to benefit all sentient beings by leading them to the ultimate state of happiness and freedom from all suffering, I will engage in the *tong len* meditation practice, which is based on the expression of love and compassion for all sentient beings.

[meditation]

The meditation that we have just done will suffice as our motivation for the teaching as well, as it has enhanced our original motivation. Every time we engage in the *tong len* practice, we are directly increasing the sense of love and compassion within our own heart, and that is something that we really need to work on developing, because it is as a result of our lack of love and compassion that we find ourselves engaging in so many negative actions. So there is not much point in putting the development of these essential qualities of love and compassion to one side, while focussing on some other practice.

As I regularly emphasise, love and compassion is the basis for whatever practice we do. So it is relevant that the subject matter of this very text that we are studying now is also based on love and compassion. It presents methods on how to generate the superior intention and the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta.

The text begins with a meticulous presentation of the benefits of bodhicitta, followed by the reasons for developing bodhicitta. As I emphasise again and again, we need to relate to this on a personal level, and daily develop the strong intention, 'I am going to do my utmost to benefit living beings and my utmost to not harm any living being' before engaging in any other activity. At the very least we can certainly manage to adopt that intention as a wish which, at our beginner's level, will suffice for a bodhicitta attitude. As we develop and increase that intention it becomes the basis for developing actual bodhicitta. I find this to be really useful and beneficial point to contemplate.

If we develop that mind as a basis for developing bodhicitta, that will in turn become the basis for developing the excellence of all good qualities, the ultimate state of enlightenment. What may otherwise seem like a simple intention is in fact the basis for developing all the qualities of a bodhisattva. The bodhicitta attitude encompasses benefitting other sentient beings in every possible way and avoiding even the slightest harm to any sentient being. As there are numberless sentient beings, there are numberless ways to benefit them, and equally, numberless ways to avoid harming sentient beings. By reflecting upon that, we can get an inkling of the extent of the bodhisattvas' deeds, which will then inspire us to develop bodhicitta ourselves.

When we relate to the benefits of developing bodhicitta in a logical way, we will definitely begin to see that there are so many benefits from developing the mind that aspires to

achieve enlightenment. As mentioned previously, there are numberless ways to benefit sentient beings and numberless ways to avoid harming sentient beings, simply because there is an infinite number of living beings. When we contemplate this fact, then we will begin to see why the mind aspiring to achieve enlightenment is so precious and invaluable.

Another point to keep in mind is that, as the past masters have said, without the wish for others to be happy and free from suffering, there is no way that the actual wish to benefit others will arise. So the wish to benefit others is based on these two essential elements—wishing others to be happy and wishing them to be free from suffering. When we understand this we will see why those who have developed an unceasing, spontaneous wish to benefit others and who are actually engaging in deeds to benefit numberless sentient beings and avoid harm, are indeed worthy objects of veneration. This is precisely why bodhisattvas are considered as holy beings. As we deepen our understanding of the actual benefits of the awakening mind, it becomes a personal inspiration for us to develop the awakening mind ourselves.

I cannot emphasise enough the great benefits that can be derived from every effort that we make to develop love and compassion in our hearts. The more we acquaint ourselves with genuine loving kindness, the more our own mind will become really calm and settled, and not easily disturbed by either excitement or depression. Rather than being judgmental and hostile or overly excited when we meet someone, we will be able to relate to them in a genuine calm manner. So we can see how having a calm mind changes the way how we relate to other sentient beings. Of course this will be explained in detail in the text itself.

2.2.1. Explanation of the Individual Meanings

CHAPTER 1: CONTEMPLATING THE BENEFITS OF THE MIND OF ENLIGHTENMENT¹

There is a significant reason why contemplating the benefits of the mind of enlightenment is presented first. In order to be inspired to develop the mind of enlightenment, one first needs to see the benefits of having that mind, which also includes the purpose for developing the mind of enlightenment.

There are two parts to the chapter:

1. Explaining the text of the chapter
2. The title of the chapter

1. EXPLAINING THE TEXT OF THE CHAPTER

The text of the chapter has two subdivisions:

1. The advice that is suitable to abandon negativity and to accomplish virtue
2. Contemplating extensively the benefits of bodhicitta

1.1. THE ADVICE THAT IS SUITABLE TO ABANDON NEGATIVITY AND TO ACCOMPLISH VIRTUE

The suitable basis for developing the awakening mind is two-fold: a good physical body and a pure mind. The suitable body needed to develop the awakening mind was presented earlier with the explanation of the eight freedoms and ten endowments. Gyaltsab Je's commentary now turns to the suitable mind needed as the basis for developing the awakening mind, which is a pure mind that abandons negativity and accomplishes virtue.

¹ To keep things manageable the numbering system will start again for each chapter.

As Gyaltsab Rinpoche points out with the heading, the advice contained in this section of Shantideva's text is that it is suitable to abandon all negativity and to accomplish virtue.

It is always good to relate the topics presented in this text to the lam rim teachings as well. To use simple terms to understand the point being made here, we all have a natural inclination to strive for happiness and avoid any kind of suffering. Thus the reason we need to abandon negativity is because negativity is the cause leading us to experience the result of suffering. Conversely engaging in virtue is naturally the cause that leads us to experience the consequence of happiness. As such, when the lam rim teachings present karma in detail, they are explaining how the cause and effect process actually works.

The definition of **negativity is that which brings about unpleasant results**. The definition of **virtue is that which brings about a happy result**. So that is the basis of the advice for the need to accomplish virtue and shun negativity, which is explained in great detail in the lam rim. Gaining a sound understanding of karma is said to be the very foundation of Dharma practice. These are really significant points to keep in mind.

The reason why I emphasise this point is that understanding the profundity of the cause and effect sequence of karma is related to the understanding of interdependent origination, or dependent arising. The masters have indicated that it is only when one has gained a full understanding of interdependent origination that one begins to understand the correct view of emptiness. Without that sound basis of understanding interdependent origination, one cannot possibly gain a true understanding of emptiness. Although one may assume one is meditating on emptiness, it could only be some form of vacuity, where there is nothing to be realised.

Understanding that a particular type of cause brings about a particular type of effect means that it is crucial to understand the nature of causes. A negative cause needs to be shunned and eradicated; and a positive cause needs to be adopted and really cherished, just as a farmer cherishes his seeds. Although some seeds may appear to be small and insignificant, the farmer knows the good effects that each seed can produce. In a practical sense, we need to understand the relevance of karma in the same way.

The point that I derive as a personal instruction is that negativity is really much stronger than virtue. We don't have to think much about engaging in negativity, because it comes about spontaneously. Virtue, on the other hand is very weak. In fact it is so weak that we barely have any intention to engage in virtue, and even when we do, it doesn't have much strength and is only of short duration. So there is little opportunity to accumulate virtue. When we acknowledge that negativity is prevalent and strong, and virtue is very weak, it gives us the initiative to try to change them around. This is the point that I get from the following presentation.

Just to re-emphasise the point, negativity is that which brings about unpleasant results, things that we don't wish for and that we don't want to experience. Virtue is that which brings about pleasant experiences, the effect of which is happiness. As what is being presented here is abandoning or overcoming negativity and adopting virtue, it is good to understand from the very outset what negativity and virtue really mean.

The relevant lines from the text read:

5. *Just like a flash of lightning illuminates the Dark clouded night sky for a moment, Likewise sometimes, through the power of the Buddha, Worldly beings receive wisdom and merit occasionally.*

6a. *Hence, virtue is always meek*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Nowadays, when we are of little merit and our negativities are very strong, it is appropriate to meditate on the antidotes to the negativities.

Nowadays refers to our present degenerate times. In these few lines Gyaltsab Je has derived the essence of the verse. As we don't have much *merit* and have *very strong negativities*, that in itself is the reason why it is appropriate for us *to meditate on the antidotes to the negativities*, and to engage in actions to purify those negativities.

The example presented in the verse is then explained in the commentary:

For example, just as one can see form very clearly for an instant when the dark clouded night sky is illuminated by a flash of lightning, ...

There are three significant elements in this analogy.

Night indicates it is night time when there is no illumination from the sun, which is analogous to the lack of the Buddha's omniscient wisdom radiating down to illuminate the minds of sentient beings.

Dark indicates a moonless night, which is analogous to the darkness of not knowing what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded.

Clouded indicates that even the stars are not being visible, which refers to the mind being clouded with the three poisons.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then explains that just as such a sky is illuminated by a flash of lightning:

... in the same way, for worldly beings the wisdom that establishes virtue thinking, 'I have to act meritoriously' arises only occasionally. Beings do not possess such thinking continually.

These points need to be seen as a personal instruction. Acting *meritoriously* or accumulating virtue *arises only very occasionally*. It is through the blessings of the enlightened beings, and maybe some small virtue or merit we have accumulated in the past, that the thought of engaging in meritorious deeds will arise briefly. So we can understand now why it is so hard to engage in accumulating merit or virtue.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then continues:

For that reason they always remain with little virtue, and similar to the dark clouded night sky, they have difficulty overcoming the strong negativities that cause rebirth in the lower realms.

The analogy of lightning on a dark night is a very vivid one. The illumination from the flash of lightning remains for only a few seconds, and when the lightning fades we are engulfed in darkness again. Similarly, it is incredibly difficult for the mind of virtue to arise in ignorant beings, and when it does arise, the duration is very short. What we need to really consider is how precious virtuous thoughts are, and how we need to look for every opportunity to develop a virtuous mind. At the same time we need to remind ourselves that we have accumulated some virtues, and rejoice in that. Then we

need to look for find further opportunities to engage in virtue, which is the most suitable way to strengthen whatever virtue we have. If we find that our mind is oppressed by negativities then that should encourage us to engage in some suitable purification practice. That is the personal instruction we need to derive from what is being explained here.

Gyaltsab Je's conclusion is:

Worldly beings take rebirth in very fearful places, which should be understood as very dreadful times, and therefore one should strive to accomplish virtue and abandon negativity. *Hence, virtue is always meek* is explained in relation to time. It can also be explained in relation to the occasion when virtues are of little power and negativities are very strong.

As some other commentaries have indicated, *Virtue is always meek*, can also relate to the occasions when *virtue has little power and negativities are very strong*. However the main point is that we are now in a time when virtue is meek, with little strength, and negativity is much more prevalent. What we need to take as a personal instruction is that one needs to cherish every moment when it is possible to accumulate virtue, and take every opportunity to abandon and purify negativities. We need to maintain whatever virtue we have and use that as a base on which to slowly begin to increase that virtue. That is the most practical approach. Otherwise we may end up in a situation where we feel that we have to do something extra, but in the process, give up what we already have! That would be a sad situation as we have completely missed the point.

Here I recall the very profound advice that the late Geshe Ngawang Dhargye once gave to Jampa Ignen when he was a monk. Apparently he had sought some advice from Geshe Ngawang Dhargye about doing some extra study or practice, and Geshe Ngawang Dhargye's advice was, 'Well, that's quite good, but wouldn't it be more worthwhile to strive to protect the vows that you've already got and really work at that'. That apparently was very timely advice for Jampa Ignen. When others later heard of the advice to work on maintaining what you've already got they found it to be very profound advice.

The advice that we take here is that if negativity is prevalent, we need to apply the antidote. If for no apparent reason there are times when one feels melancholy and sad, or a little depressed, then that is a sign that negativity is prevalent. If we don't want that experience of feeling sad and unhappy, then we need to get rid of the cause of that, which is the negativity in one's own mind. That, as I have previously mentioned, is what we need to be focussing on. What I often find is that some people do the exact opposite, taking every opportunity to create negativity and feel sad and sorry if they miss an opportunity to create negativity! So when you are feeling sad about something, look into why you are feeling sad. It might well be related to not having had an opportunity to create some negativity.

Feeling sad about not being able to engage in negativity specifically implies being sad about not having had an opportunity to engage in activities that are driven by strong attachment or aversion, in particular attachment. There are things that we want to accomplish purely out of attachment, and when we are not able to do that, we feel sad. When we really think about it from a Dharma point of view, how could anyone possibly consider themselves as a Dharma practitioner if they are constantly looking for opportunities to engage in activities associated with attachment and then

feel sad when those opportunities don't arise? We often find people who claim they are doing something to help others, when in fact they are misleading themselves and in fact dragging them further into creating more negativity. That is not the act of a Dharma practitioner at all, is it?

Sometimes people complain about feeling lonely and say 'I feel lonely Geshe-la, I feel lonely!', and in a kind of naïve way I say, 'Well can't you find some people you can talk to. Don't you have some friends you can call up to chat with?' Then they respond by saying, 'Oh Geshe-la, you don't really understand the point; you don't understand what I am saying!' Then there are some who, even though they have a partner, say, 'Oh I feel lonely' and when I point out, 'You have a husband (or wife)', they reply, 'No Geshe-la, you don't understand!'

Apparently there was an occasion when His Holiness was meeting with a minister and Kevin Rudd, During their discussions apparently this the minister asked His Holiness, 'What is a secret happiness?' and His Holiness' responded, 'I don't know anything about that, I sleep all night!' This minister was also present during the recent annual event at the Loden Centre. When he was speaking to the gathering he quoted His Holiness the Dalai Lama and spoke highly about him. On that occasion I didn't get to speak with him, but he had come up and chatted to me on previous occasions.

2. CONTEMPLATING EXTENSIVELY THE BENEFITS OF BODHICITTA

This section is sub-divided into four categories:

- 2.1. Explaining the benefits of bodhicitta
- 2.2. Identifying the nature of bodhicitta
- 2.3. The reason why it has these benefits
- 2.4. Praising the person who meditates on bodhicitta

2.1. Explaining the benefits of bodhicitta

This has three sub-divisions:

- 2.1.1. It has the power to destroy all negativity and accomplish all virtues
- 2.1.2 One will become special in name and meaning
- 2.1.3 Explaining the benefits with example

2.1.1. It has the power to destroy all negativity and accomplish all virtues

This is further sub-divided into three:

- 2.1.1.1. Destroying great negativity
- 2.1.1.2. It can accomplish supreme virtue
- 2.1.1.3. It can accomplish one's wishes

2.1.1.1. DESTROYING GREAT NEGATIVITY

Having previously indicated that it is suitable to abandon negativity and to accomplish virtue, bodhicitta is explained here as being the best way to destroy great negativity. The remainder of verse six reads:

*6bcd. And powerful negativity dreadful
How can this be overcome by other virtue
That is not the mind of enlightenment?*

As well as sufficing for accumulating the greatest merit and bodhicitta also suffices for purifying the heaviest negative karmas.

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

It is appropriate to meditate on the two bodhicittas [aspiring bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta], because how could this dreadful negativity, which is the cause of the lower realms, be overcome by any other virtue

that is not the mind striving for complete enlightenment? It cannot.

Nothing else can *overcome dreadful negativity* other than *the mind striving for complete enlightenment*. So the awakening mind is explained here as being the most supreme way to purify such heavy negative karmas as the five karmas of immediate retribution (or heinous crimes in some translations), which are an immediate cause to be born in the lower realms. Such unfortunate rebirths can be overcome by developing the bodhicitta.

Then Gyaltsab Je goes on to explain:

This does not relate primarily to the ultimate bodhicitta that can abandon the seed of the obscurations. Rather, it shows the benefit of conventional bodhicitta purifying the earlier accumulated causes for the lower realms, as well as cutting the continuity of later ones.

There may be room for some misunderstanding about how conventional bodhicitta could be a cause for purifying negative karma, when in fact it is ultimate bodhicitta that removes the seed of the obscurations. So Gyaltsab Je is stating that amongst other benefits, the benefit of conventional bodhicitta is that it also *purifies earlier accumulated causes* for rebirth in *the lower realms* as well as cutting the continuity of further ones.

The Tibetan term for purification has an additional connotation of training, which is also applied to the accumulation of virtue. Here engaging in the training of purifying negative karma means to engage in activities so that one does not have to experience the consequences of those negativities. The sign of purification is one that one does not experience the consequences of negativities. Whereas, training in virtue means to accumulate and further increase good deeds as causes for happiness.

At this point, it is good to remind ourselves that these points are not just some fancy presentation. Rather, we need take them to heart and apply them to our own practice, and thus adopt the essential points that are being presented here. They are not all that complex or profound, and their application is quite manageable.

2.1.1.2. IT CAN ACCOMPLISH SUPREME VIRTUE

We have just seen how the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta is a cause to destroy great negativity, specifically throwing karma, which is the karma that is a specific cause of rebirth in the lower realms, or unfortunate rebirths. Now we will see how familiarising ourselves with, and then developing bodhicitta, is the optimum way to accomplish the highest virtues.

It is good to relate to these points in a practical way. Simply put, we don't wish to experience any suffering and we wish for happiness. In particular we don't wish to experience the great suffering of unfortunate rebirths, and bodhicitta will overpower the accumulated causes for that. If one were to question, 'If generating bodhicitta prevents me from experiencing suffering, will it also help me to experience happiness?'. Generating bodhicitta is a means to accomplish supreme virtue, which as explained previously, is the optimum cause for happiness. We need to relate this logical, systematic presentation to our own experience, aspirations and even questions. If we really pay attention to the manner of this presentation, we will notice the meticulous detail of the explanations.

A practical approach to generating real conviction in this presentation is to relate it to our own experiences. If we truly

look into our own state of mind, we will all recognise that when we are in negative states of mind, we more readily engage in activities that will actually harm both ourselves and others. Even in everyday life, we see the truth of the law of cause and effect in relation to how non-virtuous or negative states of mind lead to undesirable consequences.

When we look into situations that are conducive for engagement with others or virtuous activity, we see that it is when we are in a positive state of mind that our relationships with others are good. Then we see the immediate cause and effect sequence between our state of mind or attitudes and the effects which are experienced. That is a good basis on which to begin to establish the possibility that the activities that we do now will definitely have an effect on our future lives.

If the altruistic attitude of love and compassion were to be developed then that would be the most powerful way to purify negativities that are the cause of our own suffering, as well as adopting the highest virtues that are the cause of our own happiness. When convinced of this, it becomes reasonable and necessary to develop bodhicitta.

Before we end the session let us now recite the long life prayer for Lama Zopa Rinpoche. I had some dreams of Rinpoche a few days ago and just yesterday I received a scarf and a gift from him, which is a bit of a coincidence. So he must have also been thinking about me. I took that as a sign that it would be good for us to do some prayers to remove obstacles to his health.

We recite the long life prayer and dedicate our merits so that every obstacle and hindrances to Rinpoche's long life will be completely removed, and for the flourishing of his virtuous Dharma activities. It would be rather narrow-minded just to think, 'I am doing this prayer because Lama Zopa Rinpoche is my guru' or because 'he is Tara Institute's spiritual guide and guru'. It is much more worthwhile to think, 'If Lama Zopa Rinpoche were to have a good health and a stable long life, his virtuous Dharma activities would proliferate and increase, which brings benefit to many sentient beings'. Making aspirational prays for Lama Zopa Rinpoche's long life so that he may continue to benefit many sentient beings is much more relevant and beneficial.

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

Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© *Tara Institute*

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་མེད་མཁའ་ལྷོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

9 April 2013

With the motivation that we generated during the recitation of the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in the practice of meditation.

[meditation]

We have just attempted to train our mind in giving happiness to other sentient beings, which is based on love, and taking up the suffering of other sentient beings, based on compassion. We can use these very positive intentions, to generate the motivation for receiving the teachings as well: May the benefit that I gain from listening to the teachings become a cause for the well-being and benefit of all sentient beings and may the Buddha's teachings flourish and remain for a long time. With that intention in mind we can now engage in listening to the teaching. Just as the listeners generate a positive motivation, as the teacher, I also, from my side, need to generate that same motivation as best as I can. I might be sitting on a throne and higher than you, but in terms of motivation I am down at the same level as you are.

2. CONTEMPLATING EXTENSIVELY THE BENEFITS OF BODHICITTA

2.1. Explaining the benefits of bodhicitta

2.1.1. It has the power to destroy all negativity and accomplish all virtues (cont.)

2.1.1.2. IT CAN ACCOMPLISH SUPREME HAPPINESS

Later in the text there will be a more extensive definition of supreme happiness, but basically the ultimate state of happiness refers to actualising the two bodies of an enlightened being.

The relevant verse reads:

7. *The powerful able ones, who have contemplated this*

For eons, see this alone as beneficial.

Through it an immeasurable number of beings

Easily accomplish supreme happiness.

The *powerful able ones* refers to the enlightened beings of the past who, over a long period of time, *contemplated* how to accomplish the supreme and ultimate happiness that is the enlightened mind of bodhicitta. This is also a personal instruction indicating that meditating on bodhicitta is the best way to accomplish the ultimate benefit for ourselves and others. We need to apply it to our own practice, rather than expecting others to do it.

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je elaborates on the meaning of this verse:

It is appropriate to strive to meditate on bodhicitta because the able ones who, over countless eons, thought deeply about what is beneficial for sentient beings, and the method with which to achieve that benefit, see only this mind of enlightenment as beneficial.

The term Able One is way of referring to Buddha Shakyamuni. Here, it indicates that prior to achieving enlightenment, Buddha Shakyamuni spent *countless eons* over countless lifetimes practising on the path leading to enlightenment. Having contemplated the best way to benefit suffering beings and to alleviate all forms of suffering, Buddha Shakyamuni found the mind of bodhicitta to be the most beneficial. The term *only this mind* is an expression indicating that among the many techniques and methods for benefitting sentient beings, the *mind of enlightenment* is the most *beneficial*. At a personal level, this is an exhortation to us to strive to develop that mind of enlightenment ourselves.

Gyaltsab Je then goes on to say further:

This very bodhicitta is the seed with which an immeasurable number of sentient beings can easily and happily accomplish supreme happiness, without having to rely on austerities such as tearing out one's hair and so forth.

It is as was said: Going from happiness to happiness; knowing the mind, who will be lazy?

It is not necessary to adopt the extreme measure of practising austerities *such as tearing out one's hair and so forth* in order to *accomplish supreme happiness*. Rather, the ultimate method is to meditate on the supreme mind of bodhicitta, and further develop and increase that mind.

As emphasised in the commentary, *this very bodhicitta is the seed with which an immeasurable number of sentient beings can be led to happiness*. Once the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta is developed, it implants the seed that will lead one swiftly to the state of enlightenment, where one can accomplish the welfare of all living beings and thus benefit them. The essence of bodhicitta is that it is the seed that will develop into the ultimate fruit of enlightenment, which is what we need to strive to achieve.

As the basis of that seed is loving kindness that is where we need to begin our practice. When one has developed genuine loving kindness, then the wish to benefit others will naturally arise, and whatever other activities we engage in will be very meaningful. As the great master Lama Tsong Khapa said, 'If one has a kind mind, then the practices that establish the grounds and paths will also be gentle and good. If, on the other hand, one has an evil or negative mind, then whatever grounds or paths one establishes will also be unsuitable'. So developing a kind heart and an attitude of loving kindness is essential. That is what we really need to contemplate.

2.1.1.3. IT CAN ACCOMPLISH ONE'S WISHES

The verse relating to this is:

8. *Those wishing to eliminate the hundredfold suffering of cyclic existence*

Wishing to clear the unhappiness of sentient beings and

Wanting to enjoy a hundredfold of happiness

Should never give up the mind of enlightenment.

Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary on this verse by reemphasising the essential point that without developing bodhicitta there is no way one can fulfil the needs of others, or to bring about the ultimate benefit for them.

It is appropriate to meditate on bodhicitta since it is the supreme method for accomplishing the purpose of self and others.

As explained previously, love and compassion is the basis for developing bodhicitta. We could not possibly go about helping others without a sense of the love that wishes others will gain genuine ultimate happiness, and the compassion that wishes for all beings to be free from suffering. If we are to achieve our goal then it is essential that we develop the mind of bodhicitta.

In relation to explaining how this actually accomplishes *the purpose of self and others*, Gyaltsab Je explains:

Having trained in the practices of a medium capable being, one wishes to destroy the hundredfold suffering of cyclic existence in one's continuum; having trained in the motivation of a great capable being, one wishes to clear away the unhappiness of all sentient beings.

In the teachings common to the medium scope, the suffering of birth, sickness, ageing and death is explained in great detail. Having contemplated how we will have to experience these sufferings again and again for as long as we remain in cyclic existence, we develop the keen wish to be completely free from cyclic existence. Thus, by overcoming the sufferings of cyclic existence, one accomplishes one's own purpose. Then, *having trained in the motivation and practices of the great capable being, one develops the strong wish to clear away the unhappiness and suffering of all sentient beings*. Thinking about their plight, we generate the distinct mind of wishing that all living beings to be free from all forms of suffering. In this way we accomplish the purpose of others.

Then the commentary goes on to say:

Regardless of whether one wishes to enjoy the hundredfold happiness of higher status or definite goodness, there is no better method. One should generate bodhicitta alone, and never give it up, or let it degenerate.

There is no better method to achieve the happiness of higher status or definite goodness than developing bodhicitta, which is based on love and compassion. We might not have developed bodhicitta yet, but we do have the basis of love and compassion within our own hearts. In order to transform basic love and compassion into bodhicitta, first we need to firmly establish the love and compassion that is within our heart, then further increase it and develop it so that it turns into unconditional and unbiased love and compassion for all beings. The more we train in this, the firmer it becomes, it further increases, and will less likely degenerate. This is how we can use this explanation as a personal instruction.

As I have shared with you previously, the most practical approach, appropriate at our level, is to develop the following attitude on a daily basis: 'I will not harm any living being in the slightest manner and I will do my utmost to benefit other living beings in the best possible way'. This attitude can then be complemented with the thought: 'I will take the personal responsibility for freeing all living beings from every suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness'.

The more we generate this thought, and the more we familiarise ourselves with it, the closer we will get to

actually developing bodhicitta. While I can't claim that engaging in some other form of practice while neglecting to familiarise our mind with these basic attitudes will prevent you from developing bodhicitta, I can say that it will be hard for one to get any closer to developing bodhicitta. If one does not familiarise one's mind with these basic attitudes then the very basis of developing bodhicitta will be missing. Thus the most practical way to engage in developing bodhicitta is to familiarise ourselves with this attitude of loving kindness on a regular basis.

Adopting the determination, 'I will not harm any living being in the slightest way and I will do the best I can to benefit other sentient beings' serves as the best basis for developing bodhicitta. If I recall correctly, on an occasion when His Holiness was teaching in Bodhgaya he mentioned that this attitude will suffice for a bodhicitta attitude for ordinary beings. He definitely did emphasise the importance of developing this attitude. His Holiness always presents us with most practical ways to engage in practice.

While love and compassion serves as the basis for developing bodhicitta, on another practical level it definitely serves as an antidote for overcoming delusions such as intense anger, strong attachments, jealousy and so forth. The more we familiarise our mind with these attitudes of benefitting others and not harming any living being, the more we are developing a direct opponent to the self-cherishing mind, which is the basis for all delusions. When the self-cherishing mind itself is opposed, the mind of cherishing other beings is further developed and there is not much room for manifest delusions to arise. This is the most practical benefit of adopting love and compassion as our daily practice.

As I regularly mention, I haven't really developed any great realisations as such, but I do try to familiarise myself with this attitude of love and compassion in my everyday activities. Whether I am sitting or trying to engage in prayers, or I am moving about outside, or even when I am taking a shower, I try to occupy my mind constantly with thoughts of not harming other sentient beings in any way and benefitting others in the best way I can. From the little experience I have in developing these attitudes, I definitely find that they help to overcome delusions. So I can confidently share with you that the practical result of having attempted to practice in this way is that I do have a happy mind now. Wherever I go I seem to be able to maintain a happy attitude and a happy mind, and I attribute that to my attempts to engage in these practices.

I consider these attitudes to be my best friend. In terms of wealth, these attitudes are the best possessions that I own, and they are the best guide and teacher. I don't know if I am missing the mark and have it all wrong, but I definitely seem to find some personal benefit. Some might remark 'Well that is a crazy geshe's attitude!', however it is not uncommon for practitioners to be called crazy. Even great practitioners such as the renowned master Ensapa was called crazy as was Milarepa the most famous hermit.

I was about to relate a story about Milarepa and his sister, but we might get side-tracked and so you can look it up for yourselves.

Through our meagre attempts to develop a genuine mind of loving kindness, our minds will naturally be transformed, and we will become more gentle and kinder. But such a mind does not develop naturally or appear spontaneously, or as a result of practices of mere austerity. We have to actually make the effort to familiarise ourselves with these positive attitudes. That is why I exhort you and remind you again and again of the importance of paying attention to this practice of developing loving kindness.

2.1.2. One will become special in name and meaning

This section explains how the transformation achieved through the mind of bodhicitta influences the way one will be known.

The relevant verse reads:

9. *Should one generate bodhicitta. Then in one instant
Those pitiful ones bound in the prison of cyclic
existence will be
Referred to as the children of the tatagatas,
And become objects of prostration for worldly
gods and humans.*

The first part of Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse says:

Should one generate the wishing and engaging bodhicitta, one will instantaneously attain the distinguished name 'child of the tatagatas' ...

The moment one generates wishing and engaging bodhicitta one will be considered as a child of the tatagatas, or child of the buddhas. As explained previously, just as the son of the king is held in high regard because he holds the royal lineage of the king and the royal family, being a child of the tatagatas means being a suitable vessel to carry on the lineage of the buddhas. Thus the buddhas consider it appropriate to bestow on such beings the essential teachings, meanings and so forth.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

... and as the meaning of the name indicates, one will become an object of prostrations for worldly gods and humans.

Just as their name indicates, children of the tathagatas will become an object of veneration, offerings and so forth by humans and gods alike.

Then, Gyaltsab Je explains:

It is not only the bodhisattvas who have entered the great grounds that have these qualities, but...

This relates to a natural doubt that that these great qualities are only befitting for bodhisattvas who have reached the higher grounds, and as such they do not relate to us personally. In response to this doubt, Gyaltsab Je states:

...also the pitiful ones bound to the prison of cyclic existence by affliction and karma attain these benefits instantly, the moment they generate bodhicitta.

This will be elaborated later in the text. In terms of a suitable basis, any individual being is capable of

developing this, be they male or female, of high status or low status, rich or poor, from any kind of social background or lineage; anyone one who has the appropriate conditions is a suitable basis for developing bodhicitta. The very moment bodhicitta is developed they become the object of veneration, because all the qualities mentioned previously are obtained. So the essential point here is that everyone has the potential to develop bodhicitta and become special in name and meaning. There is no discrimination based on gender, status, race and so forth.

That concludes the benefits of bodhicitta.

2.1.3 Explaining the benefits with analogies

The six benefits of developing bodhicitta are described using analogies.

2.1.3.1. Analogy showing how the lesser becomes supreme

2.1.3.2. Analogy showing its rarity and preciousness

2.1.3.3. Analogy showing the unending and increasing result

2.1.3.4. Analogy showing its ability to rescue from great danger

2.1.3.5. Analogy showing how it destroys negativity effortlessly

2.1.3.6. The benefits that are explained in the sutras

2.1.3.1. ANALOGY SHOWING HOW THE LESSER BECOMES SUPREME

The verse relating to this reads:

10. *Like the supreme elixir that makes gold,
Having taken this impure body, it transforms it
Into the priceless precious body of a conqueror;
Hence, strongly hold that called 'mind of
enlightenment'.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains that:

Having contemplated these benefits and generated that which is called the mind of enlightenment, one should hold onto it firmly.

Again, this is an exhortation to take these explanations of the benefits of bodhicitta as a personal instruction. We need to think like this: 'I must do my utmost to develop bodhicitta because of its great benefits, and whatever bodhicitta I have developed, I need to establish firmly and further increase it'. We need to pay heed to this advice and really take it to heart.

The analogy presented is that:

Just like one *sang*¹ of supreme gold transforming elixir can transform one thousand *sang* of iron into gold, this mind can transform this body that one has taken, impure both from the point of view of cause and nature, into the priceless precious body of a conqueror.

In Tibetan, the first line of the verse refers to having taken this impure body, which refers to being impure from the point of view of both cause and nature. We don't have to go into detail now but the cause of our body was substances from our parents, which are not normally considered as being clean substances. Whichever way we look at it our body is, by its very nature neither a clean

¹ A Tibetan unit of measurement.

object nor pure in nature. The words *having taken* have the subtle implication that one has taken this impure body repeatedly, again and again. So the contaminated body that we have is impure both from the point of view of cause and nature.

We have taken this body over and over again in the past and for as long as cause and the conditions are intact, we will have to further take it again and again in the future. When the mind of enlightenment is further developed it can transform this impure body into the priceless precious body of a conqueror.

In the analogy Gyaltsab Je explains that a small portion of *supreme gold transforming elixir can transform one thousand sang of iron into gold*. Similarly, when one develops the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta, that mind can transform this impure body that has to take rebirth again and again, into the precious body of a conqueror or a buddha.

Finally, Gyaltsab Je makes reference to the sutras.

The *Array of Stalks* sums up the benefits of bodhicitta with the example:

One *sang* of mercury, which appears as gold, can transform one thousand *sang* of iron into gold.

The main point being presented here is that bodhicitta serves as an elixir that can transform an impure or contaminated body into a pure or uncontaminated one. To go a bit further, on the hearer and solitary realiser paths, when the being on the path of preparation transcends to the next path, which is the path of seeing, their contaminated body remains intact. In other words the being on the hearer and solitary realiser path who reaches the path of seeing becomes an arya or noble being but still retains a contaminated body. Whereas, on the Great Vehicle's path, when the bodhisattva on the path of preparation attains the path of seeing their very contaminated physical body transforms into an uncontaminated body. That physical transformation takes place due to the bodhisattvas having the extra quality of bodhicitta in their mental continuum, which hearers and solitary realisers don't have. While I haven't seen this specific explanation in other teachings, in my view this has to be the reason for the difference and relates to the point being explained here.

2.1.3.2. ANALOGY SHOWING ITS RARITY AND PRECIOUSNESS

The verse which relates to this is:

**11. It is very precious since the sole captain of
migrators
Investigated well with immeasurable
awareness.
Those who wish to be free from the place of
migration
Should hold well onto the precious bodhicitta.**

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Those who wish to be free from all faults of cyclic existence, the place of migrators, should hold well onto the precious bodhicitta and protect it from degeneration like a powerful king of jewels.

Those who wish to be free from the faults of cyclic existence, in the place of migrators specifically relates to the six types of realms that beings migrate to. Those who wish to be free

from all of the faults of the six realms should hold well onto the precious bodhicitta and protect it from degeneration, just like those who have found a powerful king of jewels.

Gyaltsab Je further explains:

Like the skilful captain, who brought the merchants to the jewel island, the unequalled sole captain of migrators, the Buddha, with his immeasurable wisdom awareness, investigated thoroughly what the best method may be to eliminate the poverty of migrators, and saw that only bodhicitta was that precious, meaning that it is rare and extremely beneficial method.

Just like the analogy of a *captain who guides merchants to the jewel island the unequalled sole captain of migrators* (i.e. living beings in the six realms), *the Buddha with his immeasurable wisdom awareness* (referring to the omniscient mind of the Buddha), *having investigated thoroughly what the best method may be to eliminate the poverty of migrators, saw that bodhicitta was rare and precious and the most beneficial method for alleviating the sufferings of the migrators of the six realms.*

The Buddha's omniscient wisdom does not have the slightest fault in the way it perceives and distinguishes phenomena. So there is not even the slightest fault in the Buddha's mind, because of that omniscient wisdom. When that wisdom looks into what would be the most beneficial way to alleviate the suffering of sentient beings, the Buddha sees that bodhicitta is the ultimate method. If we have faith in the Buddha, then we know that he sees everything just as it is, properly and correctly. Since he said that bodhicitta is the most precious and beneficial way to benefit sentient beings, we need to strive to develop that mind for ourselves.

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

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

© Tara Institute

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྡོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

16 April 2013

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

For this meditation, we imagine that we are surrounded by all sentient beings who are deprived of happiness and experiencing various forms of suffering. We generate the wish for them to abide in happiness and, based on love, imagine giving our own happiness to them. Then we focus on their suffering, and generate the wish that they not experience any suffering, and based on compassion, we imagine taking upon ourselves all their suffering. This is how we can engage the meditation practice. [*meditation*]

The motivation for engaging in the teaching also needs to be based on love and compassion. So we can generate this motivation:

In order to benefit all sentient beings, to liberate them from all suffering and to 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 into practice well whatever I understand from it.

As I regularly emphasise, in addition to our meagre attempts to develop love and compassion in our meditation, it is essential that we try to maintain and strengthen that sense of love and compassion in our everyday life. Personally, I attempt to do this practice regularly, and I encourage you to do so as well. As I have mentioned over and over again, the most valuable companion we can have is this quality of love and compassion and loving kindness within our own heart. In fact, if we secure this most valuable companion within our own heart, then we will not be deprived of external companions. Conversely, if we harbour the delusions or negative states of mind such as intense anger, attachment, jealousy and so forth, then it will not be possible to find good external companions and friendship.

If we are obsessed with delusions such as intense anger and attachment, then the companions we find will naturally be ones who harbour anger and attachments as well. Even if they were not initially dominated by strong delusions such as anger and attachment, our own negativity will start to rub off on them, changing them into an angry person. If we are infested with strong attachments, that naturally influences others, and brings out attachments within them. If we harbour intense anger within our own mind, then when we relate to others it will naturally be out of anger, which triggers the anger in their mind and they too will start to become angry as well. It's the same with jealousy. If we have a very jealous mind, and discuss things with others out of jealousy, then that will naturally arouse jealousy in their minds. These situations occur as a result of not having overcome delusions in one's mind. Whenever we encounter objects of delusions they serve as a trigger for our delusions to arise, which that is why the delusions seem to arise very easily.

We need to use our rational and logical mind to see how our own delusions can trigger the manifestation of delusions in the minds of others. If you have strong attachment and anger you will end up having to deal with friends who also have strong attachments and anger. Conversely, if we practise love and compassion with a genuine intention, then that will become a positive trigger for positive states of mind to arise within others. Therefore, as I remind you again and again, we need to begin with those in our immediate surroundings and practise expressing genuine loving kindness in our speech, mannerisms and so forth. That will definitely contribute to the development of a genuinely calm and harmonious relationship with our companions and others. On a practical level these are really good points to think about.

In the event that our companion becomes angry or says inappropriate things in a state of anger, if we take the initiative to remain gentle and calm, it can have the positive effect of calming down our angry companion too. This is a very practical approach. I can relate a personal story about this. I had a very good childhood friend in Tibet called Tinley Dhargye. He was not able to escape with us to India and was imprisoned, and later passed away in prison. He was really very faithful and loyal friend but he was known to be a bit short-tempered. However, despite being easily irritated he was also known to be really good-hearted. Knowing that he trusted me, I would sometimes provoke him by playing pranks on him. When he was falling asleep, I would put odd things in his mouth, and when he woke up he would immediately become very angry, and sometimes he would even strike me. But when I just smiled and laughed, he couldn't really respond to that with anger. Eventually he became less and less irritated and he even began to participate in those pranks himself. This is yet another example of how, with a genuine concern and without anger from our side, we can help others to overcome their short temperedness, sometimes even by provoking and teasing them.

2.1. Explaining the benefits of bodhicitta (cont.)

Reflecting on the great benefits of bodhicitta will encourage us to further develop it in our own minds. While we might not have yet developed uncontrived bodhicitta, we do, to a certain extent, have a contrived aspect of bodhicitta within our hearts. At its most basic level we all have the inclination of not wanting to intentionally hurt others and wanting to benefit others in any way we can. We all feel uncomfortable when we see others who are hurt, and we all have wish to help others. When these intentions become purer and more unconditional, then the mind moves closer and closer to developing actual bodhicitta. We need to look at our current state in a practical way. We may not have developed uncontrived bodhicitta, but we can definitely use what we already have as a substitute for that. We can use our inclination of not wanting to harm others and wishing to benefit them as a basis of our reflection. When we think about this again and again throughout the day, wherever we are, the more familiar we become with this positive attitude, and the stronger and firmer it will be established in our mindstream.

2.1.3.3. ANALOGY SHOWING THE UNENDING AND INCREASING RESULT

12. *All other virtues, similar to the plantain tree
Are exhausted upon bearing fruit.
Since the fruit tree of bodhicitta constantly
Bears fruits, it is not exhausted but increases.*

In his commentary on the text Gyalsab Je opens his explanation of the meaning of the verse with these words:

It is also appropriate for those who wish for unceasing and increasing virtue to meditate on bodhicitta.

This is another very meticulous explanation of the benefits of developing bodhicitta. Virtue is defined as that which brings about pleasant results. We all want pleasant and good results, and as that comes from virtue we have an impetus to engage in accumulating virtue. Here, in a most practical way, we are being advised that *for those who wish for unceasing and increasing virtue, it is also appropriate to meditate on bodhicitta.*

While this will be explained more extensively later on, we can reflect here on how we can engage in accumulating vast amounts of virtue. As mentioned previously, while we may have not developed an uncontrived bodhicitta mind, we can, by intentionally making some effort, develop our love and compassion—wishing all beings to be free from all suffering and wishing them ultimate happiness—into a strong aspiration to achieve enlightenment. We can combine our practice of accumulating virtue with the bodhicitta attitude by thinking, ‘May whatever virtuous activities I engage in become a cause for achieving enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings’. We try our utmost to maintain this bodhicitta attitude, even if it a contrived one, while we are engaging in the virtuous action and at the end dedicate it with a bodhicitta attitude. As mentioned previously, although the contrived state of bodhicitta at our level requires some effort, it is the seed of actual bodhicitta. So we must not underestimate the value of developing even a contrived level of bodhicitta attitude in our practice. We need to really keep that in mind and make every effort to develop it further.

To put it in a very simple way, there is nothing to lose but much to gain from generating the bodhicitta attitude. Indeed, far from any loss, there is only benefit, in this life as well as in all future lifetimes. This practical approach will encourage us to develop the bodhicitta attitude to the best of our ability.

In his commentary Gyalsab Je then explains why this is appropriate:

Virtues that are not held by bodhicitta are like the plantain tree, whose ability to produce a fruit is exhausted after it produces one.

Here the plantain or banana plant is used as an analogy. The plantain produces only one crop of fruit after which it perishes. A new plant has to spring up before it can produce fruit again. The analogy is that if whatever virtues one accumulates are not accompanied with a bodhicitta attitude, then when the result of that virtue is experienced, then that will be it! There will be no further results of that virtue. Applying that at a personal level, our present human rebirth is a result of virtue, and the good conditions we have now are also the result of past virtue. If our virtuous actions with these good conditions are not accompanied by the bodhicitta attitude, we will use up all our good karma now, and our human life will end here. So our good karma will be like the plantain tree which produces fruit only once: we have a human rebirth this one time, and it will be very hard to obtain it again. Whereas if we utilise the bodhicitta attitude in our life, and develop and increase it with the good conditions that we have now, then our virtuous actions in this very life will produce more human rebirths in future lifetimes.

As Gyalsab Je states in his commentary:

On the other hand, the tree of bodhicitta produces fruits unceasingly. Like the wish-fulfilling tree it increases more and more.

A wish-fulfilling tree is a mystical tree that produces fruit unceasingly. The more you take from it the more it produces, and the fruit is never exhausted. That wish-fulfilling tree is an analogy showing how the accumulation of virtue is increased with a bodhicitta attitude. Rather than being exhausted, the virtue increases evermore. So we can see how incredibly valuable the bodhicitta attitude is.

It is because of their bodhicitta that bodhisattvas are able to come back again and again to this world with all the perfect conditions, to continuously benefit sentient beings. For example, the practice of morality for bodhisattvas is the means to accumulate great merit to obtain a good rebirth such as a human rebirth with all of the perfect conditions intact. The bodhisattva’s practice of generosity is the optimum cause to acquire good resources, great wealth and so forth in the future, as a way to continuously benefit other sentient beings. The practice of patience is the optimum cause for the bodhisattva’s charismatic features and qualities and so forth, which again serves as a means to benefit other sentient beings. In this way, all of the bodhisattvas’ practices of serve as the optimum causes to obtain all the perfect conditions, rebirth after rebirth, all the way up to enlightenment, where they will be able to benefit all sentient beings in the optimum way. More extensive explanations will come later, but it is good to reflect on these points now.

Finally, in order to back up the earlier explanation, Gyalsab Je quotes from the *Sutra of Inexhaustible Wisdom*:

The *Sutra of Inexhaustible Wisdom* states:

Just as a drop of water that falls into the ocean abides until the end of an eon, the virtue that is dedicated for enlightenment remains until the essence of enlightenment is fulfilled. It does not cease.

This quote from the sutra presents another very vivid analogy. When a drop of water falls into an incredibly vast ocean it merges with the water of the ocean. The only way that the drop of water could be exhausted would be for the whole ocean to dry up. So, because of the vastness of the ocean, *the drop of water abides until the end of an eon*, which is an incredibly long time. Likewise the essence of whatever virtue one has accumulated and dedicated to enlightenment, will not be exhausted and the seed of it will remain until one actually achieves enlightenment. The main point to derive as a personal instruction is: this: if we generate a bodhicitta motivation to the best of our ability before engaging in any practice, then remind ourselves of the bodhicitta attitude again and again during the practice, and dedicate our practice with the bodhicitta attitude at the end, then that will seal our virtue so that it becomes unceasing and increases more and more.

To take that further, Lama Tsong Khapa says in his teachings that we should not neglect or underestimate the value of virtue and gravity of negativity no matter how small they may be. In the sutras the Buddha himself mentions that we should not underestimate the gravity of even the smallest negativity. The Buddha presented the analogy that they are like the small spark that ignites a fire, which can cause great destruction. Likewise, one should not neglect or underestimate the value of small virtues, for just as small drops of water eventually fill a large container, small virtues can accumulate to achieve great results. The analogies the

Buddha used are very practical and straightforward, and easy to understand because they relate to our own experiences.

We can see how skilfully the Buddha used analogies that are relevant to our own experiences. For example, in the Black Saturday bushfires, I heard that many houses were set alight not by the fire itself but by small sparks that were carried on the wind. We can also relate the analogy of filling a huge container with drops of water to saving money. If we consider one dollar as having little value and don't bother saving any dollar coins, we might never be able to save any significant amount of money! On the other hand if we take an initiative to start saving a dollar at a time, we might eventually be able to save up \$1000. So, in this way we can see that the Buddha presented so many great analogies with logical reasons to help us become more intelligent, and accomplish what we wish for.

The really significant point here is to understand how the Buddha used skilful means to guide us. He didn't exhort us to go to great lengths in order to accumulate virtue, which could potentially overwhelm us. Rather, he exhorts us to avoid creating small negativities and adopting small virtues. Thus the Buddha showed us really practical ways of accumulating virtue as methods for us to begin our practice by taking small steps at a time. Engaging in small manageable virtues at a time becomes a cause for us to accumulate great virtues, and reap great positive results in the future.

2.1.3.4. ANALOGY SHOWING ITS ABILITY TO RESCUE US FROM GREAT DANGER

The verse relating to this reads as follows:

13. *Even having generated extremely terrible negativities,
One becomes liberated from them
instantaneously if one relies on it,
Like from great dangers in dependence on a
brave one.
Why do the conscientious not rely on it?*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Why don't the conscientious, who are patient concerning what has to be practised and what has to be abandoned, rely on bodhicitta? It would be appropriate to do so.

Here Gyaltsab Je reframes the question posed in the verse: *Why don't the conscientious, who are patient concerning what has to be practised and what has to be abandoned, rely on bodhicitta?* Then Gyaltsab Je answers Shantideva's rhetorical question with, *it would be appropriate to do so*, and explains his reasoning.

If one has created very frightful negativity such as harming the Three Jewels or creating the five immediate karmas then, by generating the mind of enlightenment, one can become free from the fears of the lower realms in an instant. It is like relying on a powerful brave person to protect one from the fears of a very dangerous road.

Here, the heavy negative karmas such as those created by showing disrespect to, or criticising the *Three Jewels*, are described as *frightful*. Other heavy negative karmas are translated here as *the five immediate karmas*, which are also known as the five heinous crimes or the five karmas of immediate retribution. These include killing one's mother, killing one's father, drawing blood from a tathagata and so forth. They are so gravely negative that, if not purified, an

unimaginable amount of suffering is to be experienced in the immediate next life as the result. We have definitely created these karmas in past lifetimes when we were completely ignorant. Even in this life, where we are quite intelligent and enjoy very good conditions, we find ourselves engaging in so many negativities and create so much negative karma. When we were completely ignorant, and in desperate situations, there would have been nothing to stop us from creating such grave heavy negative karmas. We still have the residue of those imprints in our mind now, so we need to take great measures to try to overcome those negative propensities. That is why it is appropriate for us to engage in practices of purification, most importantly by developing the bodhicitta attitude, which is one of the most powerful ways to overcome those negative karmas.

The way to *become free from the fears of the lower realms* is to overcome negative karmas by *generating the mind of enlightenment* or the bodhicitta attitude. The analogy presented here is that *it is like relying on a powerful brave person who can protect one from the fears of a very dangerous road*. If we have to travel along on a road known to be very dangerous, and we don't know the area at all, we will have to rely on a powerful person who can guide us across that treacherous and dangerous land. Similarly, bodhicitta can lead us away from fear of the lower realms.

In brief, bodhicitta has a two fold purpose: it serves as a powerful means to purify negative karma, as well as being the most powerful means to accumulate extensive merit. As explained in Nagarjuna's *Commentary on Bodhicitta*: The merits that a single being accumulates from developing bodhicitta even for a moment, is said to be so vast that all the buddhas and bodhisattvas in the ten directions are not able to describe the amount of merit that is obtained.

2.1.3.5. ANALOGY SHOWING HOW IT DESTROYS NEGATIVITY EFFORTLESSLY

There are two lines in relation to this heading:

14ab. *Like the fire at the end of the eon, the great negativities
Are completely burned up in an instant.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of this verse as follows:

If one has generated this mind, then one is endowed with great power to destroy negativity. Similar to the fire at the end of the eon destroying all the worlds below the first concentration, bodhicitta definitely burns the strong karma that causes rebirth in the lower realms in an instant.

The implication is that:

If it can destroy the power of karma that will definitely be experienced, then what need is there to mention that the karma that will not definitely be experienced will also be destroyed? The great trail blazers said that confession complete with the four opponent powers purifies the karma that will definitely be experienced.

To explain the analogy of *the fire at the end of the eon destroying all the worlds below the first concentration*, there are three main periods in the world system: the formation, the remaining duration, and then the end or the destruction of the world. It is said that the destruction of the world occurs with the fire that burns downwards from the first concentration, which destroys the world below that. Just as that great powerful fire destroys the world systems, likewise

bodhicitta can definitely destroy the karmas that cause rebirth in the most unfortunate lower realms.

Next Gyaltsab Je explains that *if it can destroy the power of karma that will definitely be experienced, then what need is there to mention that the karma which will not definitely be experienced will also be destroyed?* There are various ways of explaining karmas that are definitely to be experienced. One of these refers to the three ways in which the karma is accumulated. The first of these is karma both caused and accumulated, and this is a karma where the results will definitely have to be experienced. The results of the next two, karma which is accumulated but not caused, and karma which is caused but not accumulated, will not definitely have to be experienced.

However it has also been explained in the teachings that when the four opponent powers are intact and applied in a purification practice, then whatever karma one has accumulated (even heavy negative karmas) will definitely not be experienced, as the appropriate measures for opposing those negative karmic imprints have been applied.

As explained here *the great trail blazers* Nagarjuna and Asanga have said that *confession complete with the four opponent powers purifies the karma that will definitely be experienced.*

This indicates that even karmas that are otherwise classified as definitely to be experienced, can be overcome when the four opponent powers when they are applied fully. These four opponent powers will be explained in more detail in the next chapter, which specifically deals with purification; meanwhile you can do some research and prepare yourself for the explanations that will be given in more detail then.

The commentary concludes by explaining that *definitely to be experienced* means that if one does not meditate or apply the antidote, it will definitely be experienced. This is established with both quotation and reasoning. Again, this relates to our own personal practice: we have had so many previous lifetimes where we were completely overwhelmed with negativities, ignorance and so forth and so there is no karma that we haven't adopted or engaged in. At this point in time, however, we are aware of that karma and so we can apply the antidotes and engage in purification practices to overcome those grave negative imprints that remain in our minds.

2.1.3.6. HOW THE BENEFITS ARE EXPLAINED IN THE SUTRAS

This heading is covered in the remaining lines of verse fourteen:

*14cd. Its boundless qualities
Were explained by the aware Maitreya to
Sudhana.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

The mind of enlightenment definitely creates these benefits¹ because [as a way to back it up with a quotation from the sutras] Maitreya, who is endowed with awareness, explained these benefits and infinitely praised this mind in the *Array of Stalks* sutra to the bodhisattva Youthful Sudhana.

Then there is a quote from the *Array of Stalks* sutra:

The *Array of Stalks Sutra* has an extensive explanation:

Son of good family, the mind of enlightenment is like the seed of all enlightened dharmas. It is like a field because it increases the white dharmas of all migrators....it is like the pure vase because it

perfectly accomplishes all thoughts. It is like a spear because it causes the downfall of the enemy of the afflictions.

These are just some of the analogies presented in the sutra, which has a much more extensive list.

The main point is that the benefits that were explained earlier were not made up by ordinary people, but they were actually presented by the Buddha himself in a sutra. So the benefits of bodhicitta come from an authentic source that one can rely upon.

As you are aware the next session will be the discussion evening. As usual I encourage you to do the discussion with good intention, in a spirit of sharing your understanding and knowledge, and further expanding one's own understanding. The week following that will be the test. That is also a very worthwhile activity to engage in with a good motivation.

Before we conclude with the usual dedication prayers, let us do the long life prayer for Lama Zopa Rinpoche. It is important that we make strong and fervent prayers for an authentic and genuine teacher such as Lama Zopa Rinpoche to have a long and stable life. For this is an immediate cause for the Buddha's teachings to remain for a long time to benefit many sentient beings in this world. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has emphasised the great importance of being able to distinguish a genuine teacher from a false one. So it is important to be cautious and apply the correct discernment.

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

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*

¹ Referring to the benefits mentioned earlier.

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

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

Discussion Week 5 (04.06.2013)

Week: 1 (7 May 2013)

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

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

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

3. Explain the difference between Wishing Bodhicitta and Engaging Bodhicitta

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

Week: 2 (14 May 2013)

5. How do Bodhisattvas accrue vast amounts of merit?

6. What can we do on a practical level?

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

Week: 3 (21 May 2013)

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

a) What are they?

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

c) What did the great master Atisha advise?

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

10. What is renunciation?

11. Discuss how the following can be validated:

- Obvious Phenomena
- Slightly Obscure Phenomena
- Extremely Obscure Phenomena

Week 4 (28 May 2013)

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

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

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

Exam

Name:

Block 3

Week 6: (11 May 2013)

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

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

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

3. Explain the difference between Wishing Bodhicitta and Engaging Bodhicitta

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

5. How do Bodhisattvas accrue vast amounts of merit?

6. What can we do on a practical level?

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

a) What are they?

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

c) What did the great master Atisha advise?

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

9. What is renunciation?

10. Discuss how the following can be validated:

- Obvious Phenomena

- Slightly Obscure Phenomena

- Extremely Obscure Phenomena

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

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