

---

## Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱུང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའི་སྐྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

7 May 2013

---

As usual we will spend some time in meditation. The *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* that we have recited will suffice for our motivation. It's good to really think about the meaning of the lines in that prayer.

For the purposes of our practice it would be good to envision the objects of refuge, Buddha Shakyamuni surrounded by all gurus, buddhas and bodhisattvas, in the space before us. At the front, in the centre, we can envision all those beings towards whom we feel hostile. To the right we envision our father of this life surrounded by all relatives and friends of the male aspect, and to the left side our mother and all other relatives and friends of the female aspect. Surrounding these are an infinite number of sentient beings. As one engages in the *tong len* practice of giving and taking, envision receiving inspiration from the objects of refuge, and then engage in the practise of giving and taking in relation to the surrounding beings, who are the objects of our love and compassion. This ensures that we are doing a very good and appropriate practice.

As we become familiar with this visualisation, we will be able to use it whenever we recite the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*. When we commence the prayer we will be able to recall the objects of refuge in front of us and the objects of bodhicitta surrounding us. Also as we recite the prayer we can imagine ourselves to be like a chant leader, leading all other sentient beings surrounding us into taking refuge as well. As we sincerely take refuge in the objects of refuge we imagine that all beings surrounding us also take refuge in the objects of refuge and that we all receive the blessings. With this in mind we can now engage in the practice.

[meditation]

This is a very meaningful practice. As we engage in it we can generate the strong aspiration, 'May I be able to put this into practice. May I be able to actually implement this visualisation and make it an actual practice'. Then our meditation practice becomes really meaningful. We should not consider this a mere simple practice. It is, in fact, an incredibly meaningful and powerful practice. The teachings mention again and again that the root of all happiness lies in generating true love and compassion within one's heart. So this practice of *tong len* is definitely a very high level practice. Any practice that we engage in that is not based on love and compassion is only a practice that is sullied with personal interest and gains.

The more we familiarise ourselves with the practice of love and compassion, meditating and thinking about it again and again, the more it will help us to reduce anger towards others, which is a practical benefit for ourselves as well as others. That is because the practice of

generating love and compassion in one's heart involves focussing on those sentient beings who are experiencing suffering, and who are deprived of happiness. So the more we familiarise our minds with their plight and wishing them not to experience any suffering, the more endearing and closer they become. Thus we begin to really open up our hearts to them.

As we progress with our practice, we slowly begin to transform that initial wish for sentient beings to be free from suffering and endowed with happiness into the state of taking on a personal responsibility for doing that ourselves. Thus we transform our love and compassion into superior intention, where we make the resolve, 'I will myself lead all sentient beings out of the state of all suffering and place them into the ultimate state of happiness'. Having developed this superior intention, we are now very close to developing the actual awakening mind. This is how we gradually develop our intention to benefit other sentient beings.

As mentioned previously, when we relate to the plight of those who are deprived of happiness and who are experiencing great suffering there is no room for an angry and hostile mind to arise. That is because our thoughts are filled with genuinely wanting them to experience happiness and not to experience any suffering. When we are feeling love and compassion, thoughts of anger cannot arise. Likewise, thinking in this way will definitely help to overcome feelings of jealousy, contempt, competitiveness and so forth towards other beings. Through this practice these kinds of negative attitudes will definitely be overcome. So we can see how, as we develop our mind and improve it further, what seems like a simple practice is really a profound one. This is the way to progress on the path to enlightenment.

Of course the very reason we engage in the practice of meditating on love and compassion is so that we can implement it when we actually interact with others. We need to remind ourselves again and again, that the whole purpose of meditating on love and compassion is so that we can integrate and apply it in our daily lives. When we come out of our formal meditation practice and begin to interact with others, we need to ensure that our interactions are actually based on the sense of love and compassion with which we have been familiarising ourselves with during the meditation sessions. If we do this sincerely with a strong commitment, then the positive effect of our meditation will indeed extend into our everyday lives where we interact with other beings. This is how we need to actually engage in the practice.

I emphasise these points regularly as a way to remind you that these are essential practices—they are the very practices we need to take to heart. The teachings remind us again and again that love and compassion is the very basis for every Dharma practice. So we need to actually implement this advice in our own practices.

During the recent Easter course there was someone who said she used to come here regularly. She confided that she had practised meditation for over ten years, but her practice had lapsed for a while. However she has taken it up again recently. She said that while she is able to maintain her focus during meditation for about half an hour and even up to an hour at times with no problems,

she reverts to being grumpy and irritated as soon as she comes out of her meditation. She was being very truthful about her difficulties in maintaining her practice.

Being truthful like that is far better than being pretentious about not being affected by the world. Others may not detect what is going on, but affecting this pretentious calm and cool attitude when there is actually internal irritation can harm our progress. It is far better to be honest about the failings in our practice. When we are honest about where we are at, then when we listen to the teachings and receive advice, it can really hit the mark and help us to transform our mind.

This situation of not being able to extend our calm state of mind during meditation into the post-meditation state, arises because of not maintaining mindfulness and introspection out of the meditation session. It is because we have not maintained mindfulness and introspection outside the meditation session that the faults of becoming agitated and grumpy occur.

As I have mentioned previously, someone else confided in me that although he had been familiar with the meditation practice for over ten years, he had never heard about the specifics of applying mindfulness and introspection in meditation. He said it was really incredible when he was introduced to it. How had he missed this essential point?

## 2.1 Explaining the benefits of bodhicitta

Having heard of the benefits in detail, one will then feel inspired to develop bodhicitta. The way the text next introduces the nature of bodhicitta is really very skilful. Here, we can note the meticulous presentation of the great master Shantideva. Firstly he inspires us by explaining the benefits of bodhicitta, and then he explains what the nature of bodhicitta is.

## 2.2. Identifying the nature of bodhicitta

This heading has three divisions:

2.2.1. Divisions by nature

2.2.2. Explaining the divisions with an example

2.2.3. Explaining the difference between the benefits of the wishing and engaging minds

### 2.2.1. Divisions by nature

The divisions of bodhicitta by nature are presented in this verse:

15. *The mind of enlightenment, if summed up,  
Should be known in two aspects:  
The mind wishing for enlightenment and  
The one engaging in enlightenment.*

Of course these two divisions of bodhicitta have been presented many times in previous teachings to older students.

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Take the subject 'the generation of the mind of supreme enlightenment': by way of nature it should be known in brief in two aspects—the mind focusing on wishing for enlightenment, and the mind focusing on engaging in enlightenment.

Thus, there are two divisions of bodhicitta by nature: wishing bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta.

Next Gyaltsab Je presents this definition of bodhicitta:

The definition of the Mahayana mind generation is the mind that accompanies the aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the purpose of others.

This of course is an abbreviated definition; we have gone over the more detailed definition of the Mahayana mind generation in previous teachings.<sup>1</sup> However, the definition of the *Mahayana mind generation* presented here is that it is *the mind that accompanies the aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the purpose of others*.

Here we need to take note that within the divisions of mind and mental factors, bodhicitta is a primary mind and thus not a mental factor. It is however accompanied by the mental factor of aspiration which is of two-fold: the aspiration to benefit other sentient beings and the aspiration to achieve enlightenment oneself.

The first aspiration is the aspiration to benefit others, which is generated within one's mind-stream on the basis of having developed love and compassion and superior intention. From that follows the aspiration to achieve enlightenment oneself for the sake of all sentient beings. This is the actual aspiration that accompanies bodhicitta. In other words, in order to fulfil the aspiration to benefit other sentient beings, one needs to first fulfil the aspiration of achieving enlightenment oneself. Thus we need to obtain enlightenment first in order to benefit others to the fullest extent. This is an essential point that we need to recognise and understand.

In summary, the Mahayana mind generation or bodhicitta is a primary mind that is accompanied by two aspirations. The aspiration to benefit others is the causal aspiration, whereas the aspiration to attain complete enlightenment is the resultant aspiration that accompanies bodhicitta. Thus the aspiration to achieve enlightenment is that which accompanies bodhicitta, i.e. the *mind of supreme enlightenment*.

As mentioned previously, in terms of development, the aspiration to benefit others is generated first followed by the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for oneself. In terms of obtaining the results, one first obtains the state of enlightenment and will then be able to lead other sentient beings to the state of enlightenment. So, one needs to obtain enlightenment first in order to be able to actually engage in the ultimate purpose of benefitting others, i.e.

---

<sup>1</sup> There are two Tibetan terms used in this context, *teck-chen sem-kye* and *jang-chub sem*.

The Sanskrit term bodhicitta is *jang-chub sem* in Tibetan – *jang-chub* means enlightenment and *sem* means mind, hence the literal translation is 'mind of enlightenment'; however the implicit meaning is the 'mind that aspires to obtain enlightenment'. The person who has this mind that aspires to obtain enlightenment is a *jang-chub sem-pa*, or bodhisattva in Sanskrit.

The term *teck-chen sem-kye* is translated in the commentary as 'Mahayana mind generation' – *teck-chen* means Mahayana, *sem* means mind and *kye* means generation. It specifically refers to a mind that is characterised as a Mahayana mind from the moment it is generated and for as long as it is maintained.

So the two terms essentially refer to the same thing with respect to the nature of the mind which aspires to enlightenment. The difference lies in the fact that one term involves a process, i.e. generation, and a setting, i.e. Mahayana, whereas the other is focussed on the result, i.e. the 'mind of enlightenment' or more specifically that which aspires to obtain enlightenment.

lead them to the state of complete enlightenment. As the teachings mention, when we work solely for the benefit of others, it will naturally fulfil our own purpose as well. So, this means that when we are fully committed to benefiting other sentient beings, that will also serve as the optimum means to obtain enlightenment ourselves, because we realise that without obtaining enlightenment oneself first there is no way that we can fully benefit others.

More specifically, you will recall that in the seven-point cause and effect sequence for developing bodhicitta, the state of mind that serves as the immediate cause to achieve the result of bodhicitta is called superior intention. This is where one takes on full responsibility for leading all beings to happiness and removing them from all suffering. The mind of superior intention makes this resolve, 'I will not rely on others to do it, but rather I will take it upon myself to bring happiness and free all beings from suffering'.

Having taken on that personal responsibility, which is based on love and compassion, and making the courageous commitment to bring all beings to the ultimate state of happiness and free them from all suffering, one then reflects on whether one has the ability to do that right now. When one realises that one does not have that full ability now, one investigates who has that ability, and comes to realise that only a buddha has the full capacity to benefit all sentient beings.

When one takes refuge in the Buddha by reflecting on the enlightened qualities in detail, such as the qualities of his holy body that is adorned with the enlightened signs and marks, the numerous qualities of his speech, the unimaginable qualities of his omniscient mind, and his vast virtuous activities, then that in itself becomes a strong impetus to develop exactly those same qualities for ourselves. It is only when one has obtained all the qualities of enlightenment that one will gain the full ability to free all other beings from suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness. When one develops the strong aspiration to obtain enlightenment as a way to benefit all sentient beings fully and completely, then one has developed bodhicitta or the awakening mind. This is how one develops the Mahayana mind generation—a mind that aspires to obtain supreme enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

You also need to understand that bodhicitta is developed only on the basis of having first obtained calm abiding. As explained many times previously, the mind basis for developing bodhicitta is a higher realm mind called the preparatory stage.<sup>2</sup> As explained in the teachings, calm abiding, the preparatory stage and the mind of higher realm are all obtained simultaneously. The reason why bodhicitta cannot be generated based on a mind of the desire realm is because the mind of the desire realm is a very gross level of mind, and since bodhicitta is only developed in relation to a subtle mind and particularly a

very firm and stable mind, it has to be generated based on calm abiding which is a higher realm mind.

You can refer to the more extensive definition of bodhicitta that is presented in other texts and compare it with the definition presented here. Does the definition presented here include all of the necessary elements of bodhicitta? It's good for you to investigate this. So, is this definition intact?

Students: Yes.

But this definition would apply even to an ordinary being who has not yet entered the path. Ordinary beings just prior to entering the Mahayana path would have generated the mind that aspires to enlightenment, and even though it is a contrived mind it still meets all the criteria of this definition, doesn't it?

Also, the Buddha's eye consciousness is a primary consciousness, which also meets the criteria of the definition, but it would not be referred to as being bodhicitta. Thus the crucial element that needs to be added on to this definition of the generation of a Mahayana mind is that it is a Mahayana primary mental consciousness. So, thus the full definition would read: the Mahayana primary mental consciousness that accompanies the aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the purpose of others. This definition carries the criteria for it to be the full definition of the generation of the Mahayana mind of bodhicitta. Adding the extra element 'Mahayana primary mental consciousness' to the definition, rules out the primary consciousnesses of the other senses such as eye primary consciousness, the nose primary consciousness, the tongue primary consciousness and so forth as bodhicitta.

The inclusion of 'Mahayana' in the definition also rules out the mental consciousnesses of an ordinary being who has not yet entered the Mahayana path, as being bodhicitta. In the definition presented here it just mentions a 'mind that accompanies the aspiration' and does not specify that it has to be a Mahayana mental consciousness.

We will not go further into the extensive explanation in the commentary at this point, as you can read that for yourselves. As presented there, in addition to this two-fold division Gyalsab Je mentions twenty-two divisions by example and four by boundary, all of which are explained in the lam rim teachings. The commentary also refers to abandoning the four black dharmas and relying on the four white dharmas and so forth, and again these are also explained in the lam rim teachings. As the author of the commentary, Gyalsab Je, mentions, to understand all of these more extensively, you must study the lam rim teachings.

### **2.2.2. Explaining the divisions with an example**

The next verse goes into more detail.

16. *In the same way one understands the difference between  
Wishing to go and going,  
Those who are proficient should  
Understand the difference of the two  
sequentially.*

<sup>2</sup> A preparatory virtuous state of concentration within the sphere of the form and formless realm that directly generates an actual state of meditative concentration of either the form or formless absorption. There are eight types of preparatory meditative concentrations.

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

The mind that thinks, 'I want to go to that place' while resting and not being held by the action of going, and the mind that thinks, 'I shall go to that place' while held by the action of placing one foot down and raising the other, are the same in being an awareness that thinks 'I should go to that place'.

The difference lies with being held, or not being held by the action of going.

That is the example. Then the commentary continues:

The respective difference between the wishing and engaging mind generation should be understood by those who are proficient in the same way. They are the same in being a mind that thinks, 'I shall attain enlightenment for the welfare of others', but one of them does not depend on being held by the practice of the perfections of generosity and so forth, and the other does depend on that.

So the difference between wishing bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta does not lie in the intention, which is the same for both, i.e. 'I shall obtain enlightenment for the welfare of others'.

What does differentiate the two is that wishing bodhicitta is not accompanied by engaging in the practices of perfection of generosity and so forth. Whereas engaging bodhicitta, while having the same mind of 'I shall obtain enlightenment for the welfare of others', is held by the practices of the perfection of generosity and so forth. With engaging bodhicitta the practice of the perfections of generosity and so forth is manifest.

One way to understand this is that a bodhisattva who is in meditative equipoise is not actively practising engaging bodhicitta, but they do maintain the wishing bodhicitta within their mental continuum. When the bodhisattvas come out of meditative equipoise and enter into the post-meditative state, they engage in activities of benefiting others such as by practising generosity, giving teachings and so forth; and at that time their mind is held by the engaging bodhicitta. It is good to understand this distinction between wishing or aspiring bodhicitta, and engaging bodhicitta. That should be sufficient for now—you can do more research on that for yourselves.

The commentary ends the section with this comment:

The master Kamalashila and others explained it in the same way, so I will not elaborate it here.

### **2.2.3. Explaining the difference in the benefits of the wishing and engaging minds**

This is sub-divided into two:

2.2.3.1. The benefits of the wishing mind

2.2.3.2. The benefits of the engaging mind

#### **2.2.3.1. THE BENEFITS OF THE WISHING MIND**

In his commentary on this section, Gyaltsab Je begins with this quotation from the sutra called *The Liberation of the Superior Jampa*:

Son of the lineage, it is like this: For example, the precious diamond, though broken, outshines the supreme ornaments of gold and so forth, still keeps the name 'precious diamond', and eliminates all poverty. Son of the lineage, likewise the precious diamond of the mind that generates omniscient

knowledge, even without significance, outshines all the gold of the qualities of the hearers and self-liberators. It keeps the name of bodhisattva and eliminates all the poverty of cyclic existence.

This quote was also mentioned when we were studying the *Madhyamaka* (or Middle Way text), so you will be familiar with it.

Then the verse from the root text is presented:

*17. Though from the wishing mind of enlightenment  
Great benefit arises while circling,  
Continual merit, similar to the mind  
Of engaging, does not arise.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

As stated here, though a great result from the mind wishing for enlightenment arises while being in cyclic existence, a similar uninterrupted stream of merits, such as that which arises from the engaging mind does not arise.

As a result of the merit accumulated from a wishing mind of enlightenment while one is in cyclic existence one actually experiences great positive results, such as being born as a universal monarch and so forth.

However an uninterrupted stream of merit is not obtained from a mind that merely wishes for enlightenment. The engaging mind produces an uninterrupted stream of merit, which is far superior and far greater than the merit one gains from just the wishing mind.

The distinction between the mind that generates a wish for bodhicitta and the mind that engages in bodhicitta can be understood in terms of how each is actually implemented. The wishing mind is where one develops that keen aspiration to achieve enlightenment, 'May I achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings', which suffices for the wishing mind. Based upon that aspiration of wishing to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, the engaging mind actually makes a promise to achieve enlightenment. When we talk about the bodhisattva vows, we are talking about vows that are based upon the engaging mind. Based on the earlier aspiration 'for the sake of all sentient beings I aspire to achieve enlightenment', the engaging bodhicitta mind promises to engage in the practices of the six perfections such as generosity and so forth. So we can see that there is definitely a difference between a mere aspiration and making a promise to fulfil that aspiration.

We can relate this to the practices and commitments that we regularly undertake, such as the Vajrayogini sadhana. The practice begins with 'I aspire to achieve the united state of Vajrayogini and for that purpose I will now engage in these practices of generating myself as the deity and so forth'. The first part 'for the sake of achieving enlightenment may I achieve the state of Vajrayogini' suffices as wishing bodhicitta. The second part 'for that purpose I will engage in the self-generation of Vajrayogini' suffices for engaging bodhicitta. It is good to apply this understanding to any practices we may engage in.

One also needs to understand that it is the promise that makes engaging bodhicitta so much more powerful. We can see this with our practice of the virtues, such as

---

refraining from killing. The mere act of refraining from killing is of course a virtuous act in itself. However if one were to actually promise, 'Today, I will not engage in any act of killing' or 'I will completely refrain from killing' then the act of refraining from killing becomes much more powerful and much more meritorious. This is important to understand.

It is good to study the definition of the Mahayana mind generation or bodhicitta and become familiar with what it actually means. That doesn't mean just being able to repeat the definition, but rather having a personal understanding of what bodhicitta actually means. What is the actual difference between wishing bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta and so forth? We need to really understand this so we understand what we are striving for.

Bodhicitta is not something to be left as merely an intellectual understanding. We will gain the most benefit from bodhicitta when we actually meditate on it. Initially meditating on bodhicitta can be done with the explanation based on the sequential development of bodhicitta. As I have presented on numerous occasions, there are two main methods for developing bodhicitta. One is based on the seven-point cause and effect sequence, and the other on the technique of equalising and exchanging oneself with others. In the form of a meditation, or as part of familiarising one's own mind with them, it is good to go over these points and try to reflect upon them.

The seven-point cause and effect sequence begins with developing equanimity towards all living beings. We begin the process of developing a contrived bodhicitta by 1) contemplating how all beings have been equally kind to oneself, as they have all been one's mother in an infinite number of past lives. At this point you need to use logical reasons to determine that, as one's mental continuum has gone back beyond the conception of this life through numerous, countless, and infinite past lives, then all beings must at one time or another have been one's mother. Then 2) we remember the incredible kindness shown to us by all beings, just like one's mother in this life. In this way we remember their great kindness. Next, 3) we develop the strong intention of wishing to repay that kindness. Then 4) we develop heart-warming or appealing love for all beings, 5) followed by compassion. The sixth cause 6) is superior intention. Having meditated in this sequence one has, using this contrived means, reached a point where one really wants to do anything possible to benefit sentient beings, to bring them happiness and remove their suffering. When we acknowledge that we do not have the full potential or ability to achieve that goal, then the aspiration to obtain enlightenment is developed.

When we develop that thought, 'How wonderful it would be if I could obtain enlightenment in order to benefit all beings', we have generated a contrived bodhicitta attitude. We need to further familiarise our mind with this contrived attitude until it becomes the effortless and spontaneous wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings.

The technique that Shantideva presents in great detail in the eighth chapter of *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* is the

equalising and exchanging self with other technique. The exchanging self with other technique has four stages, beginning with 1) equalising oneself with others, which is developing equanimity. Then based on that, 2) one contemplates the many faults of cherishing oneself; followed by 3) contemplating the benefits of cherishing others. Then comes 4) the actual practice of exchanging self with others, which incorporates superior intention. You would have done this *tong len* practice of giving and taking over the three weeks when I went to India last year.

Some texts indicate that when one engages in the practice of developing bodhicitta using the exchanging self with others technique, then the seven-point cause and effect sequence is subsumed into that technique. Whereas if you're practicing the seven-point cause and effect sequence for developing bodhicitta, that doesn't necessarily suffice as a practise of exchanging self with others technique.

Some have commented that the exchanging self with others technique doesn't necessarily mean that you have to think about past lives. I think this particular explanation is presented in *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, which also mentions that the exchanging self with others technique incorporates the seven-point cause and effect technique as well.

So it's good to refer to different texts and read their various explanations as a way to increase your understanding and wisdom. The opportunity we have now is, of course, very rare, and this is a good opportunity to try to bring this about again in the future. But that's very hard to predict.

Before she passed away Caryn Clarke confided in me, 'I have no real hesitation about death itself, but the prospect of not meeting with such an opportunity to be with you again is a prospect that really frightens me'. She was referring to me, but of course she really meant having the opportunity to practise Dharma and meet with teachers. We need to take this as a personal instruction. The great Kadampa masters had similar ways of presenting instructions; with predicaments and so forth. Caryn said, 'You know I've had the opportunity to be with you for about seven years, and that was a great time of being together, for learning and practice. I worry that I won't have this opportunity again'. These are points that we need to remember.

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