
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

25 June 2013

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

[meditation]

Also, as for the motivation for receiving the teachings, it would be good to generate a motivation based on bodhicitta; such as the thought:

For the sake of all sentient beings, in order to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teaching and put its meaning into practice well.

The main point is to try to generate a motivation that is not tainted by mere self-interest.

2.4. Praising the person who has generated such a mind (cont.)

2.4.2. If even small benefit is praiseworthy then achieving all happiness and benefit is even more praiseworthy

This heading is covered in these two verses:

32. *Even giving scornfully just one instance
Of ordinary food, which lasts only half a
day, To a few migrators
Is praised by beings, saying:
'It is an act of virtue'.*
33. *What need is there to mention the continual
generosity
Of working to complete all mental
intentions,
The highest happiness of the tatagatas,
For countless sentient beings for a long time.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on these verses reads:

In worldly terms, someone who gives inferior ordinary food in an inferior manner, with scorn and no praise, to a small number of beings, (such as one hundred), enough for only half a day, will be regarded by the people as a great sponsor who practises virtue.

What need is there to mention then that someone who continually gives the superior object, the highest uncontaminated happiness of the tatagatas, with the special benefit that it satisfies each and every thought, in a respectful manner to the expansive field of innumerable sentient beings for as long as cyclic existence remains, is praiseworthy?

Therefore one should have single-pointed respect for the bodhisattvas who have this mind.

As explained in detail here, the benefit that bodhisattvas extend is definitely an object worthy of praise and

veneration, because this benefit is focused on all living beings, which is an incredibly expansive scope.

2.4.3. Praiseworthy because of becoming the supreme field

This section is subdivided into three:

2.4.3.1. The reason why it is unsuitable to be even a little disrespectful to a bodhisattva

2.4.3.2. The reason why it is suitable to meditate on faith

2.4.3.3. They are worthy of praise and going for refuge

As Gyaltsab Rinpoche clearly elucidates, the negativity incurred by criticising a bodhisattva is very grave. As we are not able to discern who is a bodhisattva and who is not, there is always the danger that we might be criticising or ridiculing someone who is in fact a bodhisattva. Therefore we need to be incredibly cautious about criticising others in general, because we would incur grave negativity if they are a bodhisattva. Thus Gyaltsab Rinpoche cautions us to be really mindful and careful about this point.

Can you give me a definition of a bodhisattva?

Student: A person of the Mahayana lineage who is intent on benefiting others by achieving enlightenment, accompanied by the deeds.

When an explanation of what a bodhisattva means is sought, it would be good to have a clear, concise and succinct explanation already in mind.

A bodhisattva is a being who has developed bodhicitta, which has two components *bodhi* and *citta*. The Tibetan word for *bodhi* is *jang chub*, which has two syllables and a separate connotation of each. It is good to contemplate what *bodhi* or *jang chub* implies. If you can remember, this was discussed at the very beginning of the text.

The title of the text is *Bodhicharyavatara*. The *charya* relates to the actions, which includes the basis, the path and the result or fruits; so all three aspects of the path are explained in that one word *charya*.

A bodhisattva is a being who has developed the bodhicitta mind. Thus a succinct explanation of a bodhisattva is a being who has developed the mind that aspires to enlightenment, and who engages in the actions of the six perfections.

As I have also explained previously, a buddha has bodhicitta in their mental continuum, however they are not referred to as bodhisattva. These are important points to keep in mind.

2.4.3.1. THE REASON WHY IT IS UNSUITABLE TO BE EVEN A LITTLE DISRESPECTFUL TO A BODHISATTVA

34. *If one generates negative minds towards
One bodhisattva patron like this, one needs
To remain in the hells for eons equalling
The number of negative minds, the Buddha
taught.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Should one criticise or generate a negative attitude towards those ultimate bodhisattva benefactors, who offer all benefit and happiness to any sentient being, then this negative attitude is the supreme among negativities. If one generates a negative

attitude, then it is taught in the *Sutra of Strong Peace Definitely Abiding Magical Emanation*:

Jampel, should a bodhisattva generate anger or a criticising mind towards another bodhisattva then it is said for that many eons he will remain in the hells. Therefore, wear your armour.

As taught here by the Able One, one will remain in the hells for as many eons as the number of moments one generates the negative mind. Therefore, one should be careful concerning this object.

From the *Sutra of the Seal Generating the Power of Faith*:

It generates much more countless negativity to generate a negative attitude and so forth towards a bodhisattva who aspires to the Mahayana, than to destroy or burn stupas equalling the number of sand grains in the Ganges.

As support it states that the buddhas are born from the bodhisattvas, and that to harm the cause of the buddhas is taught in many teachings and commentaries as supremely negative.

Gyaltsab Je's explanation is quite clear so there is no need for further elaboration.

2.4.3.2. THE REASON WHY IT IS SUITABLE TO MEDITATE ON FAITH

This is covered in these two lines:

*35ab. But, if one practices clear faith
Its result will increase even more,*

Gyaltsab Rinpoche's explanation is meticulous. First, it indicates that because bodhisattvas are working towards the ends of all sentient beings, it is a grave negativity to criticise, ridicule or disparage bodhisattvas. Then, because they are an object of faith, if one were to generate a moment of faith with a clear mind, one's virtue will increase incredibly. This is a very logical and meticulous presentation.

As his commentary reads:

However, if a person has clear faith in a bodhisattva, then the result of that virtue will increase more than the earlier explained result of negativity.

While the negativity incurred by disparaging and criticising a bodhisattva is very grave, vast virtue is accumulated from a clear mind of faith in a bodhisattva. Praising and having faith in a bodhisattva will accumulate an incredible amount of merit. So there is far more benefit in generating faith and veneration, and paying respect to a bodhisattva, than the negativity incurred from criticism.

This can also be understood in conjunction with the qualities of a bodhisattva. The benefits of developing the mind of bodhicitta and the qualities of someone who has developed bodhicitta have been explained extensively. These are directly related to the great virtue or merit that one accumulates by praising a bodhisattva.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

For however many moments of clear faith there are, for a much greater number of eons one will experience the special result.

This is explaining the great results from generating faith, for even just one moment. These explanations exhort us to develop that faith in the qualities of a bodhisattva.

Finally, Gyaltsab Je says:

This is taught in the Sutra of the Seal of the Definitive and Indefinite.

There is a quote from this sutra, but we will not go through that.

2.4.3.3. THEY ARE WORTHY OF PRAISE AND GOING FOR REFUGE

The next two lines of verse read:

*35cd. Even great force against the conqueror's
children
Will not raise negativity, it increases virtue
naturally.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Even if the great children of the conquerors are confronted with the intent to harm or cause suffering, they will not generate negative minds such as anger and so forth, and their virtue will naturally increase, even when faced with danger or loss of their lives.

As explained in the mind training teachings, adverse circumstances, or any kind of difficulties (such as lacking sufficient food, clothing, dwelling and so forth) will not daunt the person who is intent on practice. Those very difficulties can be transformed into the path. The Tibetan word *dogal* translated here as *great force* also has the connotation of the significant difficulties that one may face. As mentioned in the teachings, transforming difficulties in the path does not literally mean that negative circumstances will actually become the path. Rather, difficulties and so forth can complement one's practices on the path. That is the main meaning of transforming difficulties into the path. Rather than becoming a hindrance, difficulties and so forth become an aid for one's practice. In this way not only can suffering be more readily endured, but it can be transformed as an aid to complement one's practice.

The crucial point lies in the lines, *they will not generate negative minds such as anger and so forth*, but instead *their virtue will naturally increase, even when faced with danger and loss of their lives*. An ordinary mind responds to suffering and difficulties with anger, or at the very least some annoyance and agitation, and the moment that this happens there is no way for virtue to increase. From the very instant we generate anger and so forth we immediately incur and accumulate negativity.

As explained here, a bodhisattva, even when their life is at stake, will not allow any situation to become a cause for engaging in negativity or allow a negative mind to arise. Rather, they will use that situation as a way to further increase their virtue. We need to take this advice to heart and try to implement it in our own practice. If bodhisattvas do not allow even a moment of negativity to arise, even if their life is at stake, and only accumulate virtue, then that should be an example for us to try our best. When we face minor difficulties in life, we should not allow a negative mind to arise and we should try to maintain a virtuous mind. That is the main point.

When bodhisattvas are referred to in the teachings they are always referred to as being objects worthy of veneration and praise. If we really understand the practices of bodhisattvas then we will come to understand for ourselves why bodhisattvas are regarded as holy or noble beings.

The next verse comes under the same heading:

36. *This precious holy mind
Whoever has generated it, I prostrate to their
body.
Though harmed they remain connected with
happiness
I take refuge in this source of happiness.*

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

For those reasons¹, I respectfully prostrate with my three doors to the body of the person who has generated such a precious holy mind.

I take refuge in the bodhisattvas, who are our source of happiness (as explained later on in the chapter on patience), who when harmed, not only refrain from retaliating, but only offer happiness, just as in the life story of the king Maitrabala who, despite the five yakshas drinking his blood, led them to the state of a superior being.

The crucial point being emphasised is that *when harmed, bodhisattvas not only refrain from retaliating, but only offer happiness*, unlike ordinary beings who retaliate by returning harm for harm. Instead of returning harm with harm, bodhisattvas only offer happiness to the one who has harmed them, and lead them to the state of ultimate happiness. This in itself is an unprecedented act of compassion. If we think of ourselves as an example, when someone utters uncompromising words, hurtful speech or inflicts any kind of harm on us, we immediately create a negative mind and wish to get back at them! For a bodhisattva, there is not even a hint of retaliating with harmful intentions, only the wish to lead them to the ultimate state of happiness. The connotation of *though harmed they remain connected with happiness* is that they connect those who harm them with ultimate happiness. Thus, *I take refuge and offer veneration to the source of happiness*.

Another important point to note here is that there may seem to be a discrepancy here between the earlier explanation, that if out of a negative mind one harms or criticises a bodhisattva, then that will incur the negativity of being reborn in the hell realms for many eons. Whereas here it is explained that if you harm a bodhisattva, they will hold you dear, and by not forsaking you, they will lead you to supreme happiness. So it may seem that there is a discrepancy or a contradiction between these two points.

The earlier point refers to the infallibility of the law of karma: if you create positive karma you will reap positive results, and if you create negative karma you will reap negative results. Thus it concerns one's own karma: if out of a negative mind one harms a bodhisattva, then one's own karmic consequences will be a negative result in the

form of unfortunate rebirths in the hell realms and so forth.

Here, however, the point concerns the qualities of a bodhisattva. Even if you harm a bodhisattva, they will hold you dear. Through their compassion they will never forsake you. From the bodhisattva's side, they will never give up on you and will guide you to the ultimate state of happiness. So these points need to be understood in their proper context.

Through their compassion, aspirational prayers and their skilful means, a bodhisattva leads others, even those who harm them, to the ultimate state of happiness.

Furthermore, as the commentary explains:

In short, regardless of whether one enters the tantric or perfection path, the door to the Mahayana is the generation of bodhicitta alone. Therefore, one needs to generate this mind by striving in many methods. As explained earlier, to generate it one must first develop strong, heartfelt enthusiasm for the benefits of meditating on this mind.

Basically, if one is to develop an attitude of bodhicitta a courageous mind is essential.

Then, as Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

That one needs the seven limbs with refuge is explained by this supreme commentary on the stages of the path of a bodhisattva, as well as in the *Compendium of Deeds*.

To generate the mind of bodhicitta one first meditates on its benefits again and again, which generates a strong inclination to develop that mind, and as an aid to develop that mind we need the seven limb practice. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama recently mentioned, if we add refuge to the usual seven limbs then it becomes eight limbs. I don't know if you recall it but I definitely remember hearing that. Sometimes there is reference to ten limbs of practice, which adds the limbs of faith and bodhicitta as well as the limb of refuge to the usual seven limbs. It is good to remember that so that you don't become confused. The importance of the seven (or eight) limb practice is explained in the *Bodhicharyavatara* as well as the *Compendium of Deeds*, which was also composed by Shantideva.

Gyaltsab Je goes on to say:

If the aforementioned explained benefits are condensed, then there are two, which can be subsumed into temporary and ultimate benefits. The first again has two: not falling into the lower realms, and being reborn in a happy migration.

We went through these points in earlier verses, and His Holiness recently emphasised them in his teachings. He quoted the *Praise to Maitreya* which says that generating bodhicitta protects one from the lower realms, as well as leading one to a happy migration.

Then Gyaltsab Je goes on to present his reasons:

If one generates this mind, then many earlier accumulated causes for the lower realms are purified, and the future accumulation of further causes is interrupted. The causes for a happy migration that one has already accumulated

¹ Referring back to how a bodhisattva is praiseworthy and so forth.

increase due to being held by that mind, and those to be accumulated will be inexhaustible because of arising from that mind.

This succinct explanation states that due to the bodhicitta state of mind, both the causes for unfortunate rebirths are purified, and further causes for unfortunate rebirths are interrupted; and the causes for a happy migration that one has already accumulated will increase, and further causes will be inexhaustible. For as long as the bodhicitta attitude is held in one's mind, one will continuously be accumulating virtue. The personal instruction is, as mentioned again and again in the teachings and by the teachers, that generating the bodhicitta attitude prior to engaging in any virtuous activity is extremely important. When one generates a bodhicitta attitude, it will ensure that whatever activity one engages in will become a means to accumulate the highest form of merit, thus becoming a cause for one's temporary and ultimate happiness.

Furthermore, Gyaltsab Je says,

Ultimately, one easily attains liberation and enlightenment in dependence on this mind, but first one needs to have the spontaneous aspiration to attain those temporary and ultimate benefits because, since these benefits arise from the generation of bodhicitta, one may say, "I shall generate the mind", but it will be mere words. If one analyses one's mind, this will be very clear.

As I mention again and again, it is important that we ensure that our deeds and our attitudes are not just mere words, but that we have actually developed that attitude. We need to really try to put some effort into generating and cultivating that bodhicitta attitude, otherwise, when we recite the text there is a danger that it will become mere words or lip service.

Then Gyaltsab Je further explains:

To generate the wish to attain the two benefits of higher status and definite goodness one needs to first train in the motivations of the small and middle capable being, and then meditate on the mind of enlightenment, which is rooted in love and compassion.

Here again the commentary is stating very clearly that in order to create the causes to obtain higher status, such as a good rebirth (i.e. as a human being) in the next lifetime, one needs to have a good understanding of karma as well as practising it. This is explained clearly in the small scope and the middle scope of the teachings. Without that basis of a profound understanding of the law of karma and abiding by that law, there is no way one can establish the causes to create a higher status.

Without developing an understanding of emptiness and realisation of emptiness, there is no way that one can obtain definite goodness or liberation. To gain a profound understanding and realisation of emptiness, one also needs to have a good basis of the practices of the small and medium scopes.

What this really means is that we need to develop renunciation, because without developing renunciation there is no way that one can gain the realisation of emptiness. Recently when I was among the other geshe

we were debating certain points, and I made the comment that there is no way for us who still seek pleasure in samsara to obtain the realisation of emptiness! How could we possibly realise emptiness if we don't give up the pleasures of samsara? Indeed the teachings say: without developing renunciation there is no way to gain the realisation of emptiness.

Even non-Buddhist practitioners such as the Tirthikas, who are classified as extremists, have actually renounced certain levels of suffering. They definitely have developed disgust for the sufferings of the desire realms. With disgust for the pleasures of the desire realm they develop a longing for the pleasures of the higher realms, such as the form and formless realms. Then, when they gain the absorption of the form realms while in a meditative state, they realise that even the pleasures there are mediocre relative to the higher realms. Thus they develop disgust for the pleasures of the form realms and long for the pleasures of the formless realms. Then they go further into meditative absorption to obtain the pleasurable state of the formless realms. So while they have developed a certain amount of renunciation in relation to the two sufferings (the suffering of suffering and the suffering of change) of the lower realms, they have still not overcome the third suffering, the all-pervasive compounded suffering, which is the primary form of suffering. For as long as one does not renounce that third level of suffering, one cannot develop renunciation of the pleasures of samsara. This is the crucial point that we need to understand.

Based on the training of the practices of the small and middle capable being, one meditates on the mind of enlightenment, based on love and compassion. We need to really understand and realise these practices and go through them in systematic stages, leading up to engaging in the higher practices of developing bodhicitta.

Then Gyaltsab Rinpoche, author of the commentary, sums up the meaning of the chapter in this verse:

Those who know they have attained a human body
with freedoms and endowments
Meditate with effort on the two bodhicittas.
This is the supreme taking the essence of the
freedoms and endowments.
Initially meditate on the benefits of that mind.

THE TITLE OF THE CHAPTER

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

Having completed the first chapter we will begin the second chapter in our next session. The main subject matter of the second chapter is a detailed presentation of the practices of the seven limbs. You can prepare for this by reading relevant texts such as the lam rim teachings. I taught this chapter at one Easter course in conjunction with the seven limb practice from the lam rim, so you may refer to your notes from that.

At the recent teaching on the *Heart Sutra*, His Holiness discussed the very beginning of the sutra where it states

that the Buddha is absorbed in the meditative state called Profound Illumination. His Holiness explained that the words *profound* and *illumination* indicate that the Buddha is simultaneously in meditative as well as in post meditative equipoise. In other commentaries, the *profound* and *illumination* are said to refer to subject and object. His Holiness' explanation showed that the quality of the Buddha was such that he could be in these two states simultaneously, and this explanation brought tears to my eyes!

As he has done in the past, His Holiness mentioned in his teaching this time that the word *also* (from the line: *also looking perfectly and correctly at the emptiness of the inherent existence of the five aggregates*) has a profound implication. His Holiness offers a very profound explanation of this. Most commentaries explain that *also* means that not only the aggregates, but also the constituents are empty of inherent existence. However, as His Holiness explained, *also* implies that not only are the aggregates empty of inherent existence, but the person who is designated upon the five aggregates is also empty of inherent existence. This is a much more profound explanation of the word *also*, because it has the implication of presenting the lack of inherent existence of both persons as well as other phenomena. This explanation is not really found in other commentaries. Beginning with this explanation His Holiness then went on to explain the essence of the *Heart Sutra*.

On this recent visit I had many opportunities to be close to His Holiness, which was really good. His Holiness really showed clear signs of being really pleased. So if I don't now attempt to do some practice it would be really embarrassing!

When we were in New Zealand His Holiness approached me and asked how old I was and I offered that I was actually 78 years old, and then at the Quang Minh temple, after the teaching he came down and held my hand and said 'We are of the same age, so we are old buddies!' After the second session at Quang Minh, His Holiness came down and held my hand and said, 'Thank you for what you do'.

The event at Geshe Ngawang Dhargye's centre in Dunedin was really very good. His Holiness was scheduled to visit for only half an hour, but ended up spending about two hours there. When he saw the picture of the late Geshe Ngawang Dhargye, His Holiness spent quite a long time looking at it and commented, "This picture must have been when Geshe-la was quite ill, because normally he was quite plump wasn't he?"

When His Holiness was interviewed soon after he arrived at the New Zealand airport, he explained that one of the main reasons for his visit was to come to the centre which was established by the late Geshe Ngawang Dhargye, who was a great scholar and a practitioner and a great friend. Having been a great friend of His Holiness, he said, "It befalls upon me to take on the responsibility for looking after his centre now". Later I mentioned to the centre staff that if they were to listen to what His Holiness said, they would find great points there for them to consider. There wasn't time to receive His Holiness at Dunedin airport, so I waited at the centre for his arrival. As soon as His Holiness stepped out of the car he came

up towards me and held me in his arms for a while. This was definitely an auspicious occasion.

It is important to utilise the teachings to subdue one's mind and not to increase one's pride. As His Holiness himself mentions, if we use the teachings and the words of buddhas to subdue one's mind then it contributes to a happy mind. But if one remains pompous, with a sense of pride, it does not help to contribute to a joyful and happy mind. This is very practical advice presented by His Holiness.

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་མཁའ་ལྷན་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

2 July 2013

Having generated our motivation with the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in meditation, focussing single-pointedly on the practice.

[meditation]

It would also be good to now generate the positive motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings, as a way to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teaching and put it into practice well.

Familiarising ourselves with these positive intentions is extremely beneficial. At the very least we can familiarise our mind with the thought of how wonderful it would be if all beings could be free from suffering and abide in ultimate happiness, and then think, 'May I be able to do that'. If we can remind ourselves again and again of this intention, and periodically bring it to mind in any activity we engage in, we will be familiarising ourselves with the basis of love and compassion, which then becomes the foundation for developing bodhicitta within our own mind. Familiarising ourselves with this attitude is incredibly meaningful and beneficial. Although as beginners we have not yet developed actual bodhicitta, this sort of attitude can be a substitute for that bodhicitta attitude at our level.

In our last session we completed the first of the ten chapters of the *Bodhicharyavatara*, which explained the benefits and the many great qualities of bodhicitta. The main topic of the second chapter is how to engage in the purification of negativities.

It is good for us to identify what negativity is, as well as its opposite, virtue. **Negativity** is defined in the teachings as that which brings about unwanted or unpleasant consequences. So any activity that brings about unpleasant consequences is engaging in negativity. The opposite of negativity, **virtue**, is that which brings about positive and pleasant consequences for oneself.

We can succinctly identify negativity by referring to the ten non-virtues, which are easy to list. The lam rim teachings explain karma in great detail—the different types of karma, the four pathways of creating karma and so forth. Through this we can understand in greater detail how one creates and engages in negativity. The opposite of the ten non-virtues are the ten virtues, which we can also relate to the lam rim teachings. Thus we will be able to see that intentionally engaging in the ten virtues is a way of accumulating virtue.

We need to have a reason to engage in the practice of abandoning non-virtue and negativities and adopting

virtue. Why do we need to abandon negativity and adopt virtue? The reasons can be understood when we think about the unpleasant consequences of negativity and the positive results of virtue. If we don't wish to experience unpleasant results, then we need to abandon negativity; if we want to experience positive results then we need to adopt virtue. It's as simple as that! When we relate this basic understanding to the extensive explanations in the lam rim teachings, we will gain a broader picture of how karma works, which would be really meaningful.

Relating to the lam rim teachings will broaden our understanding of the range of material about karma. So if we are asked, for example, to teach about karma, we will not be short of material to relay—if, that is, we have studied the lam rim. On a practical level it is good for us to expand our own understanding by referring to other teachings, both for our own development as well as to present the topic to others. Then, when a situation arises where we need to present the Dharma to others, we will readily be able to access the knowledge that we have gained from our study of the texts. It is good to take this practical approach to studying the texts.

I've heard comments that the *Bodhicharyavatara* is an easy text to teach. I personally feel that it is not that easy at all to teach the *Bodhicharyavatara* thoroughly; one needs to have a broad understanding of the lam rim teachings, the Madhyamaka teachings, the mind training teachings, as well as a good understanding of tenets.

In the past, in our recitations of the *Bodhicharyavatara*, as you were doing the recitation in English it seemed to take much longer. In particular, when we came to the ninth chapter I would hear you recite terms such as Chittamatra, and I wondered where that came from in the actual text. Later I learnt that the ninth chapter was translated as a commentary, and was not in verse form.

I can safely say that I have made every attempt to study the earlier mentioned subjects, so it's not as if I am trying to present this text without having done any prior study myself. Even though I cannot claim to be able to give you a profound explanation, I have at least attempted to complete the study. I have to assume that when His Holiness the Dalai Lama thanked me, it was because what I'm presenting here might have some value and benefit. There would be no reason at all for His Holiness to thank me about anything else.

1. THE PREPARATORY ACTIONS FOR EXPLAINING THE STAGES OF THE MAHAYANA PATH¹

2. THE ACTUAL EXPLANATION OF THE STAGES OF THE PATH

2.2. The method for taking the essence

2.2.2 Explaining the individual meanings²

2.2.2.1. CONTEMPLATING THE BENEFITS OF ENLIGHTENMENT (CHAPTER 1)

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

This is subdivided into two.

2.2.2.2.1. Taking the mind of enlightenment

2.2.2.2.2. The way of training in the perfections

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

²This heading was introduced on 26 March 2013.

The two bodhicittas were explained in detail in chapter 1, so here we need to be able to immediately reflect on our understanding of what these two bodhicittas refer to.

From just the outlines alone we can see how profoundly the material of the text is presented. Just one heading can carry the whole entire path within it, as is the case with this outline. It implies that having cultivated and developed the two types of bodhicitta (the awakening mind that aspires to enlightenment and the mind that engages in the practices), the next step is to actually engage in the practices, such as the six perfections and the four means of gathering disciples. So this outline is concisely referring to the bodhicitta attitude as well as the practices of the six perfections.

Even just this one line can be a basis for contemplating the entire presentation of how a bodhisattva practises along the path. As mentioned here, the two bodhicittas refers to aspiring bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta, which can be developed using two specific techniques. With regard to the seven point cause-and-effect technique, it would be good to reflect on what those six causes and their effects are, and contemplate each point. Then we can contemplate the various points within the exchanging self with other techniques. As training in the practices refers to the six perfections, we can reflect on the nature of generosity and how it is practised, and likewise morality, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom and how each of these are practised. The bodhisattva's practices also include the four means of gathering disciples, which are the means by which a bodhisattva gathers disciples.

2.2.2.2.1. Taking the mind of enlightenment

This has two main sections.

2.2.2.2.1.1. Confessing the disruptive conditions, the negativities, by way of the complete four powers, after having done the preliminaries of prostrating, offering and going for refuge

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

The precious mind of enlightenment, or bodhicitta, is not generated spontaneously. Rather, it depends on specific causes and conditions of which there are two types, abandoning the disruptive conditions that have to be purified, and adopting the conducive conditions for developing bodhicitta that need to be acquired.

The **conducive conditions** are acquired through the accumulation of merit. Without the accumulation of merit there is no possible way to generate bodhicitta within one's mental continuum. Therefore, various methods of accumulating merit are presented in the teachings as a way to acquire the conducive conditions for generating bodhicitta.

The disruptive conditions are the negativities. Thus the negativities need to be purified, for without purifying the negativities there is no possible way to develop bodhicitta. So an extensive explanation of how to purify the negativities is also presented here.

Nagarjuna explains how one definitely needs to accumulate extensive merit as a way to develop bodhicitta, while Asanga explains how one definitely needs to have faith, in order to develop bodhicitta.

The optimum way to incorporate both of these aspects of accumulating merit and generating faith is to engage in making offerings. In addition to accumulating merit the very act of making offerings in an appropriate way will induce faith in the holy objects.

2.2.2.2.1.1. Confessing the disruptive conditions, the negativities, by way of the complete four powers, after having done the preliminaries of prostrating, offering and going for refuge

Having applied the conducive conditions of accumulating merit such as rejoicing in virtue and so forth, taking on the mind of enlightenment begins with engaging in the conducive preliminaries of prostrations, making offerings and going for refuge. Then one engages in the practice of purifying negativities by way of the four opponent powers.

We need to take this presentation as a personal instruction. If we aspire to develop bodhicitta, then we need to engage in the preliminaries. It is not as though we can skip the preliminaries, and suddenly develop bodhicitta. Without engaging in the preliminaries, there is no way we can develop bodhicitta. Therefore we need to identify what the preliminaries are and what the practices involve, and then attempt to really engage in those preliminary practices. That is the optimum method to establish the basis for developing bodhicitta within ourselves.

There are texts that will help us to identify the preliminaries. One of these is *Bodhicharyavatara*, the text we are studying. The lam rim teachings present the preliminaries as well, particularly in the practices of the small and medium scopes, which are the preliminary practices for developing bodhicitta. So we can refer to these texts to gain a good understanding of the correct sequence of engaging in the preliminaries. Then we can confidently present the preliminary practices to others if they ask us. So understanding the preliminaries is for our own benefit, as well as the benefit of presenting it to others.

CHAPTER 2: PURIFYING NEGATIVITIES

The chapter has two subdivisions:

- I. Explaining the text of the chapter
- II. The title of the chapter

I. EXPLAINING THE TEXT OF THE CHAPTER³

The chapter is divided into four sections:

1. Offerings
2. Prostrations
3. Refuge
4. Confessing of negativity with the four complete powers

In the lam rim the first of the preliminaries is prostration, whereas here the first practice is offering; except for the order there is not much difference.

³ To keep things manageable the numbering system starts again for each chapter.

1. OFFERINGS

This has two main headings:

- 1.1. The need to make offerings
- 1.2. The actual practice of offering

The Tibetan word for offerings is *chopa* which comes from the Sanskrit word *puja*, and it has the connotation of pleasing the minds of the gurus, buddhas and deities such as Tara and so forth. So, when we imagine that the object of one's offering is pleased, we are making the actual offering. For our own sake, making offerings is to be understood as an antidote for overcoming miserliness.

The manner of presenting the offerings is clearly presented in the lam rim.

First of all the offerings themselves have to be pure. That is they have to be free from deceit, which is sub-divided into two categories:

1. Free from deceit on a causal level.
2. Free from deceit on a motivational level.

To be free from deceit on the **causal level**, one needs to ensure that the object of offering is not obtained through wrong livelihood, or acquired through heavy negativities. Wrong livelihood involves pretentious behaviours and so forth. The teachings explain four different types of wrong livelihood. We can, however, offer what we have obtained from others if others have given it to us willingly. Even if we have to ask for donations or beg for an offering, as long as it is given willingly it can be offered, as it would not be an offering obtained by a wrong livelihood. Otherwise, if something is obtained from pretentious behaviour and so forth, then the offering has been obtained through causal deceit, and thus will not be a pure offering.

On a **motivational level**, the offering has to be free from the eight worldly concerns, i.e. not made with the eight worldly concerns in one's mind. This is extensively presented in the lam rim. Offerings made out of worldly concerns are tainted and cannot become a cause for liberation and enlightenment.

The lam rim teachings present this under the heading of the Six Preliminary Practices. The first of these is to clean the area well first and then arrange the altar with the representations of the three objects of refuge. The offerings have to be on a clean surface, presented in clean containers and so forth, and also arranged very beautifully. When we make water bowl offerings for example, the water bowls have to be arranged neatly and so forth. It is good to understand these details of how to engage in the practices of offering so you can incorporate them into your daily practices. I have previously explained this in detail and it is also good for those of you who were present to refer to those notes.

In addition to the text we are studying, I exhort you to refer to the lam rim teachings which have a very detailed presentation. We cannot forget about the lam rim teachings when we are studying *Bodhicharyavatara*, and it is good to complement our study of this text with the lam rim as a way to enhance your understanding.

It is good to note Gyaltsab Je's meticulous presentation where he uses the outlines as a way of explaining and summarising the body of the text.

1.1. The need to make offerings

The first verse of this chapter reads:

1. *To take this precious mind,
I make wholesome offerings to an ocean of
qualities:
The tathagatas and the holy Dharma,
The stainless Jewel, and the buddhas' children.*

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

One respectfully makes offerings in thought and action in a wholesome way, with exalted objects.

Here, *exalted objects* refers to the actual objects of offering. What is to be offered has to be an exalted object. This implies these are objects that are free from deceit, i.e. that they are pure objects. The manner of offering is *respectfully*. *In thought and action* can refer to offering with the intention to benefit all sentient beings, to lead them to the ultimate state of happiness and to free them from all suffering.

This is another very meticulous presentation by Gyaltsab Je. It is a concise explanation of the complete form of making an offering in relation to both our physical actions and our thoughts; our gestures in relation to the object itself; and the substance we offer and so forth. All of that has been presented in these few words.

The presentation in the commentary follows the order of the Tibetan version of the verse. Following his explanation of making offerings Gyaltsab Je asks:

To what end?

In other words, for what purpose do we make the offerings. The answer to that is:

For the purpose of taking the precious mind, from which all the masses of goodness of all sentient beings arise.

That is an explanation of the first line of the English translation of the verse. As a way of explaining the following lines of the verse, the commentary presents this rhetorical question:

To which object?

That is to say, to what objects are we presenting the offering? Again it is good for us to understand the meticulously logical quality of the presentation, which reflects how our mind works. It poses questions as a way to quell doubts or queries as they are likely to arise. After the explanation that one should make offerings respectfully in a wholesome way, and that the objects have to be exalted objects, one might ask, 'For what purpose? Why would one need to do that?'

So Gyaltsab Je next presents the objects to whom one presents the offering:

As one makes offerings to the tathagatas and the holy superior beings, and also to the holy Dharma Jewel, the Mahayana truth of cessation that is free from adventitious stains on top of being naturally pure, and the truth of the path, is an object of offering.

The ocean of qualities that are the children of the buddhas, such as the superior lord Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri and others, are included as well.

The meaning of *tathagata* was extensively explained at the beginning of chapter one, so we can refer to that. A

tathagata is an enlightened being. The *holy superior beings* are the bodhisattvas (of which we have also given an explanation). The *holy Dharma* refers here to the Dharma Jewel which is the Mahayana truth of cessation and truth of the path. *The Mahayana truth of cessation* consists of that which is *free from adventitious stains*, which is *naturally pure*. *Free from adventitious stains* refers to the *cessation* of the deluded obscurations, and *naturally pure* refers to the obscurations to omniscience. Thus cessation includes being free from both the deluded obscurations as well as the obscurations to omniscience. That is what the cessation means in the Mahayana Dharma Jewel. Then the *truth of the path* is also included in the Dharma Jewel. Thus the two aspects of the Dharma Jewel are *cessation* and *the truth of the path*. *The ocean of qualities of the children of the buddhas* refers to the *holy superior beings*, as mentioned here.

1.2. The actual practice of offering

This is subdivided into three:

- 1.2.1. Offering substances that are not owned
- 1.2.2. Offering one's own body
- 1.2.3. Offerings that are emanated by the mind

1.2.1. Offering substances that are not owned

This section has three subdivisions:

- 1.2.1.1. Offering substances
- 1.2.1.2. The way of offering
- 1.2.1.3. The reason for offering substances that are not owned

1.2.1.1. OFFERING SUBSTANCES

The substances that we offer are:

2. *Whatever flowers and fruits there are,
Whatever medicines there are,
Whatever precious objects there are in the
world,
Whatever clean and beautiful waters there are,*
3. *High mountains and likewise,
Forested areas, isolated and beautiful,
Flowering trees adorned and weighted with
flowers,
All trees whose branches are weighted down
with fruit,*
4. *Divine and worldly smells and
Incense, wish-fulfilling trees and precious trees,
Uncultivated crops and
Further, ornaments suitable as offerings,*
- 5a. *Lakes and ponds adorned with lotus flowers,
And beautiful swans making pleasant sounds.*

Offerings classified as unowned offerings are those things that are not personally owned by oneself. In fact, these are the best offerings for those of us who feel that we don't have much to offer. When we think about these lines of verse, we will find we have no shortage of offerings.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary elaborates on each of the substances listed in the verses.

The unowned flowers of the world, such as lotuses and so forth;

Lotuses and so forth are an example of very beautiful flowers. When we are out and about in a beautiful park or garden, rather than just enjoying it for our own personal pleasure, we can immediately remember to

mentally offer these beautiful flowers to the objects of veneration—the objects of refuge. It might be inappropriate to pick a flower as soon as we see it; if it is completely unowned then maybe that's fine, but not if we are in someone's garden or a park where we are not allowed to do that. The advice is to mentally offer the beautiful flower as soon as you see it. The *Mandala Offering* refers to visualising, which means a mental offering. There can be no dispute if you do that, as you will not be actually taking anything from the environment.

One needs to understand that these are incredible ways for us to take every opportunity to engage in practice and accumulate virtue. As soon as we see a flower we can immediately seize that as an opportunity to make an offering, which is a way for us to accumulate virtue. So it is in these small and moderate ways that we need to start accumulating merit and virtue.

Then as the commentary continues:

- Whatever fruits there are such as aryara and so forth;
- Whatever medicines there are such as camphor and so forth;
- Whatever precious substances there are in the worlds such as gold, silver and so forth;
- Whatever clean and pleasant waters there are such as lakes, ponds and so forth;

This means that whenever we come across small lakes or ponds we can immediately offer them.

The eight mountains of gold and so forth;

These are mythological offerings. Here one visualises offering great mountains of gold and so forth to the objects.

Likewise forests, isolated and beautiful areas;

Along with the objects of offering such as beautiful forests and so forth, *isolated and beautiful areas* are areas that are conducive for meditation, in particular, for developing calm abiding. So these sorts of places can also be objects of offering.

Flowering trees that are weighted down and adorned with their flowers;

Trees fully in bloom with beautiful flowers are also objects that can be offered.

Trees whose branches are bent by the weight of their ripe pure fruits;

Here, we visualise trees laden with fruit, like mangoes or apples, where the branches are weighed down with their load of fruit.

Pure scents of gods, nagas and so forth, natural ones, applied ones and created ones;

Pleasant incense;

Natural ones refers to pleasant scents that are naturally fragrant. *Applied ones and created ones* refers to those which are created or applied by the mixing of substances, such as incense. So *incense* is included in the category of scents which are created, meaning that you have to put many substances together in order to create the nice smell.

The wish-fulfilling tree that gives what one needs and wishes, and trees made out of precious substances;

The wish-fulfilling tree is a mythological tree that is said to bear whatever one wishes for. Now, of course, we refer to a mythological tree, but it is very possible that such trees did exist when the merit of the beings in the world was much greater.

Lakes as one thinks they should be and ponds for bathing, that are adorned with lotuses, where beautiful swans make pleasant sounds;

It is very good for us to visualise these beautiful places and areas to make as offerings. Visualising such an offering can be really soothing and pleasant, and it is really a form of meditation. Visualising pleasant objects can really lift you up and make you feel quite joyful.

The crops that grow by themselves without the need to plough the fields and

This again relates to the time called the fortunate era, when it is said that beings on this planet didn't need to sow seeds to reap a crop. In fact, it is said that if a crop was harvested in the morning, it would already be growing again by evening. This was a fortunate time when merit was very high. It is also said that it declined when humans started to amass things for themselves, when they didn't have to. I think this is one of the heaps on the long mandala offering, the *Mandala of the Thirty-five Heaps*.

All unowned offerings are summarised in this last offering:

Beautiful ornaments that are suitable to be offered to the tatagatas.

In summary, whatever offering that is suitable to be offered to the tatagatas can be offered. This also implies that there may be certain offerings which are not suitable to be offered, either mentally or actually.

It is also explained in the teachings that we should use the best substances we can afford as an offering. There is a Tibetan sweet cake made out of butter and tsampa which turns mouldy and green if you keep it for too long. Cutting off the mouldy part and offering it would not be suitable. Nor is it suitable to offer a plant with yellowing leaves. In other words one should not be making offerings of substances that one would not use oneself. 'Oh, this is spoiled, I cannot use it, so I might as well offer it!' would be the wrong way of making an offering. Rather one should offer things that are in their prime.

On a personal level, these explanations encourage us to make offerings on a regular basis in whatever way that we can—water bowl offerings, or flowers or even visualised offerings of beautiful parks and so forth. That is a way to accumulate merit in our daily lives.

Offering substances such as one's wealth will not deprive us of food and drink. Rather it will be the reverse; it will be a cause for us to have even more food and drink. So you need not worry that you will be losing out by making offerings of your food and drink to the holy objects.

Whenever we can make actual offerings of substances we obtain them through our own means. Whenever that is not possible we can use unowned objects as a way of making offerings. So what we have learned here is that we are never deprived of means or substances for offerings. As the teachings mention, it is not the lack of

substances that will deprive us of making offerings to the holy objects, but rather the lack of faith.

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་མེས་པོ་འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷོ་ལྷན་པ་ལ་འཇམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

9 July 2013

Based on the refuge and bodhicitta motivation that we generated earlier, we can now engage in the meditation practice. [meditation]

We can now generate the following motivation for receiving the teachings:

In order to benefit all sentient beings by liberating them from all suffering and leading them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teaching and put its meaning into practice well.

Generating such a motivation can definitely ensure that our time listening to the teaching will contribute to the flourishing of Dharma and the welfare of all sentient beings.

1.2.1. Offering substances that are not owned (cont.)

1.2.1.1. Offering substances

Last week we covered the list of unowned substances that can be offered. Now we turn to the way in which we offer these substances.

1.2.1.2. THE WAY OF OFFERING

The relevant lines from the root text are:

- 5cd. *Extending to the end of space
All of these, which are unowned,*
6. *Having mentally created and offered them
To the Able One, the supreme of beings, and
his children,
May those with holy qualities and great
compassion
Consider me with affection and enjoy these
offerings of mine.*

The opening line, *extending to the end of space*, indicates the measure or extent of whatever offerings we are presenting. When offering flowers, for example, one can imagine that the whole sky is filled with flowers. With this visualisation the merit one gains will not be limited to offering just a few flowers. Rather it will expand to the extent of space. It is the same with all the other offerings. Not limiting an offering to one or two items but making such expansive offerings is a way to amass much greater benefit from the offerings.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with:

All the objects not possessed by anyone, having mentally created and offered them...

The implication of *all the objects* is that we can make offerings in the most expansive way. *All the objects* particularly relates to all the unowned objects, a list of which was presented last week. Another way to understand how to make extensive offerings would be, for example, when offering a flower then we can also bring to mind the particular beautiful features of the

flower such as its beautiful shape, colour, and scent. When one presents the offering, thinking in detail about all of its beautiful features, it becomes a much more expansive offering.

A significant point about mentally creating the offerings is that even though these objects are unowned external objects, when we personally take the initiative to mentally create and offer them expansively to the extent of space and so forth, they become offerings made from our own side. Also, the *Mandala Offering* is created in one's mind. As the six-session prayer reads, 'Holding in my mind an exquisite jewel-filled mandala'. So one needs to understand what this all actually means.

The next part of the explanation identifies the holy objects that we present the offerings to. As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary we make offerings:

...to the supreme of beings, the Able One, and his children, respectfully in a good way. May those possessing qualities and great compassion consider me with affection and enjoy these offerings of mine.

The supreme of beings, the Able One refers to Buddha Shakyamuni, who is also referred to as the supreme being of the bipeds (those who walk on two legs, i.e. humans). The term *Able One* indicates that he has overcome all adversities and acquired all good qualities. *And his children*, refers to the bodhisattvas. The manner of making these offerings is *respectfully in a good way*. The term *good way* can refer to the actual arrangements of the offerings, but more specifically it relates to presenting the offerings with the bodhicitta attitude in our mind. That is the optimum way to make the offerings.

When we present the offerings, we are also making a request to *those supreme beings possessing great qualities and who have great compassion*. *Possessing qualities* refers, of course, to the great qualities of the enlightened beings such as Buddha Shakyamuni as well as the bodhisattvas. Here one can envision those bodhisattvas who were the close disciples of the Buddha, such as Manjushri, Vajrapani, Maitreya, Samantabhadra and so forth who possess incredible qualities and who have great compassion for all beings. The greatest quality of the Able One, Buddha Shakyamuni, and the bodhisattvas is, of course, their unbiased and unflinching compassion for all sentient beings who are experiencing unbearable sufferings. They have no ulterior motives; the only concern of enlightened beings and the bodhisattvas is how to free all beings from suffering.

As explained in other teachings, if, from our own side we have suitable faith, there will be no doubt whatsoever about the capacity and the willingness for the enlightened beings and bodhisattvas to help us. So if we, from our own side, pay respect, and more particularly develop faith, we will be suitable receptacles for receiving their help. So, *consider me with affection*, implies that if we open our own mind with faith, we will definitely receive unceasing benefit and help from the enlightened beings and bodhisattvas.

With respect to the actual offering, *enjoy these offerings of mine*, indicates that one needs to imagine that having made these offerings, the buddhas and bodhisattvas very

gladly and joyfully accept the offerings, and for each moment that they accept an offering, they experience a fresh, new uncontaminated bliss in their mind. Here we need to note that this newly generated uncontaminated bliss does not mean that they are obtaining a new bliss that they have not obtained before. That is because *obtain* implies obtaining something by the virtue of overcoming a defilement. Enlightened beings have already abandoned all adversities and negativities, so we need to understand the difference between the generation of uncontaminated bliss and obtaining uncontaminated bliss. *Generating* uncontaminated bliss doesn't necessarily mean that it is newly obtained but rather that it is freshly experienced. It is reasonable to acknowledge that each time we make a new offering the enlightened beings experience new uncontaminated bliss.

1.2.1.3. THE REASON FOR OFFERING SUBSTANCES THAT ARE NOT OWNED

I have mentioned these points many times before but I'm not sure if you are holding onto them or you have just let them wash over you each time.

The verse relating to this topic reads:

7. *I have no merits and am very poor
And have no other wealth to offer;
Therefore, may the protector who thinks
about the purpose of others
Enjoy them merely due to the fact of it being
for my purpose.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation of this verse commences with a qualm.

Argument: Why offer only offerings arisen from the mind? It is appropriate to offer diverse pleasant offerings.

The implication here is this: isn't it more suitable to offer real substances, rather than mentally created ones? This is a reasonable argument. Will it be sufficient to make mentally generated offerings if one actually has the means to make actual offerings? One way to understand this is that one only offers mentally created substances when one lacks the means to make actual offerings. So by offering mentally created substances one is not deprived of making offerings.

Another way to understand mentally created offerings is that we don't limit the actual offering substances, such as flowers and so forth, to a mere bunch of flowers. Rather they are mentally multiplied to fill the entire space.

Now if one only makes mentally created offerings when one has the means to make physical offerings then, as previous teachers have indicated, that could be a way to create the karma to be reborn into an area where we can see many nice things, but which we lack the karma to use. Life in the western world is a good example. We see fancy cars and houses and many beautiful things, but we can't use them all because we don't have the wealth to purchase them. Thus one should not resort merely to mentally created offerings if one has the means to make actual offerings.

Then Gyaltsab Je gives a direct answer to the earlier qualm:

Answer: Because I have not accumulated extensive merit previously I have become destitute, without desired enjoyments...

One reason for mentally creating offerings is that one is destitute now as a result of not having previously accumulated extensive merit. This implies that while one may have the means to reach some level of enjoyment, one does not have the means now to obtain whatever one wishes for. The first thing we need to understand here is that being poor and destitute now and not being able to experience desired enjoyments, is a result of not having accumulated extensive merit through acts of generosity in the past. So we need to understand that the law of cause and effect, or karma, is also being presented here.

If one has not engaged in the act of generosity in the past, then one will experience the consequence of being destitute or impoverished in this lifetime. The direct implication is that this is a consequence of not having accumulated extensive merit previously. So in order to secure good resources in the future, we need to engage in acts of generosity now, when we will have the means to accumulate merit. Thus, if one does not have the means to make extensive offerings now, then one has to resort to offering mentally emanated ones to accumulate merit.

Then Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Since I do not possess other wealth to offer, I request that the protector, who thinks singularly about the purpose of sentient beings, to enjoy this unowned offering for my purpose.

Gyaltsab Je is saying, 'Through being destitute and not having great wealth to make elaborate offerings as *I do not possess other wealth to offer*, I make this request to *the protector*, who is the enlightened being *who thinks singularly about the purpose of sentient beings*. Please accept *this unowned offering for my purpose*.'

Here, *my purpose* indicates for the purpose of accumulating merit, and abandoning both the deluded obscurations and the obscurations to omniscience. So for the personal purpose of overcoming the two main obscurations and amassing great extensive merit one requests those who have great compassion (such as the Buddha) to accept these offerings. In straightforward language, we are saying, 'Even though I don't have great extensive offerings, and I only have these meagre ones, please accept them out of your great compassion, as a way to fulfil my purpose of accumulating merit and so forth'.

However, we need to acknowledge that we do have the means to make basic offerings, such as water bowl offerings, flowers, fruit and so forth. But we should not limit whatever physical substances we may be able to place on our altar without too much effort or cost. Rather, that simple offering can serve as a base for the extensive, expansive offerings that one mentally creates. No matter how meagre or simple an offering may be, mentally turning it into an expansive offering is a way to accumulate extensive merit. This is the main point that we need to understand.

One needs to bring to mind that these are the extensive practices of a bodhisattva. Of course bodhisattvas have already generated bodhicitta, but prior to generating

bodhicitta they contemplated the benefits of bodhicitta as a way to develop that bodhicitta. As a cause for developing bodhicitta one needs to accumulate extensive merit, for which purpose one engages in the practice of making such extensive offerings.

Even if these practices involve some effort and hardship one will definitely reap the benefits and gain positive results. There was once an occasion where there were some other geshe visiting here, and as we were doing some practices, nice meals were brought to us. Geshe Jampel Sengye commented, 'Oh, they are bringing such nice food! We might be reaping the benefits of the difficulties and hardships we went through earlier in life'. I commented, 'Oh, I don't think we should limit the reaping of a good result to just merely receiving nice food now'. Geshe Jampel Sengye said, 'Well, that might be true, but couldn't we still consider the good things that we are receiving now are a result of our earlier hardships'?

1.2.2. Offering one's body

We now come to offering one's body, which is something that we definitely do possess.

The two verses relating to this outline read:

8. *To the conquerors and their children
I always offer my body completely,
May the supreme brave ones enjoy me!
With respect I make myself your slave.*
9. *Being perfectly held by you
I shall, without fear, benefit sentient beings
in existence.
I shall leave earlier negativities behind in
every respect,
And henceforth not create other negativities.*

In relation to the way of making an offering of one's body Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Regarding the statement, "Since I have a body that can be offered thus I offer it":

To the conquerors and their children I offer completely and always this body of mine, giving up the mind that makes it completely mine. Please, supreme brave beings, enjoy it.

The **objects** to which one offers one's body are *the conquerors*, the enlightened beings *and their children*, the bodhisattvas. The **way** to offer it is *completely and always*; **what** one offers is *this body of mine*, and the **manner** is *giving up the mind that makes it completely mine*. Basically, this refers to giving up our sense of identity or attachment to our body. Normally, we naturally have a very strong sense of ownership of our body thinking 'this is *my body*', which is accompanied by very strong attachment and a very strong sense of identity. Leaving aside that strong sense of ownership and identity, one offers one's body to the conquerors and their children to use as they wish.

Next Gyaltsab Je states:

Please, supreme brave beings, enjoy it. The purpose of offering it is that I make myself your slave with faith and respect and will follow your advice according to your instructions.

Normally we use our body as a slave to our senses and to sustain ourselves. Here, one decides to use one's body to fulfil the wishes of the conquerors and their children. Offering ourselves as a slave or servant means to willingly follow every advice of the conquerors and their children. The king's commands to his ministers and subjects are followed because the king is their ruler, so they have to obey whatever command the king gives. Similarly, as specified here, one offers oneself with respect, willingly following the advice and instructions that have been given by the conquerors. Thus we are putting ourselves into the service of the conquerors and gurus and follow their wishes.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then raises another query: what does one accomplish by having offered one's body as a servant to the protectors? The answer is:

Having offered it, whatever action I do, since I am being held by you, the protector, I am unafraid of cyclic existence because I am relying on a refuge that is free from all fears, and I will benefit sentient beings.

The specific implication of the benefits of offering one's body to the supreme beings is that a supreme being is an ultimate *refuge that is free from all fears*. Offering oneself to a supreme being who is free from all fears, will free one from all fears, particularly the fears of cyclic existence. Because one does not fear the shortcomings of cyclic existence, one has a courageous mind, which is then used to *benefit sentient beings*.

So that is the ultimate purpose of offering one's body as a slave to the supreme protector, the ultimate refuge—as a way for oneself to become fearless in benefiting other sentient beings.

To extract the main points from these few lines; being a servant implies following every wish or command of the supreme beings. The object to which one is making this offering is the Supreme Being, who is free from all fears, the ultimate protector and refuge. From that one enjoys a state of fearlessness. However, it is not as though one is achieving that fearless state just for personal gain, to further strengthen one's sense of pride and ego. But rather, the purpose for being in a fearless state is to utilise that state to benefit other sentient beings. Here, one again reflects upon the elements of love and compassion in benefiting sentient beings.

Those of you who have received initiations will recall a similar pledge made to the guru at the end of the initiation: As I have offered myself to you as a servant, I will now follow whatever instructions you give.

Then Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the further endeavours in which one engages:

I will leave behind all the meaningless negativities that I have accumulated before, and I will not create new negativity, even at the cost of my life.

This is indicating the importance of purifying the negativities one has created in the past, and of making a resolution to no longer create any negativity. So, with a strong sense of regret of the previous negativities one has amassed, one feels compelled to purify them and not to create any new negativity.

1.2.3. Offerings that are emanated

Here there are two subdivisions:

1.2.3.1. The common offerings

1.2.3.2. Peerless offerings

Some translate the Tibetan terms, *lana yopa* and *lana mepa* as *surpassed* and *unsurpassed*, respectively. When we use the term *surpassed*, translated here as *common*, then that indicates that there are even greater offerings beyond that. *Unsurpassed*, translated here as *peerless*, implies there is nothing that surpasses that. So an unsurpassable offering is the highest form of offering, and there is no offering greater or grander than that.

There are twelve common or surpassed offerings. These all relate to normal worldly activities of our everyday life, which we transform into offerings.

The twelve common offerings are:

1.2.3.1.1. Bath

1.2.3.1.2. Clothes

1.2.3.1.3. Ornaments

1.2.3.1.4. Scents

1.2.3.1.5. Flowers

1.2.3.1.7. Food

1.2.3.1.8. Light

1.2.3.1.9. Crystal palaces

1.2.3.1.10. Blessing parasols

1.2.3.1.11. Instruments

1.2.3.1.12. The blessing that they may be continually in the aspect of offerings

1.2.3.1.1. Bath

This has three subdivisions:

1.2.3.1.1.1. Bathing house

1.2.3.1.1.2. Way of bathing

1.2.3.1.1.3. Drying the body

One of our everyday activities is bathing ourselves. In order to do that we need to have a bathhouse, without which we cannot take a shower; then there is the manner of how to bathe; after which we need to dry ourselves. These are all normal daily activities which can be turned into offerings.

We can go through these quite quickly as they are easy to comprehend, and we don't want to take up too much time with them.

1.2.3.1.1.1. Bathing house

10. *In a fragrantly smelling bathhouse
With crystal ground, bright and sparkling,
With pleasant pillars ablaze with precious
objects,
Decorated with canopies made from bright
pearls,*

There are some variations in how to offer the bathing house: some mention visualising it in the space above. But, in our practice, if we have the merit field in the space above us, then it is good to visualise the bathing house in front of ourselves, in between ourselves and the merit field.

Again, Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary with a query, followed by an answer:

Where does one offer the bath?

In a bathhouse smelling fragrantly because of sprinkled sandalwood, with a floor of crystal, clear of colour, bright and completely clean...

So one visualises a beautiful bathing house with crystal panes and crystal floors.

...having adornments like conch shells and pillars blazing with precious objects,...

The *pillars* refers to the pillars at each corner of the bathing house, which are adorned with beautiful ornaments.

From the top being adorned with a canopy glowing from the bright pearls permeating it.

So basically the bath house is sheltered by a canopy adorned with many pearls.

We will not go into an elaborate explanation of these points here as I have explained them previously. So you can refer to previous notes. They are also explained in the preliminaries of the lam rim teachings, so you can refer to that text. The main point here is that one visualises that the holy beings in the merit field actually come into the bathing house, and take off their garments, which they put in beautiful places and so forth.

1.2.3.1.1.2. Way of bathing

As presented in the teachings one visualises dakinis around the bathing house where the enlightened beings of the merit field are bathing. There are three particular dakinis: one which holds a vase; another holding a substance for cleaning the body, like what we call soap, and the third dakini holds a towel to dry the holy bodies.

11. *To the tathagatas and their children
Out of many precious vases well filled
With pleasant incense water, accompanied
by
Music and dance, I offer in various ways a
bath.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation is:

One offers a bath to the tathagatas and their children out of many vases made from gold and other precious materials...

Here the dakinis use the vases to scoop up the scented water from the basin, and then pour that out as a way of showering.

That bowl is:

...filled with pleasant incense water that is fragrantly scented and has beautiful flowers in it, accompanied by music and dance.

The water has flower petals in it, which gives the water extra fragrance and scent. There are also dakinis who are playing music and offering dances.

1.2.3.1.1.3. Drying the body

This visualisation involves drying the holy bodies at five points. First the water on the top of the body is dried, then the water on the right side of the body, followed by drying the water gathered on the left side. Then the water at the heart of the body is dried, followed by the water below the navel.

In the bathing ritual, a mirror is used to visualize the entire merit field in it. One needs to understand that the

five dots or points of drying represent the five Dhyani buddhas.

The next two lines of the verse relate to drying of the body:

*12ab. I thoroughly dry their bodies with
Unequaled cloth, clean and infused with
scent.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Then one dries the bodies of the objects of offering with unequalled cloth, which is soft and clean, and infused with pleasant scents.

Here *unequaled cloth* implies a very special cloth is used to dry the bodies of the holy beings. We don't appreciate towels that are too coarse or rough and need to have soft towels and soft clothing. Likewise, here we visualise the best cloth for drying the holy bodies.

1.2.3.1.2. Clothes

I have previously extensively explained the specifics about the garments that are to be offered and you can refer to that.

The next lines of verse are:

*12cd Then I offer them holy and well-scented
Clothes of nice colour;
Various pure clothes, thin and soft.*

Here Gyaltsab Je explains:

Having dried their bodies I offer them holy fragrant garments of good colour...

If they are of the aspect of an ordained Sangha, then one offers the three types of robes, or:

...If they are in the aspect of a householder [or a layperson] then I offer them a variety of soft, fine clothes of good size and colour.

It is good to take note that in addition to making offerings to the normal objects of refuge, such as ordained Sangha, one also makes offerings to bodhisattvas in the lay aspect. This is another way to see the unbiased nature of Buddha's teachings. Suitable objects are to be venerated and are objects of offerings, whatever aspect they may be in. A bodhisattva having the aspect of a lay householder is depicted in lay garments, such as Manjushri, Maitreya and so forth. Ordained bodhisattvas include Shariputra and Maudgalyayana, who were the close disciples of the Buddha.

I have already explained how to discard old clothes.

1.2.3.1.3. Ornaments

In our worldly life, it is not enough just to have fine clothes. It seems that one needs to beautify oneself even further with ornaments. So we can make offerings of these.

The verse relating to this is:

*13. And hundreds of supreme ornaments
I offer also to the supreme Samantabhadra
and Manjushri
And to the ruler of the world and so forth.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je says:

I offer hundreds of supreme ear ornaments, bracelets, anklets, necklaces and so forth, to, among others, Samantabhadra, Mipham, Manjushri,

bodhisattvas in a lay aspect, and to the ruler of the world.

These are examples of bodhisattvas in the lay aspect, which implies that one need not make offerings of ornaments and so forth to ordained Sangha, bodhisattvas and so forth.

Of course in the worldly manner, after beautifying oneself with nice ornaments or jewellery, one will also apply nice smelling substances, scents and so forth. That is the next offering, which we can leave for our next session.

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 July 2013

Based on the motivation we have just generated in the recitation of the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in the practice of meditation.

[meditation]

You may come out of your samadhi now!

We have just attempted to engage in the practice of giving and taking in the form of a meditation practice. It would be very worthwhile if we could develop the determination to engage in this practice as much as possible in our everyday lives, so that our thoughts, actions and speech contribute to giving our happiness to others, while taking away their suffering. If we can apply this in our everyday life as much as possible, this would, of course, be most worthwhile.

The benefits one derives from doing such a practice are quite obvious. In countries like Australia, people are generally not deprived of sufficient food, clothing or shelter, and if that is the case then there are many practical ways to help them.

The most prevalent kind of suffering experienced here in the west tends not so much to be physical suffering, but suffering on a mental or psychological level. When suffering is of a psychological nature, people don't need physical help with food, shelter and so forth. Rather, the best form of assistance to someone who is experiencing mental or psychological suffering is companionship. We often see how true companions and friends really assist and help others. So we can see that there are many ways we can help others and that we don't need to be wealthy in order to extend our help to others.

We also need to apply the giving and taking practice in practical ways to those who are close to us, because if we can't apply it to them then there aren't many other practical ways to engage in practice. As mentioned previously, the problems of our companions are mostly psychological or mental ones, conflicts of interest and so forth. These problems are very prevalent because they often arise through their relationships with their companions and the partners and so forth. So the problems need to be solved within those relationships.

My way of taking a practical approach is to deal with the immediate situation, and then use that as a basis for improving and expanding one's practice. The practice can then be extended to help others on a broader level. If we are inclined to engage in this supreme practice of giving and taking then we need to remind ourselves again and again what it is that we are attempting to practise. Basically, it is a practice to increase and to further develop the sense of love and compassion within oneself. So it is worthwhile to make this determination: 'I need to try to implement the practice in every possible way, beginning with those who are close to me'. Many of you have found that the practice of *tong len* or giving and taking is a very beneficial one. If you want to gain further benefits from it then this is the way to go about practising it.

1.2.3. Offerings that are emanated

1.2.3.1. THE COMMON OFFERINGS (CONT.)

1.2.3.1.4. Scents/Perfumed balms

The Tibetan word *jukpa* refers to perfumed balms that are applied to the body.

14. *The supreme smell that gives rise
To all the smells of the three thousand worlds
I apply to the able ones' bodies
That are glowing like polished refined gold.*

In his commentary Gyaltshab Je explains this verse thus:

The supreme smell that gives rise to the fragrant smells of all the three thousand worlds I apply to the bodies of the able ones, ...

Here *smells of the three thousand worlds* implies that the fragrance of the balms pervade the whole universe. The *bodies of all the able ones* refers to Shakyamuni Buddha and all the enlightened beings.

Then the quality of the bodies of enlightened beings are presented:

... that are glowing and blazing like polished refined gold.

At this point one brings to mind the incredible qualities of the Buddha's body which are enumerated in the list of the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of the Buddha. As mentioned here, the Buddha's enlightened body is *glowing and blazing like polished refined gold*—it has a natural radiance that fills the entire universe.

When refined gold is polished it has a brilliant glow, and the radiance of the Buddha's body is much greater than that. *Blazing* indicates that the Buddha's holy body has such beautiful radiance, that the more it is seen by sentient beings the more they want to look at it. That is, by merely seeing the Buddha's holy body it produces great joy in the minds of sentient beings.

Earlier, when we were studying *Precious Garland*, we covered the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech and mind in detail. The qualities are also explained when identifying the objects of refuge. So here we can immediately relate to the qualities of the holy Buddha's body. Thus we can see that the earlier explanations serve as a basis to understand further references in the text. Otherwise we would have to spend significant time now in explaining the Buddha's qualities in detail.

1.2.3.1.5. Flowers

We usually offer flowers in front of the image of the Buddha, enlightened ones and deities. In addition, we can also visualise offering flowers to Tara's head ornament, when we do the offering in the Tara practice. For enlightened beings who are in the aspect of a renunciate, we can also imagine offering flowers as a canopy above them. So we should not be limited to offering flowers in just one way.

Also, as depicted in some drawings, dakinis make offerings of flowers by sprinkling them from the sky. My interpretation of this offering is that it is said that certain celestial deities can't come too near humans because we have a foul smell!!! So, from the sky above, they sprinkle flowers onto enlightened beings who are on Earth.

On another level, when His Holiness the Dalai Lama teaches, he is addressing the humans sitting on the ground below him. But there are definitely celestial beings who are listening to the teachings at the same time. They don't sit at the same level as the humans but they are in the space

above. So we need to visualise them above a great lama or a master when they are teaching. Even where one has to give a teaching oneself, there may be celestial beings listening to it. So we need to visualise that. There are of course *nagas* at ground level, but celestial beings such as gods and *dakinis* are in the space above. So the main point is that offering flowers includes visualising sprinkling flowers from the sky.

The verse that relates to the offering of flowers is:

15. *To the offering objects, the able ones,
I offer beautiful flowers, mandarava, lotuses,
Utpala and so forth; all that are well smelling,
In beautiful well-arranged garlands.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with an answer to a rhetorical question, 'Who should I make offerings to?':

I shall make offerings to the able ones, the supreme objects of offering.

Then Gyaltsab Je poses another question, which he also answers:

With what? With pleasant flowers like mandarava, lotus, utpala flowers and so forth, which disperse all the fragrant scents. I also offer flower garlands well spread out and beautiful.

These flowers are not only beautiful to behold, but they have a beautiful smell. The Tibetan word *selma* is used here, which refers to loose petals or flowers that do not have stems. Thus, flowers with stems are offered as garlands, while flowers without stems are sprinkled or *spread out*. So the offering of flowers to the objects of refuge includes beautiful stemmed flowers as well as loose flowers.

1.2.3.1.6. Incense

The first two lines of the next verse read:

16ab. *I also offer billowing clouds of smoke from
supreme incense
Pervaded by a scent that robs one of one's
senses.*

The Tibetan word translated here as *incense* has a connotation of a substance which, when burnt, produces a beautiful aroma. This is an offering to the smell sense.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of these two lines as follows:

I offer billowing clouds of incense, spreading into the ten directions, of supreme well scented incense that robs one of one senses, like *akaru*¹ and so forth.

The offering here is substances that, when burnt, produce a sweet-smelling scent in the form of smoke. So in this visualisation we can imagine continuous billowing clouds of smoke being emitted from a sweet smelling substance such as incense or other substances which create that beautiful smell or scent.

1.2.3.1.7. Food

The next two lines of the verse relate to the offering of food to the taste sense. They are quite easy to understand so we need not spend too much time on them.

16cd. *I also offer divine feasts made of
Various foods and drink.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains:

I offer to the conquerors and their children various foods, like sugar cane, and various drinks; both as

divine feasts possessing various colours, smells and tastes.

One needs to be mindful about presenting the food offerings in beautiful clean containers. The food offering presented to the taste sense includes drinks as well, and it should have a variety of colours and taste and an enticing aroma. With some practices, we offer things that represent the traditional offering called a *torma*, which is a food offering to the deities or the enlightened beings.

Those who are familiar with tantric practices will recall that we visualise deities accepting the *torma* offerings by visualising a hollow tube of light descending from the enlightened being's mouth to the *torma*. The outside of the *torma* has the appearance of a hard substance, and inside is a nectar-like liquid. It is this nectar which is accepted by the enlightened being when they suck up its essence through the tube of light that serves as a pipe.

The reason why I relate this here is that there are many who do a regular Tara practice. When offering the *torma* in the Four Mandala Tara practice, the *sadhana* indicates that a HUNG at the tongue transforms into that hollow tube of light through which the Tara deity partakes of the essence of the *torma*. That is the visualisation that one does. However one does not need to do that visualisation every time one makes an offering.

One important thing to visualise is that one makes an offering of food or flowers to the deities respectfully and with both hands. So that would be good to visualise when presenting the offerings.

1.2.3.1.8. Light

The first two lines from the next verse read:

17ab. *I also offer precious lamps
Mounted on golden lotuses.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then explains the meaning of these two lines:

I offer bright precious lamps mounted on bases of many arranged golden lotuses.

The *golden lotuses* serve as containers in which to offer the lamps. So, one can visualise light being offered in many beautifully arranged *golden* containers, which are in the shape of *lotuses*.

As the offering of light is an offering of illumination, it is an offering to the eye sense. However ordinary beings like ourselves may feel uncomfortable offering light which is placed too close to the eyes; we may feel that it is too bright and may actually burn the eyes. So as a way to comfortably make these offerings, we can imagine offering them the illumination of light by arranging them in front of the deity.

1.2.3.1.9. Crystal palace

The next six lines of verse read:

17cd. *On clean ground anointed with incense
I arrange delightful fresh flowers.*

18. *A beautiful crystal palace reverberating with
melodious praises
Ablaze with tassels of pearls and precious
substances;
Infinite, becoming an ornament of the skies,
I also offer to the great compassionate ones.*

In explanation of this verse the commentary reads:

I offer to those in the nature of great compassion a beautiful [priceless] crystal palace ...

¹ A sweet smelling substance.
Chapter 2

The Tibetan word *shalme*, translated here as beautiful, has the connotation of being priceless.

... where the well-polished floors are sprinkled with scented water, where delightful flowers are laid out,...

Again the Tibetan word *selma* specifies either petals or flowers without stems. Although not mentioned here, other presentations indicate that one visualises a beautiful throne, which is supported by eight snow lions (two on each side), in the middle of the palace.

... where goddesses sing melodious praises, and which are beautified with tassels made from pearls and various precious substances blazing with their splendid infinite light. With its infinite qualities it beautifies the essence of space and such becomes an ornament of the skies.

That is how the palace is visualised.

1.2.3.1.10. Parasols

The verse relating to this heading reads:

19. *Precious beautiful parasols with golden handles,
Seamed by dazzling ornaments,
Well-shaped and uplifting when seen,
I always offer to the able ones.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

I always offer beautiful parasols made from a variety of precious substances, with golden handles, the edges of the parasol are seamed by many dazzling jewel ornaments, and magnificently shaped so that it is uplifting for the mind just to see it.

Here we visualise a parasol of magnificent shape, with a rim encrusted with various beautiful jewels and ornaments. It is so beautiful that merely seeing it brings much joy. One offers the parasol to shade the heads of the enlightened beings.

1.2.3.1.11. Instruments

Next is an offering of instruments for making music.

The verse for this reads:

20. *Further, may arrays of offering clouds
Of instruments with delightful melodies
That dispel the suffering of sentient beings
Be scattered about.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

In addition to the earlier mentioned offerings, I also present offering clouds of instruments, such as clay drums, with delightful melodies that dispel the sufferings of sentient beings, and satisfy them just through hearing.

May arrays of such offering clouds be scattered about.

The Tibetan word *sosor ne*, translated as scattered, indicates 'may an array of such offering clouds manifest, residing separately in various locations'.

1.2.3.1.12. The blessing that they may be continually in the aspect of offering

This is basically an aspirational prayer that all the offerings that have been presented continually abide, to please the senses of the enlightened beings.

The verse relating to this reads:

21. *May it rain unceasingly
Precious flowers and so forth
On the holy Dharma and all Jewels,
Stupas and the holy bodies.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

May it rain unceasingly precious flowers and other offerings on the twelve types of scriptures ...

The *twelve types of scriptures* refers to the Dharma Jewel in the aspect of scriptures. When we make offerings to the Three Jewels, we can visualise texts to represent the Dharma Jewel, which is the speech of the Buddha in the form of writing.

The commentary continues:

... that are contained in the truth of cessation and the truth of the path

This is the actual Dharma jewel.

... on stupas that contain relics of the Buddha and physical representations of the body of the Buddha, such as paintings and so forth.

In the Tibetan translation, the aspirational prayer comes at this point.

May it rain unceasingly, until the end of cyclic existence, precious flowers and other offerings.

As mentioned previously, this is in a form of an aspirational prayer, referred to as 'blessing the offerings'.

1.2.3.2. Unequaled or unsurpassed offerings²

The verse relating to this heading reads:

22. *Just as Manjushri and so forth,
Make offerings to the conquerors,
I make offerings in the same way to
The tathagatas, protectors and their children.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Just like the empowered bodhisattvas Manjushri, Samantabhadra and so forth make offerings to the conquerors by emanating them into the whole of space, ...

Empowered bodhisattvas refers to high level bodhisattvas who, because of the level of concentration they have attained, are able to manifest incredible, expansive offerings that fill the sky. Taking that as an example to emulate:

I also make offerings to the tathagatas, the protectors of gods and humans, and their children.

In other words: 'Just as these great bodhisattvas present unsurpassable offerings, likewise I make these offerings'.

Then the commentary quotes from another sutra:

From the sutra *Precious Lamp*:

Most flowers are like canopies and are sent out by light rays; having arranged various flowers everywhere the great ones make offerings to the conquerors.

To further explain how to present unsurpassable offerings; as explained in other teachings, one visualises the entire space filled with offerings. This involves visualising the bodhisattva called the Supreme Being Samantabhadra in the aspect of a renunciate (i.e. wearing the robes of one who is ordained), his hands folded at his heart, holding a jewel between his palms. There is a more elaborate form of visualisation, but the condensed form is visualising oneself as Samantabhadra holding at one's heart the jewel held between one's palms. The jewel radiates innumerable rays of light which fills the entire universe. The method of building this visualisation involves visualising each tip of radiated light emanating further offerings. At the tips of each of the light rays that are radiated from the jewel, one visualises

² Previously presented as Peerless Offerings.

various types of offerings manifested. Then from each of the offerings, further light rays are emanated and then from each of the tips of the light rays emanated from the offerings, further replicas of the offerings manifest. Then from those offerings, light rays again radiate forth and from the tips of each of those light rays, further offerings are presented. So because there are infinite offerings that are manifested from infinite rays of light, the entire universe is filled with offerings, which is what we present to the enlightened beings; the buddhas and bodhisattvas. It is said that this visualisation is the easiest one for us ordinary beings to do as a way to present unsurpassable offerings.

Another interpretation of what unsurpassable offering means is that the unsurpassable offering is to engage in the practice of Dharma, and to uphold the doctrine. More specifically it refers to listening to the Dharma and putting it into practice. This form of unsurpassable offering is, of course, a very significant one.

Another way of explaining unsurpassable offering is to visualise one's own virtues from the three times transforming into offerings and then presenting those offerings.

Then there is the most supreme of offerings, which is the actual generation of bodhicitta.

It is good to also take note that these forms of unsurpassable offerings are not beyond our reach. We are already making attempts to engage in these practices. Upholding the doctrine means that if we are contributing to the preservation and proliferation of the Dharma, we are, in fact, making an unsurpassable offering. Furthermore, when we listen to the Dharma and make our own attempts to try to practise it, we are also making unsurpassable offerings. The very fact that we make attempts to accumulate virtue means that we have a basis of virtue to transform into offerings. And to whatever extent we are able, we are at least trying to aspire to generate the bodhicitta motivation.

We need to recall the earlier explanations to ensure our practices, such as upholding the doctrine of the Buddha, listening to the doctrine and trying to put it into practice and so forth become an offering. As mentioned earlier, the real offering is pleasing the minds of the enlightened beings and our gurus. When we engage in, or make an attempt to engage in this practice of upholding the doctrine, which is the source of happiness and goodness for all, or make attempts to uphold that, then that is definitely a means to please our gurus and the minds of the enlightened beings. Furthermore, listening to the Dharma and trying to put it into practice and so forth are the optimum means to please the minds of the enlightened beings. This is how we can ensure our practice becomes an offering.

There will be a bit of a change in our usual routine for the next few Tuesday evenings. Next Tuesday, 23 July, and the following Tuesday, 30 July, I will continue to teach. So, discussion night will be on 6 August. The seminar will be on 11 August, and you have to participate in that well. Tuesday 13 August will be the exam evening and as usual it is good to participate in that exam. On 18 August the annual White Tara initiation takes place.

It would be good for you to organise the seminar well, with good subjects, complemented with some meditation. If it is arranged early enough, people will have time to prepare well. In the past these seminars have been in the form of two groups engaging in discussion or debate. So, if it is done in that way, each group has to know what the subject is in

order to present it, and they also have to know the other groups' subjects, so that you will be ready to raise questions on their topic. And of course you have to be ready to answer questions that are raised by the other group.

As I regularly mention to the Monday night presenters, it is not sufficient just to write down notes of what you will be presenting. You also need to prepare yourself so you can answer questions when they are asked. Also one needs to be mindful when you present topics that have lists of different things. You do have to be able to list what they are. I wouldn't blame you if you get stuck in that situation once in a while. There have been some geshe who have prepared to explain a topic, but who were not prepared enough to give a precise list of the things they were presenting.

It is important for those presenting the Dharma (such as on Monday evenings) not to be satisfied with just preparing material from books and notes. It's important to do some internal preparation as well, which involves spending some time meditating and thinking about the topic that you are going to present. In that way the presentation will not be merely dry words, but because one has spent some time internalising it, it will carry some weight.

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་སྣོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

23 July 2013

With the motivation generated with the bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in the meditation practice.

[meditation]

It would be good to train our mind to the extent that, whenever we see any living beings, we feel a spontaneous wish for them to be happy and free from all suffering. That would be an incredible state of mind to develop. Right now, however, we find it hard to develop a mind of wishing even one sentient being to have happiness and be free from suffering. However it is possible to develop that wish if we further develop our mind.

Right now the only example we have in this world of someone who has spontaneous genuine concern for another being is the love and concern of a mother for her child. If we could develop a similar attitude of genuine love and compassion towards all living beings, then we would, as defined in the teachings, have developed great love and great compassion. It is called great love and great compassion because the wish is directed towards all living beings.

As explained in the teachings, the positive outcome of meditation is said to be the lessening of the delusions. So the more we familiarise our mind with developing this sort of wish for all beings to be happy and free from suffering, the more our delusions will definitely lessen, which will be of direct benefit for our mind. Stronger delusions can definitely be weakened and we can even overcome certain delusions. So if we sincerely practise any genuine form of meditation, the delusions will definitely lessen.

Training our mind in love and compassion means training our mind to be able to immediately respond to the plight of sentient beings. As soon as we see them we will immediately relate to the suffering that they are experiencing and develop a keen wish for them to be free from that suffering. This comes about when we really think about the experiences of sentient beings in cyclic existence.

We are already quite familiar with the teachings of the lower scope, which describe the suffering nature of all existence, and in particular the three types of suffering. Relating to the various levels of suffering in cyclic existence is also a way for us to be able to relate to any kind of sentient being. For as long as they are a sentient being, then, whatever their status, even if they are temporarily enjoying good conditions, they are still an object of our compassion.

Personally, when I see someone enjoying their wealth and opulent lifestyle I immediately feel, 'Ah, they look very happy – but only if they didn't have to die'. Indeed if they were immortal, then perhaps their wealth and luxuries would bring them some form of everlasting happiness. It often might be hard to recall my own mortality, however when I see the seemingly very joyful states that others are enjoying, I am reminded that in reality we all have to die some day and leave behind whatever seeming pleasures that we enjoy now. Underneath that seeming pleasure that others

are experiencing on the surface they are constantly experiencing the suffering of all-pervasive suffering. And of course, they may be experiencing the suffering of change, and the suffering of suffering. Of these, the dormant suffering is the all-pervasive compounded suffering.

This is because of the fact that sentient beings possess the appropriated contaminated aggregates. So the very fact of having the contaminated aggregates serves as the basis for the all-pervasive compounded suffering. This level of suffering is said to be very subtle and deep rooted. In fact it could be rightly said that we can only find the explanation on the subtleties of this form of suffering in the Buddhist teachings. So, to the extent that we relate to the subtler level of sufferings of sentient beings, the more profound our compassion for them becomes.

This is something that we really need to pay attention to, as it is the very basis of our practice. It would be quite presumptuous to eagerly want to practise higher levels of practices without first developing a strong foundation. We can see this with external examples, such as a building construction; if the foundations are not sound then the whole building collapses. That is a fact, isn't it? It is the same with our practice. We need to really train and pay attention to forming very strong foundations for our practice, based on the principles of love and compassion.

EXPLAINING THE TEXT OF THE CHAPTER

2. PROSTRATION

Having covered the section on the various types of offerings, how to present them and so forth, which the text and the commentary explain in great detail, we need to actually try to put the advice into practice. There are no other more profound sources with instructions for making offerings other than what has been presented here. If, after having been exposed to these explanations we still feel, 'Oh, I wonder how I should make an offering', then we have definitely missed the point! Thus, if we are keen to practice then we need to rely on the very detailed instructions that are presented in this text.

If we are not careful we might end up finding ourselves with books stacked up in the bookcases in front of us, but when it comes to our actual practice we might start wondering about, 'How do I actually make offerings? How do I do prostrations? and so forth'. Having access to these teachings and books and not being able to use them would be completely missing the point. That would be a great pity. Thus, having studied these texts and manuals of instruction, when it comes for us to do a certain practice, we need to be able to readily recall, 'OK, this teaching has a very good explanation on this point about this practice, and that teaching gives that explanation'. So in this way, we are able to access what we need for our practice. And of course, many of you have the transcripts, which serve as notes, so that is another reference for you.

A while ago someone who had come to some of my classes here was asked to lead a meditation in Auckland. He said that he initially thought, 'Oh, what should I talk about?' and felt a little bit apprehensive. Then, he said, he remembered that he had some notes from the meditation sessions that I had been giving, so he took them out and read them, and found that he was not short of material to present to others.

As explained earlier, the purpose of presenting offerings to the objects of refuge is so that we can amass great merit to further develop ourselves. So amongst the various types of offerings, as explained earlier, hearing the Dharma and

putting it into practice is the best offering. We need to really take this point to heart. As the great yogi and adept Milarepa said in one of his songs, 'I have no other offerings besides my practice that I offer to please my gurus'.

This section on prostrations is presented with two subdivisions:

2.1. Verbal praise

2.2. Physical homage

Here we can take note that that verbal praise is listed in this commentary as part of prostration, whereas other commentaries on *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* present verbal praise under the category of making offerings. As an offering, verbal praise takes the form of melodious hymns. Here, however, it is listed under the heading of prostrations. It can fit comfortably into either category.

Benefits of prostration

- As a practice, prostration is one of the supreme antidotes for overcoming pride.
- Another specific benefit is that one creates the amount of merit to be reborn as a wheel-turning king.
- A further benefit is that prostration is one of the greatest forms of purification practices. Thus, it is an optimum method for cleaning our mind to improve our mental health.
- Another practical benefit is that since it involves physical exertion, it is actually a very good form of physical exercise. So we derive some physical benefit from the practice as well.

If someone were to ask, 'Is there any form of practice in Buddhism that has physical benefits?' we can confidently say, 'Oh yes, prostrations'.

As explained in other teachings as well, along with physical prostration there is also verbal and mental prostration. When one engages in the practice of prostrations, it is important to recall the qualities of the objects of refuge, such as the enlightened beings. That is how we derive much greater benefit and merit from the practice. As many of you would already be aware, the physical prostration begins by putting your palms together with your thumbs tucked in between your palms.

Before prostrating onto the ground, we place our hands at either three points or four points on our body.

If it is *four points*, the first is above one's crown, which symbolises obtaining the crown protrusion of the Buddha, which is one of the qualities of the enlightened body. The second is at our forehead which symbolises obtaining the Buddha's spiral hair. Next is placing our hands at the throat, which is to acquire the merit of obtaining Buddha's holy enlightened speech, and fourth is at the heart, which signifies creating the causes to obtain the quality of a buddha's mind.

If it is *three points* then the first is above the crown, then at the throat and then the heart, which symbolise obtaining the qualities of the holy body, speech and mind respectively.

The Tibetan word for prostration is *chag-tsal*, which has two syllables. Each syllable carries a specific meaning which doesn't come across in the English word *prostration*. The first syllable, *chag* has the connotation of clearing away, which indicates clearing away the negativities and imperfections of our body, speech and mind. The syllable *tsal* has the connotation of acquiring, in this case the qualities of the holy body, speech and mind of the enlightened beings. It is good to bring this meaning to mind when one actually does the

prostration and really think about the qualities of the enlightened body, speech and mind. Then, as we do the prostration we can really feel that we are receiving the blessings of an enlightened body, speech and mind.

As with any other Mahayana practice, the motivation needs to be bodhicitta; so try to generate the bodhicitta attitude as best as possible. I have explained this many times, so bring to mind the bodhicitta attitude prior to engaging in the practice.

During the recitation of whatever prayers or praises you may be reciting during the prostration, remind yourself that you are clearing away and purifying the negativities of body, speech and mind that you have accumulated from beginningless times. At the same time think that the blessings of the enlightened body, speech and mind actually enter into your heart; keeping these points in mind while engaging in the practice will ensure that the practice becomes most meaningful and beneficial.

2.1. Verbal praise

Verbal praise refers to praising the qualities of the enlightened beings, which takes the form of a verbal salutation. The relevant verse reads:

23. *I eulogise an ocean of qualities
With an ocean of melodious limbs of hymns;
These clouds of melodious praises to hear,
May they arise everywhere.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation of this verse begins with:

This oceans of qualities of knowledge, such as love and so forth, I eulogise with limbs of melodious hymns that express infinite qualities.

The commentary explains that the Tibetan term *yang*, translated in the verse as *hymns*, refers to words or sound of the praise, while *yenlag* or *limbs* refers to the cause of the praises, and *ocean* has the connotation of *many*. These are good points to remember as they come in many other texts as well.

Then Gyaltsab Je further explains:

Thus, carry out the praise by visualising that each body has many heads and each head has many tongues.

This visualisation is also presented in *The King of Prayers*, which is a specific practice to gain extensive merit. One does this visualisation to multiply the praise that one is offering by imagining that one has many bodies, and that each body has many heads and each head has many tongues. Thus there are many manifestations of oneself offering the eulogy at the same time.

The final part of Gyaltsab Je's explanation of this verse reads:

Further, even if one does not actually sing the melodious hymns oneself to the great numbers of superiors, may infinite clouds definitely reach them in every place and at all times.

Even if one is not actually singing melodious hymns oneself, hold in mind 'May the infinite clouds of praise and eulogies constantly be presented to the numberless superior beings in all places and at all times'. The last line of the verse should read, 'May they definitely arise everywhere'.

2.2. Physical homage

This has three subdivisions.

2.2.1. To the Triple Gem

2.2.2. To the basis for generating bodhicitta

2.2.3. To abbots, preceptors and so forth

2.2.1. To the Triple Gem

The root text reads:

24. *I prostrate humbly with as many bodies
As there are atoms in all the realms
To all the buddhas gone in the three times,
To the Dharma and the supreme assembly.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

I prostrate humbly to all the buddhas who have come and gone in the three times, to the scriptural and realised Dharma and to the supreme assembly of superior bodhisattvas ...

The objects of refuge

Of the three objects of refuge, the first is the prostration to the Buddha. Offering prostrations *to all the buddhas of the three times* refers to the buddhas who have come in the past, who are residing in the present and who will come in the future. Prostrating to all buddhas means that you are not just limited to one or two buddhas of the past and present and future. Rather, you are visualising all the buddhas who have come in the past, which is an infinite number of buddhas; all buddhas resident throughout the universe at this very time, which is also an infinite number of buddhas, and all the buddhas yet to come in the future, which is again an infinite number of buddhas. Thus one offers the prostration to an infinite number of enlightened beings.

The next prostration is *to the scriptural and realised Dharma*. Here, *scriptural* refers to the three baskets of the Buddha's teachings in general, and *realised Dharma* refers to, for example, the practices derived from the scriptures on three higher trainings.

When we refer to upholding the Dharma it is good to understand that the Dharma one is upholding has these two aspects of scriptural and realised Dharma. *Upholding the scriptural Dharma* means to study, listen, contemplate and think about the subject matter of the scriptures, such as the three baskets of the Buddha's teaching. *Upholding realised Dharma* refers to, having studied the scriptures to actually put the meaning of the scriptures into practice. This would be, for example, engaging in the three higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom; or actualising the truth of the path and the truth of cessation.

We can relate this distinction between scriptural and realised Dharma to the Buddha's doctrine; there is the doctrine that is the scriptures or speech of the Buddha and there is realised doctrine. The doctrine of the Buddha's speech or words is the three baskets of the Buddha's teaching, and the realised doctrine of the Buddha is putting the meaning of his scriptures (or words) into practice. More specifically, the Dharma here is Mahayana Dharma, which relates to the Mahayana truth of the path and the Mahayana truth of cessation.

This forges a direct link to the Sangha jewel which is identified here as *the supreme assembly of pure bodhisattvas* who are practising the Mahayana path and actualising the Mahayana cessation.

In summary, when prostrating to the first of the Three Jewels, the Buddha, one is prostrating to infinite numbers of buddhas. The Dharma relates to the scriptural and realised Dharma of the three baskets of teachings and the three higher trainings. More specifically, it refers here to the Mahayana Dharma, which is the Mahayana truth of the path and the Mahayana truth of cessation. Sangha, in general

terms, relates to any assembly of arya beings, and more specifically here to the supreme assembly of superior bodhisattvas, which is specifically identifying the Mahayana Sangha.

The next part of Gyaltsab Je's commentary is a response to a hypothetical question.

How does one prostrate?

... with bodies emanated as many as there are particles in all the buddha fields

That is how one prostrates.

The visualisation that one does during the prostration is to emanate one's body as many times *as there are particles in all the buddha fields*. As explained in *The King of Prayers*, there are numerous buddha fields within just one atom. From this we come to the conclusion that there are many more buddha fields than there are atoms. That is how we actually create the visualisation of prostrating with as many bodies as the infinite numbers of buddha fields, where the Buddha resides.

That covers the explanation of how to do physical prostrations to the Three Jewels.

Explanations in other teachings

According to explanations in other teachings such as *The King of Prayers*, in addition to visualising one's body manifesting as numerous bodies and offering prostrations to infinite numbers of enlightened beings, another way is to visualise oneself as being surrounded by other sentient beings, each of whom manifests numerous bodies. So one is prostrating to the entire universe filled with *infinite numbers of enlightened beings, manifesting infinitely*.

Here it is relevant to present the unique instruction that has been passed down from the earlier masters, which is that when one does the prostration, one visualises *manifesting one's body over the infinite lifetimes of the past*. Thus, one imagines each and every life that one has taken in the past in a human aspect, rather than in whatever form it might have been. Thus one is surrounding oneself with an infinite number of manifestations of oneself in human form.

Benefits

As one does the physical prostration one imagines all of these manifestations of oneself prostrating at the same time, thus purifying all the negative karma created in all those previous lifetimes. It is said that the uniqueness of this practice is that even doing just one prostration purifies heavy negative karmas one has created over beginningless lifetimes in the past. So we purify an incredible amount of negative karma because of our intention and visualisation. Likewise, because one is prostrating to an infinite number of enlightened beings at the same time, one accumulates an infinite amount of merit at the same time. So this is an incredibly powerful way to do the practice of prostration.

Prostrating in this way, with these visualisations and an appropriate motivation, is an incredible practice. During the practice itself our mind is really calm and peaceful, because we have a virtuous frame of mind as a consequence of focusing our minds on a virtuous object. In addition, as we are engaging in a real sense in true virtuous activity, we definitely purify negative karma and accumulate vast amounts of merit. That is a great benefit of this practice. It is really good to understand that this is a really beneficial practice and bring these points to mind when you actually do the practice.

The action

Another point to mention here is that a *full physical prostration* involves touching the five limbs — which are the two hands, our head and our two knees—on the ground. If you are doing a full-length prostration you need to be mindful to stretch out completely on the ground and then to stand up immediately. You should not remain on the ground for too long.

Some teachings explain that we need to ensure that all *four aspects of ourselves are straightened out*. This begins with stretching out our body, which allows the channels within us to be straightened out. When the channels are straightened out then that allows the wind to be straightened out, meaning that it will be flowing well within the channels. As a result of that the mind will be straightened out, meaning that it will be in a good frame; a fresh and clear state of mind. As these instructions are given in the teachings, they must definitely be significant.

That covers physical prostration, explained here under the heading Physical Homage.

2.2.2. To the basis for generating bodhicitta

This is covered in these two lines of verse:

*25ab. To the bases of the awakened mind
And to stupas I prostrate.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

The basis of bodhicitta refers to the causes from which that mind is generated:

There is a Tibetan term *nam* in the verse which indicates numerous, and this refers to the numerous causes of bodhicitta.

Then the commentary lists the causes from which that mind of bodhicitta is generated. The first is:

The three Mahayana baskets;

This refers to the Mahayana scriptures, which give specific instructions on how to develop bodhicitta, such as the seven point cause-and-effect method of developing bodhicitta, and the exchanging self with other technique of developing bodhicitta.

This text we are studying, Shantideva's *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, is definitely an object of prostration as we always have access to it and by studying it we can understand the supreme method to develop bodhicitta. So this text definitely serves as one of the causes.

The individuals who become a condition for generating that mind;

This refers to genuine individual beings who help us understand what bodhicitta is. They show us the way to generate bodhicitta that has not been generated; they help us to maintain whatever bodhicitta we may have already developed; and they encourage us to further develop and increase that bodhicitta. Such genuine individual beings who help us in that way are definitely causes for developing bodhicitta.

The place where it is generated;

This refers to holy sites where enlightened beings and holy beings have generated bodhicitta. They are places that inspire us to generate bodhicitta ourselves.

The body of the Buddha and so forth;
Stupas;

The body of the Buddha refers to actual representations of the Buddha. As other teachings explain, one can take the bodhisattva vows, either from a living teacher or in front of a

holy image such as a Buddha image or a *stupa*, which represents an enlightened being's mind.

To put all this together, once we have gained an understanding of what this precious mind of enlightenment is, we develop that keen determination to develop it ourselves. Then all the causes and conditions for developing that mind naturally become an object of great respect and veneration. Thus we naturally generate great respect for the teachings and the texts that present the ways and means of how to develop bodhicitta. Then the living masters, the virtuous friends or gurus who present these explanations and give us the vows and so forth, definitely become objects of veneration and respect, along with the place where it is generated, such as holy sites, images of Buddhas as well as stupas. All of these causes are naturally worthy of great respect and veneration, and thus an object of prostration.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary concludes with:

To these I prostrate

2.2.3. To abbots, preceptors and so forth

Here *abbots* refers to abbots who bestow the novice vows, as well as abbots who bestow the full ordination vows.

Preceptors refers to teachers of novice vows as well as the lay person vows.

The lines of the verse relating to this are:

*25cd. I prostrate to abbots and likewise to preceptors
And to the supreme adepts.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

I prostrate to the abbots who connect and complete the earlier and later words of individual liberation; likewise I prostrate to the preceptors who bestow the vows.

As mentioned here, abbots confer the rituals of taking individual liberation vows; abbots and preceptors can also refer to one's spiritual teachers.

... and to the supreme adepts who carry the burden of training in the supreme disciplines of the path to liberation.

So the prostration is to the abbots and preceptors who bestow and explain the vows of self-liberation. It is also to those who have taken those vows, and who actually uphold that discipline, which is the path to achieve liberation.

3. REFUGE

We will leave this for our next session.

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

Transcribed by Su Lan Foo

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

© Tara Institute

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྡོད་པ་ལ་འདུག་པ་བལྟགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

30 July 2013

As usual let us spend some time engaging in the meditation practice. [meditation]

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

In order to benefit all sentient beings by removing them from all suffering and leading them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

REFUGE

In the *Lam Rim Chen Mo*, or *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, refuge is presented in four subdivisions. *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand*, however, adds a fifth subdivision. The four subdivisions of refuge are: the cause of going for refuge, identifying the objects of refuge, the manner of going for refuge and the commitments after having taken refuge. Lama Tsong Khapa's four-point presentation of the essentiality of refuge is very meticulous.

Having a good understanding of what refuge entails is essential. It is considered to be the doorway, or entrance, into the Buddha's doctrine. So refuge is the foundation of the Buddha's doctrine. As presented in the Buddha's teachings, it is also the basis on which one can receive the vows.

1. Causes of going for refuge¹

The causes of refuge can also be understood as the reasons for seeking refuge. As explained in the teachings there are two main causes, the first is to generate fear of the general sufferings of cyclic existence and in particular, the sufferings of the lower rebirths. The second cause is, having generated the fear of the sufferings of cyclic existence and lower rebirths, generating the confidence that the objects of refuge have the ability to liberate one from these fears. Thus one seeks refuge in the objects of refuge.

Refuge in the Three Jewels with these two causes intact will be a pure and stable refuge. Of course, one may initially have a general sense of refuge in the Three Jewels; however a pure and unflinching refuge is one which has these two causes intact. Having complete reliance on the Three Jewels means believing in them one hundred per cent, acknowledging from the depths of one's heart that the Three Jewels have the full capacity to free one from all fears and sufferings. The essential point here is to cultivate an unflinching and absolute reliance upon the Three Jewels.

The greater the fear and sense of reliance one has, the stronger the mind of renunciation one also develops. So we need to see how taking refuge and developing renunciation have a connection and are complementary.

If we are keen to practise the Dharma, then we cannot underestimate the value and essentiality of understanding and taking refuge properly. As explained in many teachings,

it is the very foundation of the Dharma. Generating a true sense of longing to be free from the general sufferings of cyclic existence, and the lower realms in particular, arises from contemplating the plight of having to experience these sufferings over and over again. Would you be able to bear the thought of having to repeatedly experience these sufferings, over and over again? When we really consider this plight, we will definitely generate a keen wish to be free from all suffering. Then, automatically, we will start to think about how best to free ourselves, and who can help us. It is at this point that we turn to the objects of refuge as the unmistakable source of help. The more we gain a deeper understanding of the qualities of the refuge, the greater our confidence and reliance in the objects of refuge will become.

When someone experiences the symptoms of a severe illness, they feel extremely uncomfortable and really long to be free from the sickness and their suffering. It is at the point when they keenly want to be free from their sickness that they seek a skilled and trusted doctor who can prescribe a treatment that will cure their illness. This is a very good analogy that illustrates the need and appropriateness of going for refuge to the Three Jewels.

Gyaltsab Rinpoche mentions in his *Commentary on the Uttaratantra* that an intelligent and sharp-minded trainee needs to have the realisation of emptiness if they are to take unmistakable refuge in the Three Jewels. Other texts also indicate, that even if one has not realised emptiness directly, one would, at the very least, have to have an unmistakable and correct understanding of emptiness that has been established through reasoning.

As mentioned previously, because strong refuge is dependent on developing a sense of renunciation, we need to reflect on the reason why we experience suffering. Suffering doesn't not come about randomly or arise spontaneously from nothing; rather, it is dependent on its own causes and conditions. So what are the causes and conditions of suffering? When we contemplate in this way we realise that it is as a result of negative karma that one created in the past that we experience suffering now.

Taking that further one can ask: why did one create such negative karma? It was because our intentions and actions were influenced by the delusions. When we look further into which specific delusion influences us to create negative karmas, we come to realise that the main delusion is the fundamental ignorance of grasping at the self. At this point one comes to the understanding that without applying the antidote to this fundamental root ignorance, there's no way that the inevitable consequence of suffering will cease. At this point one arrives at the understanding that the antidote for overcoming the ignorance of grasping at the self is none other than selflessness or emptiness. We can relate this to two of the four noble truths: that suffering is to be known, and the origination of suffering is to be abandoned.

When one thinks about the various types of suffering that one experiences, and the origin of that suffering, then an understanding of the need to abandon the causes of suffering will arise. Understanding this will definitely help us in daily life. Whenever we experience any kind of uncomfortable difficulties we can immediately reflect, 'Whatever uncomfortable feeling I am experiencing now has not come about randomly without causes and conditions. It has been caused by something!' So, contemplating in that way actually lessens our pain and suffering, and in this way helps us to cope and better deal with that difficulty or problem.

¹ Ed: These headings have been introduced to relate the teaching to the structure presented in the lam rim.

In summary, there are two main causes of going for refuge, and it is by contemplating those two causes that one develops that keen wish to rely upon an object of refuge to help free oneself from the causes of those fears. With this understanding we need to be able to come to the conclusion that we cannot develop a genuine and strong sense of refuge without reflecting on those two causes.

2. Identifying the objects of refuge

The definition of the **Buddha jewel** is the ultimate source of refuge having the eight qualities of being non-produced and so forth. The Buddha jewel has two subdivisions: the conventional Buddha jewel and the ultimate Buddha jewel.

Conventional Buddha jewel: Of the four bodies of the Buddha, the form body and the emanation body are examples of the conventional Buddha jewel.

Ultimate Buddha jewel: The remaining two bodies, the wisdom truth body and the nature truth body identify the ultimate Buddha jewel.

The definition of the **Dharma jewel** is a completely purified truth in the continuum of a superior being which has any one of the eight qualities, such as being inconceivable and so forth. The Dharma jewel is also sub-divided into two:

Conventional Dharma jewel: The twelve limbs of the Buddha's teachings are an example of a conventional Buddha jewel.

Ultimate Dharma jewel: the truth of cessation and the truth of path.

The definition of a **Sangha jewel** is a superior being possessing any of the eight good qualities of realisation and freedom. It is also subdivided into two main categories: the conventional Sangha jewel and the ultimate Sangha jewel.

Conventional Sangha jewel: This is an arya being i.e. a being who has gained the realisation of emptiness.

Ultimate Sangha jewel: The truth of cessation and truth of the path within the arya being's mental continuum. So it needs to be understood that the two truths can be related to both the Dharma jewel as well as the Sangha jewel.

If one wonders, 'Why do we need to have three jewels as objects of refuge?' then the answer lies in this prayer:

To the Buddha jewel, the unsurpassable supreme guide; the Dharma jewel, the unsurpassable supreme protector; and the Sangha jewel, the unsurpassable supreme companions;

To these Three Jewels that are objects of refuge, I make offerings.

This verse presents the reason for the identification of Three Jewels, which is that we need a supreme guide to guide us in the right direction on the path leading to liberation and enlightenment. So reliance on an unsurpassable supreme guide is most essential to gain the unmistakable method. We also need to have the ultimate protection, which is identified as the Dharma jewel. Likewise we need to rely upon unflinching and compassionate companions to help us along the path, which is the Sangha jewel. So in this way we can understand the need to rely on the Three Jewels.

Now again, if one wonders, since it is the Dharma jewel which is the actual protector, then why do we need to rely upon the Buddha jewel and the Sangha jewel? Doesn't that make them redundant? Are the Buddha jewel and Sangha jewel not protectors as well? The answer is that all three objects of refuge are equally supreme protectors. But the reason why the Dharma jewel is identified as the actual

protector is because ultimately the only way to liberate oneself from suffering is by practising and actualising the Dharma jewel within oneself.

Here we need to gain this very profound understanding that while the Buddha has unbiased and unlimited love and compassion for us, and the Sangha jewel are also completely dedicated and committed to assisting us and being our companions, they are however not able to liberate us just by themselves. Without applying the Dharma jewel within our own mental continuum and actualising it, the Buddha and the Sangha jewel cannot by themselves liberate us. If that were possible, then we would have been liberated long ago; we certainly would not be suffering in cyclic existence now!

The fact that we are still in cyclic existence and experiencing various sufferings is because we have not yet actualised the Dharma jewel within our mental continuum. To give a practical example, we can all identify the ten non-virtues and their opposites, the ten virtues. Making a commitment to avoid the ten non-virtues is the basis for morality, and it is this practice of ethics that will help to protect us from taking rebirth in the sufferings of the lower realms. We need to understand that taking the initiative to adopt the practice of avoiding the ten non-virtues and adopting the ten virtues has to be our own decision. It is by practising that commitment and actualising it in one's mental continuum that one actually establishes the protection that is necessary to avoid the sufferings of future unfortunate rebirths. That is how we need to understand how the Dharma jewel is the actual protector.

As the Buddha himself said, 'I have shown you the method and path to liberation. Now it's up to you to adopt it and put it into practice'. So the Buddha clearly mentioned that, while he presented the unmistakable methods and paths leading to liberation, the decision to actually get there lies with the individual themselves. Furthermore, the Buddha gave this very good analogy of how Dharma practice works: which is of a patient, the doctor and the treatment. When a patient comes to a doctor with certain symptoms, the skilled doctor will definitely prescribe the unmistakable treatment, which is giving, for example, the correct medicine. However if the patient refuses to take the medication or treatment, the patient cannot hope to be cured. Skilled doctors and kind nurses cannot help the patient if the patient is not willing to undertake the necessary treatment.

If someone practises the abandonment of the ten non-virtues, and then observes morality of abiding by the ten virtues then, because they are leading an ethical life, it will be a life that is relatively free of complications and problems. Most importantly, at the time of death, such a person will have a natural confidence that, having to the best of their ability practised avoiding the ten non-virtues and adopting the ten virtues, they will not go through an unfortunate rebirth in the next lifetime. That level of confidence can definitely manifest at that time. So to that extent we need to pay attention to this very crucial practice.

With all of this explanation we can come to another very profound understanding. While one regards, the Buddha jewel, the Dharma jewel and Sangha jewel as supreme and holy objects, one might however relate to them as having being holy from time immemorial, thinking that they have always existed as holy objects. That would be a completely wrong understanding. If we view them as some sort of primordial supreme being, then we might also develop a false belief that they can help or protect us without any effort on our part. So that would be the wrong conclusion.

The right profound understanding is that the supreme objects of refuge that we rely upon did not come about spontaneously without depending on causes and conditions. Rather, they reached that state as a result of practising avoiding every smallest misdeed, and by adopting every small virtue along the path. It was that practice along the path that led them to achieving the ultimate result. What that shows us is that this is exactly how we need to engage in our practice right now. We need to avoid the smallest misdeeds and adopt every single small virtue. Slowly accumulating small virtues is the way we create the causes and conditions for reaching the ultimate state of enlightenment. So this practical approach is actually a very profound level of understanding to adopt.

Here I have covered only the very basics of the objects of refuge. You can rely on the lam rim teachings for a more elaborate and complete explanation. Then, as we go through the text, covering refuge briefly, it will supplement the study you've already done.

EXPLAINING THE TEXT OF THE CHAPTER

3. REFUGE

Unlike most other subdivisions in his commentary, Gyaltsab Je's commentary on the Refuge section of the chapter does not begin by quoting the relevant verse from the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*. Rather it begins by explaining the meaning of refuge as follows:

The meaning of refuge is to mentally hold and verbally express the objects of reliance for liberating one from dangers and suffering.

Thus refuge carries two main causes. As explained here succinctly, *the meaning of refuge is to mentally hold*, refers to mentally holding that full confidence in the objects of refuge. With that full confidence in the objects of refuge, one expresses verbal refuge. These are *the objects of reliance for liberating one from the dangers of suffering*; this encompasses all suffering. That is the meaning of refuge as explained here.

Then Gyaltsab Je goes on to state:

There is causal refuge and resultant refuge. The first is to hold the Three Jewels that already exist as objects of reliance for liberation from dangers.

The causal refuge is a refuge *that already exists*, such as Buddha Shakyamuni and other enlightened beings who are already enlightened; as well as the Dharma jewel and Sangha jewel that are present now. Here *reliance* can be understood as relying on an unfailing friend, someone who will help us at any time; especially when faced with many difficulties. Thus the objects of refuge such as the Buddha are definitely unfailing friends who present us with so much inspiration, advice and so many teachings about how to overcome and uproot our misery and suffering. By relying on them we can definitely achieve *liberation from all dangers*.

Then Gyaltsab Je describes resultant refuge:

The second is to hold the Buddha jewel and Dharma Jewels that one is going to realise in one's own continuum, as objects of reliance for liberation.

This refers to the fact that one will develop Buddha jewel or Dharma jewel in one's continuum in the future.

Practically speaking, we normally take *causal refuge* in the Buddha jewel that already exists as an enlightened being that we relate to, and to whom we make offerings and salutations and so forth. We relate to this causal refuge as an entity that has already obtained the qualities of enlightenment. These supreme enlightened beings are an

object of our reliance because of their kindness to us and the unmistakable advice that they present to us. So one visualises the Buddha and the Dharma and the Sangha from whom one receives inspiration and kindness.

The *resultant refuge* relates to the future objects, where one actualises the Three Jewels; becoming an enlightened being, actualising the Dharma jewel and the Sangha jewel within oneself. Contemplating that is the resultant refuge.

Gyaltsab Je' commentary continues:

The causes for refuge, the refuge objects, and the four ways of going for refuge—by knowing the qualities, by knowing the differences, by acceptance, and by not asserting other refuges—as well as the advice of refuge and so forth one can know from the *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path of the Perfections* by the great lama. Hence I do not explain them here.

3. The manner of going for refuge

Here Gyaltsab Je presents the third subdivision of the topic of refuge with four further subdivisions:

- *by knowing the qualities* refers to knowing the particular qualities of the Buddha jewel, the particular qualities of Dharma jewel and Sangha jewel;
- *by knowing the differences*, which is explained in six categories in the lam rim
- *by acceptance*, and
- *by not asserting other refuges*,

4. The commitments of taking refuge

In stating *as well as the advice (or commitments) of refuge* and so forth, Gyaltsab Je is referring to the final subdivision of the topic of refuge. The addition of *and so forth* indicates the benefits of taking refuge. This is also explained extensively in the lam rim, as Gyaltsab Je himself mentions:

... one can know from the *Great Expositions of the Stages of the Path of the Perfections* by the great lama. Hence I do not explain them here.

Here, the text is explaining the four divisions of refuge exactly as I mentioned earlier in the overview of the topic of refuge.

Gyaltsab Je further mentions:

The refutation of the mistaken assertion that the truth of the path is never an ultimate refuge, the general presentation of refuge, the difference between ultimate and conventional refuge and so forth I have already explained in the *Commentary on the Uttaratantra*. Thus you can learn from that.

The refutation of the mistaken assertion that the truth of the path is never an ultimate refuge is presented in Gyaltsab Je's *Commentary on the Uttaratantra*. The truth of the path within the Buddha's continuum is explained as an ultimate refuge.

With *the difference between ultimate refuge and conventional refuge*, conventional refuge is understood as a *temporary source of refuge* while *ultimate refuge* is to be understood as a permanent refuge.

Thus far, the commentary is identifying the objects of refuge in terms of a general presentation that can apply to all the tenets of Buddhism. The presentation from this point onwards is based on specifically identifying the Mahayana refuge.

The difference between the common refuge and the uncommon refuge, which refers to the Mahayana refuge, can

be understood in the manner of how the refuge is taken. With common refuge, when one takes those vows of refuge the commitment is, 'I'll seek refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha until the end of my life'. So the commitment is only for the duration of this life. Whereas the uncommon or Mahayana refuge is taking refuge with intention to take refuge until one reaches the state of enlightenment.

The actual Buddha refuge in both the common refuge and uncommon refuge is the same object, the Buddha. However, when it comes to the Dharma jewel, the uncommon or Mahayana Dharma jewel relates to specifically the Mahayana truth of path and the Mahayana truth of cessation; while the Sangha jewel relates specifically to the Mahayana arya Sangha.

Different texts have slightly different presentations of causes of the uncommon Mahayana refuge. The commentary on the lam rim called *Manjushri's Words* indicates that by contemplating the qualities of the Three Jewels, one generates a reliance on them, specifically by thinking about how they have the full ability to liberate one.

In relation to the fear of suffering, one uses one's own wish of not wanting to experience suffering to understand how all other beings are exactly the same; they too do not wish to experience any kind of suffering and they also want to experience all happiness. So one generates a specific fear in relation to oneself, and extends that to all other beings who will also have to experience these various sufferings again and again. Extending that wishing to be free from suffering, as well as being free from those fears to all beings, is the particular cause for taking refuge.

The verse from the root text is placed at this point in Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

26. *Until attaining the essence of enlightenment
I go for refuge to the buddhas;
Likewise, I go for refuge to the Dharma
And to the assembly of bodhisattvas.*

In addition to this verbal assertion of taking refuge one generates the motivational thought that, 'In order to liberate all beings from all suffering, I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I take refuge. Until I achieve enlightenment, I take refuge in the buddhas, the Dharma and the bodhisattvas.

In the Tibetan version the next lines in Gyaltsab Je's commentary are:

... by taking the Three Mahayana Jewels that already exist in the continuum of others, and the Three Jewels that will exist at one point in one's own continuum as the focal object, ...

So, as mentioned previously, this object of refuge is a causal refuge:

... from now until the attainment of the essence of highest enlightenment, when one manifests the dharmakaya at the foot of the bodhi tree,

This is indicating that one takes refuge until one achieves both the place and the state that one aspires to. Specifically the place is *at the foot* or *site of the Bodhi tree*, and the state is the dharmakaya body of a buddha. One achieves the dharmakaya body of a buddha at Bodhgaya, or in the *Akanista* buddha field where the sambhogakaya form of buddhas reside. So one goes for refuge until one is at the place of the seed of the bodhi tree which is in Bodhgaya, and until one achieves the dharmakaya or a buddha's truth Body.

Gyaltsab Je then further explains:

Until that time one takes refuge in the buddhas and likewise in the Mahayana Dharma jewel and takes refuge in the assembly of bodhisattvas, the superior bodhisattvas.

Again, this is identifying the specific objects of refuge: *until that time one takes refuge in the buddhas and likewise in the Mahayana Dharma jewel and the assembly of bodhisattvas, the superior bodhisattvas.*

Furthermore:

One takes the buddhas that are already established as guides of the path, the Dharma jewel that one will generate in one's own continuum as the actual refuge, and Mahayana superiors who have already achieved the Dharma jewel, as companions to achieve refuge.

This description of the way one takes refuge is exactly as I presented earlier.

Next week is the discussion night, so please engage in the discussion well. Following that is the exam, so try to do that well too. And the seminar is coming up, so it is also good to prepare for that and try to participate in it well.

The main thing is to utilise all of this study and practice as a way to ensure that your mind and heart becomes a bit more gentle and kind. That is the main purpose. If we ensure that whatever practice we do helps to reduce the unruly, negative states of mind that are so prevalent within us, then the more that unruly mind is tamed, the more a kind and more gentle mind is manifest and developed further. Then, not only this life, but also at the time of death and in all future lives, we will definitely experience a much more joyful and happier state of mind.

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

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

Tara Institute 'Shantideva's Bodhicharyavatara' Study Group 2013

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

Discussion **Week 7 (06.08.2013)**

Week: 1 (25 June 2013)

1. What is a bodhisattva? Answer in terms of the presentation found in the title of Shantideva's text.
2. a) Explain the infallibility of the law of Karma?
b) Here, however, the point concerns the qualities of a Bodhisattva. What are these qualities?
3. In relation to verse 36 Gyaltsab Je goes on to say:
'If the aforementioned explained benefits are condensed, then there are two, which can be subsumed into temporary and ultimate benefits. ...'
Explain these temporary and ultimate benefits.

Week: 2 (2 July 2013)

- 4.a) How is virtue defined? How does it relate to the definition of negativity?
b) What is the purpose of identifying virtue and non-virtue?
5. What is the optimum way to incorporate accumulating both extensive merit and purifying negativities?
6. Taking on the mind of enlightenment begins with engaging in which conducive preliminary practices ?

Week: 3 (9 July 2013)

7. What does the line, *extending to the end of space*, indicate?
8. (a) What is the specific implication of the benefits of offering one's body to the supreme beings?
(b) So what is the ultimate purpose of offering one's body?

Week: 4 (16 July 2013)

9. a) What are some of the different ways of offering flowers?
B) What should we visualize above a great lama or Master when offering flowers and how may those flowers be offered?
10. What is the actual Dharma Jewel?
11. Describe how one presents unsurpassable offerings according to the tradition of Samantabhadra.

Week: 5 (23 July 2013)

12. a) What is the dormant form of suffering that every sentient being possesses?
b) what is an example of the basis of this suffering?
- 13.a) Name one mental affliction for which prostration is a supreme antidote

b) Name three benefits of prostration?

PTO

14. Describe how we visualize while prostrating. Then explain the benefits of doing prostrations in this way.

Week 6 (30 July 2013)

15. Explain how refuge carries two main causes? (pg.3, 2nd paragraph under heading of REFUGE in the 1st colomn)

Exam

Name:

Block 4

Week 8: (13 August 2013)

1. What is a bodhisattva? Answer in terms of the presentation found in the title of Shantideva's text.

2. a) Explain the infallibility of the law of Karma?

b) Here, however, the point concerns the qualities of a Bodhisattva. What are these qualities?

3. In relation to verse 36 Gyalsab Je goes on to say:

'If the aforementioned explained benefits are condensed, then there are two, which can be subsumed into temporary and ultimate benefits. ...'

Explain these temporary and ultimate benefits.

4.a) How is virtue defined? How does it relate to the definition of negativity?

b) What is the purpose of identifying virtue and non-virtue?

5. What is the optimum way to incorporate accumulating both extensive merit and purifying negativities?

6. Taking on the mind of enlightenment begins with engaging in which conducive preliminary practices ?

7. What does the line, *extending to the end of space*, indicate?

8. (a) What is the specific implication of the benefits of offering one's body to the supreme beings?

(b) So what is the ultimate purpose of offering one's body?

9. a) What are some of the different ways of offering flowers?

b) What should we visualize above a great lama or Master when offering flowers and how may those flowers be offered?

10. What is the actual Dharma Jewel?

11. Describe how one presents unsurpassable offerings according to the tradition of Samantabhadhra.

12. a) What is the dormant form of suffering that every sentient being possesses?

b) what is an example of the basis of this suffering?

13.a) Name one mental affliction for which prostration is a supreme antidote

b) Name three benefits of prostration?

14. Describe how we visualize while prostrating. Then explain the benefits of doing prostrations in this way.

15. Explain how refuge carries two main causes?