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# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 2.1. Explaining the benefits of bodhicitta (cont.)

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

### 2.1.3.3. ANALOGY SHOWING THE UNENDING AND INCREASING RESULT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As Gyalsab Je states in his commentary:

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

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

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

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

The *Sutra of Inexhaustible Wisdom* states:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The verse relating to this reads as follows:

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

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 2.1.3.5. ANALOGY SHOWING HOW IT DESTROYS NEGATIVITY EFFORTLESSLY

There are two lines in relation to this heading:

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

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

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

The implication is that:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 2.1.3.6. HOW THE BENEFITS ARE EXPLAINED IN THE SUTRAS

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

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

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

The mind of enlightenment definitely creates these benefits<sup>1</sup> because [as a way to back it up with a quotation from the sutras] Maitreya, who is endowed with awareness, explained these benefits and infinitely praised this mind in the *Array of Stalks* sutra to the bodhisattva Youthful Sudhana.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to the benefits mentioned earlier.