
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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

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

[meditation]

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

2. CONTEMPLATING EXTENSIVELY THE BENEFITS OF BODHICITTA

2.1. Explaining the benefits of bodhicitta

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

2.1.1.2. IT CAN ACCOMPLISH SUPREME HAPPINESS

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

The relevant verse reads:

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

For eons, see this alone as beneficial.

Through it an immeasurable number of beings

Easily accomplish supreme happiness.

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

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

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

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

Gyaltsab Je then goes on to say further:

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

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

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

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

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

2.1.1.3. IT CAN ACCOMPLISH ONE'S WISHES

The verse relating to this is:

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

Wishing to clear the unhappiness of sentient beings and

Wanting to enjoy a hundredfold of happiness

Should never give up the mind of enlightenment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then the commentary goes on to say:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.1.2. One will become special in name and meaning

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

The relevant verse reads:

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

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

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

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

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

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

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

Then, Gyaltsab Je explains:

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

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

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

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

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

That concludes the benefits of bodhicitta.

2.1.3 Explaining the benefits with analogies

The six benefits of developing bodhicitta are described using analogies.

2.1.3.1. Analogy showing how the lesser becomes supreme

2.1.3.2. Analogy showing its rarity and preciousness

2.1.3.3. Analogy showing the unending and increasing result

2.1.3.4. Analogy showing its ability to rescue from great danger

2.1.3.5. Analogy showing how it destroys negativity effortlessly

2.1.3.6. The benefits that are explained in the sutras

2.1.3.1. ANALOGY SHOWING HOW THE LESSER BECOMES SUPREME

The verse relating to this reads:

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

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains that:

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

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

The analogy presented is that:

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

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

¹ A Tibetan unit of measurement.

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

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

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

Finally, Gyaltsab Je makes reference to the sutras.

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

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

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

2.1.3.2. ANALOGY SHOWING ITS RARITY AND PRECIOUSNESS

The verse which relates to this is:

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

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

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

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

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

Gyaltsab Je further explains:

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

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

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

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

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