
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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

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Based on the motivation we generated in the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in our meditation practice. [meditation]

It would be good to generate from the depths of one's heart a positive motivation for receiving the teaching such as: For the purpose of all sentient beings, to free them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of enlightenment and happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself; so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

2.2.3. Explaining the difference in the benefits of the wishing and engaging minds (cont.)

The distinction between the wishing mind and the engaging mind was presented in the last session, along with the benefits of the wishing mind of bodhicitta. It is good to reflect on those benefits.

Again, I exhort you to contemplate the meaning of the teachings that have been presented and not to just leave it as a mere intellectual understanding thinking, 'OK, I've heard that. It makes sense'. There is not much benefit in just skimming over what is being presented. The only way to derive any personal benefit is by really contemplating and reflecting on the meaning of these points. Only then can one taste the real flavour of what is being presented. Having reflected on and digested the meaning of what the great scholar and master Shantideva presented, we will begin to really admire and venerate him.

The most important application of these teachings to our practice is to see how they counteract our very stubborn mind, which cherishes our own interests and well-being. It counteracts that self-cherishing because everything being presented here relates to thinking about the welfare of all other beings, and how to benefit them. By its very nature the material presented here extends our view beyond ourselves to benefiting others, which definitely counteracts our focus on our own interests and our self-cherishing mind.

The essence of this presentation lies in the ways and means to benefit others, which also helps to simplify what might otherwise seem to be a complex teaching. When we look into it, we find that we already have, to a certain degree, a wish to benefit others. So it is just a matter of further developing and expanding that. That is essentially what is being presented here.

2.2.3.2. THE BENEFITS OF THE ENGAGING MIND

The two verses relating to this heading are:

18. *Whoever, from the time they perfectly generate
With an irreversible attitude,
This mind to liberate the infinite
Realms of sentient beings,*
19. *From then on, although they sleep
Or become reckless, manifold
Merits of uninterrupted power,
Equalling space, strongly arise.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je begins his explanation of the meaning of these verses as follows:

Whoever, from the moment they perfectly generate an irreversible engaging mind for the purpose of others, to completely liberate all realms of beings and place them in the state of enlightenment, for as long as cyclic existence lasts,...

These verses are introducing the nature of the engaging mind as a way of explaining its benefits. As explained earlier, the wishing mind is a mere aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of other sentient beings, whereas the engaging mind is a mind accompanied by actions or deeds such as the six perfections. *From the moment* someone makes that pledge or vow to engage in the bodhisattva deeds *they perfectly generate the irreversible engaging mind for the purpose of others*. This refers to engaging in the actions solely for *the purpose of benefiting others for as long as cyclic existence lasts* and *to completely liberate sentient beings in all realms*. This is the extent of the pledge that is made when one takes the engaging bodhisattva vows.

So, the engaging mind is this very strong and stable pledge to not abandon working for the purpose of others for as long as cyclic existence lasts. This means continuously working for the purpose of others until the very last sentient being is liberated. Here we need to take note that the negativity from breaching the bodhisattva vows is only incurred when one has made this pledge. With a wishing mind one has not made any pledge, so if one does not apply oneself to the practice, or if one breaches any of the practices, there will be no resulting negativity, simply because one has not made the pledge. The negativity of a downfall occurs only when one breaches the commitments of a pledge.

Having explained the engaging mind and that it involves making a pledge, Gyaltsab Je indicates that from the time the bodhisattva makes the pledge and generates the engaging mind:

... from then on, whether they sleep or become reckless through intoxication and so forth, they will still create a manifold uninterrupted power of merit as vast as space.

That is because the wishing mind is generated merely through aspiring to the result, while the engaging mind is held by the practice of completing the causes for enlightenment.

As this is such a clear presentation it is good for us to reflect on its meaning. Because of the power of the pledge and the power of the mind that one has generated (i.e. the resolve to benefit all sentient beings until the end of samsara), bodhisattvas continue to create merit even while asleep, or during moments when they are not being conscientious, such as becoming intoxicated. Some bodhisattvas may engage in worldly activities, such as socialising with others, maybe even drinking to the point of becoming a little intoxicated, and temporarily numbing the mind. However, due to the power of their pledge they are still accumulating merit at that time.

Here we need to understand that there are occasions where, even though their mind is not manifestly active such as when it is intoxicated, or sleeping, the bodhisattva still accumulates merit. But it is important that we don't misinterpret this. It doesn't mean that once the pledge is made, one does not need to further develop that engaging mind—bodhisattvas still need to train to further develop that altruistic state of mind. However, once they have developed the engaging mind they will continuously

accumulate merit, as vast as space, in all their activities, even while sleeping and eating. When eating, for example, they will consciously consume the food with the intention, 'It is for the purpose of nourishing my body to make it stronger, so that I can further develop myself to be in the service of benefiting others, that I eat and drink'. They sleep with the intention, 'I go to sleep in order to rejuvenate and restore the energy of my body, so that I can further work for the welfare of other sentient beings'. So in this way, any activity, even sitting or moving about, is engaged with a conscious mind of doing so for the purpose of benefiting others. That is how bodhisattvas are said to accrue an incredibly vast amount of merit. All their activities become the means to accumulate merit, because they are done for the purpose of other sentient beings.

The main point here is that the way to accumulate a continuous stream of merit is by holding that intention to benefit others. Then whatever activity one engages in actually becomes a means to benefit others. The simple act of opening a door can be done with the intention, 'By opening this door may I open the door to liberation for all sentient beings'. With the bodhicitta attitude a normal and simple activity such turning on the light can generate an altruistic intention such as, 'May turning on this light become the cause to remove the darkness of ignorance within all sentient beings'. So, whatever seemingly simple, mindless activity we normally do, it becomes a supreme means to accumulate extensive merit when it is accompanied by the intention of wishing to benefit others. So combining any practice or activity with that intention of benefiting others is a means to accumulate great merit.

On a practical level, if we can ensure that whenever we engage in any activity we do so with an intention that the activity will benefit others, then that will be a direct antidote to the self-cherishing mind. As explained extensively, because so many faults arise out of a self-cherishing mind, we definitely need to overcome it. A practical way to begin overcoming that negative state of mind is by turning every activity into an intention to benefit others, which will act as a direct antidote that overcomes the self-cherishing mind.

In addition to these ways of training our mind to overcome self-cherishing, there is the practice of equalising and exchanging self with others. This is a practice where we intentionally engage in methods to lessen the self-cherishing mind and replace it with a mind that cherishes others. As mentioned previously, when we ensure that our actions are held with the intention to benefit others, then these actions actually become a practice of cherishing others. Doing anything with the intention of benefiting others will naturally overcome the self-cherishing mind. The practice of exchanging self with others can be thus applied with this intention. We have heard of these practices and techniques many times, so now it is up to us to use every opportunity to try to apply them. That is how we will gain the greatest benefit from the practice.

However, you need not worry that your own welfare will suffer if you cherish others! As mentioned in the teachings, the side-effect of cherishing others will be that your own welfare and wellbeing will naturally be enhanced. More extensive explanations about the benefits of cherishing others and overcoming self-cherishing are found in the eighth chapter of this text.

As mentioned in that chapter, we just need to look at the difference between the Buddha and ourselves in order to understand the disadvantage of cherishing oneself and the

benefit of cherishing others. Having surpassed the practice of cherishing others, the Buddha became a supreme enlightened being, whereas we are still ordinary beings suffering in cyclic existence. That is because we have held onto the self-cherishing mind. This really summarises the benefits of cherishing others. If we have any doubts that we might lose or miss out if we don't cherish ourselves, we can encourage ourselves by remembering that the ultimate benefit of cherishing others is that we will become enlightened, just like the Buddha. There is no greater benefit than that!

We can see the significance of becoming a buddha by recalling how many beings are naturally drawn to the Buddha now—they naturally respect and admire him and want to follow his advice. His Holiness recently mentioned that it had come to his attention that a general survey in China had revealed that there are over 200 million Chinese people who are interested in the Buddhist teachings and who consider themselves to be Buddhists. That is the extent of the interest in the Buddha in these times. Of course, in the past, China was mostly a Buddhist country. When I was in Tibet I used to hear from the elders that things began to decline in China when the emperor was no longer able to reign. If he had been able to rule continuously there would have been peace and wellbeing in China. That is because the emperor was regarded as a manifestation of Manjushri. If the emperor had remained in power, then as a follower of the Dharma, and as a manifestation of Manjushri, he would have brought peace and harmony throughout the Chinese nation. That's what the elders in Tibet used to say.

To this day one of the prominent places of pilgrimage in China is the Five Peaks of Manjushri, where there are many monasteries and temples on the main mountain. I wouldn't mind going on a pilgrimage there but at my age I don't know if I would be able to reach the summit! There's a Tibetan saying that whoever makes the pilgrimage to the Manjushri peaks will definitely receive some sign of making a connection with Manjushri.

Getting back to the main point mentioned earlier, lest we feel we are missing out by cherishing others and overcoming our self-cherishing mind, we can reflect on the Buddha's deeds and qualities, and how we will achieve the same state of buddhahood. That will really help to encourage us to practise cherishing others.

2.3. The reason for these benefits arising

Thus far the many benefits of cherishing others have been presented. Lest one wonders how and why these benefits come about, Shantideva very meticulously presents the reasons why these benefits arise. He does so under two headings:

2.3.1. Stating the quotation

2.3.2. Establishing it with reasoning

2.3.1. Stating the quotation

The quotation is presented in this verse:

20. *That this has validity
Was taught by the Tathagata
In the Subahuprccha
For those aspiring to the lesser.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je elaborates:

That it is valid that the engaging mind has these benefits was established by the Tathagata himself in the *Sutra Requested by the Bodhisattva Subahu* with reasoning ...

The sutra that is referred to here is the *Sutra Requested by the Bodhisattva Subahu*, and *with reasoning* indicates that the quotation from the sutra is a citation that withstands the three-fold analysis. As older students would be aware from previous teachings, the three-fold analysis determines whether a quotation is valid or not.¹ The three-fold forms of analysis are:

1. Obvious phenomena are not contradicted by direct valid perception.
2. Slightly obscure phenomena are not contradicted by valid inference based on the force of evidence. Examples of slightly obscure phenomena would be impermanence, selflessness and so forth.
3. Extremely obscure phenomena are not contradicted by valid inference based on scriptural authority. Examples of extremely obscure phenomena would be the subtleties of karma.

The main point is that a quotation is established as a valid quotation when it withstands the three-fold analysis.

Gyalsab Je's commentary continues:

Why did the Buddha do this? It was intended for those sentient beings who are inclined to the lesser; such as a person whose hearer lineage is not definite, but who is afraid of accumulating vast merit, and thus they turn away from the Mahayana path and aspire to the hearer's enlightenment. It was to help them give up their inclination to the lesser, so that they could be placed in the Mahayana.

We need to clearly understand what is being presented here and what we should specifically rely upon. As mentioned here in the commentary, the Tathagata or the Buddha specifically explained the benefits, especially for those who might be inclined to the Hinayana or the Lesser Vehicle. *Like a person whose hearer lineage was not definite* means that if a being's lineage is already definite or fixed, then there would be no point mentioning it to them because they have definitely entered the Lesser Vehicle. Those whose lineage is not yet definite could turn to either the Mahayana or Hinayana path depending on which teachings inspire them. Such beings might be afraid of the effort needed to accumulate the vast merit required in the Mahayana path and possibly *turn away from the Mahayana path and aspire to the hearer's enlightenment*. So in order to help them give up their inclination to the lesser vehicle and become established in the Great Vehicle, the Buddha explained the benefits of cherishing others.

At a personal level, this is very sound advice. We might safely assume that we don't have the hearer's lineage, meaning that there might be no immediate danger that we will enter the hearer's path. Nevertheless we may lack aspiration to practise the Mahayana path because we are afraid of the vast amount of merit that needs to be accumulated. The prospect of having to accumulate extensive merit might be so daunting that there might be times when we start to think, 'Um, maybe I will set the practice for enlightenment aside for now, and go for self liberation!'

There is a reason why the lam rim teachings present the practices of the three scopes sequentially. If the great scope practices are not presented, then there is the danger for the trainee to aspire to self liberation after they have trained

their mind in the small and medium scope practices. When the trainee becomes familiar with the practices of the small scope followed by the practices of the medium scope, they will develop confidence about being able to obtain liberation. So if bodhicitta is not presented to them at that stage then there is the danger that they will strive just for self-liberation. When the practices of the great scope are introduced they will be able relate their own plight in samsara to all other sentient beings. That can then be developed into the great resolve of liberating all sentient beings and thus entering the Great Vehicle. We need to see how the lam rim has been presented in this way so that there is no danger of entering the lower vehicle; i.e. the path aspiring to self-liberation.

To put this into a more specific context, the benefits of bodhicitta are presented to beings who are not yet inclined to enter the lesser vehicle, such as the hearer's vehicle. If all the great deeds of the bodhisattvas are presented initially to a beginner trainee, that could be too daunting for them and hence there is the danger that they might turn to the lower vehicle.

For example, the great deeds of generosity practised by a bodhisattva could extend to giving away their own limbs and even their whole body. There are many accounts of how in his previous lives as a bodhisattva the Buddha gave away his limbs and his own body in order to benefit others; he gave away his possessions; and there are even accounts of him giving away his children and wives and so forth. His generosity was so great that he was able to give away much that would otherwise be cherished as being so very dear. The thought of such practices of generosity can be very daunting, and there could be a danger that one might think, 'I can't manage that!', and enter the Lesser Vehicle. However, when the mind is not yet set and the potential to enter the Great Vehicle is still intact, presenting the benefits of bodhicitta in detail will really inspire them to enter the Great Vehicle path.

So the benefits of bodhicitta are presented by starting with the disadvantages of cherishing oneself, and then describing the great benefit of cherishing others. When these are presented systematically, they will be a source of inspiration to actually engage in those practices, because the great benefit in cherishing others will be apparent.

2.3.2. Establishing it with reasoning

This section is subdivided into two:

2.3.2.1. The validity of the benefits of the wishing mind

2.3.2.2. The validity of the engaging mind

Having presented a valid quotation, i.e. a quotation that withstands the three valid forms of analysis, the benefits of bodhicitta are established more firmly using logical reasoning.

2.3.2.1. THE VALIDITY OF THE BENEFITS OF THE WISHING MIND

This is further subdivided into four:

2.3.2.1.1. Great benefit because of the infinite applications for virtue

2.3.2.1.2. There is no higher concern for others than this

2.3.2.1.3. Sentient beings do not generate such a concern even for their own purpose

2.3.2.1.4. Praising it as a summary

2.3.2.1.1. Great benefit because of the infinite applications for virtue

This is presented in two verses:

¹ This threefold analysis is discussed in the teachings of 19 June 2001, 18 November 2003, 23 October 2007, 15 November 2011.

21. *Even if one thinks: I shall
Alleviate just the headache of sentient beings,
Since it has the intent to benefit
One becomes endowed with boundless merits.*
22. *What need is there to mention the wish to
alleviate
The boundless unhappiness of each sentient
being
And to establish each of them
In boundless qualities?*

The commentary explains:

Captain Friend's Daughter, though generating only the limited thought, 'May I free sentient beings from their headaches', had a true concern for others which generated infinite merit...

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary is related to an account of events that took place in the past. The *tong len* practice of giving and taking is said to have originated from this historical account.

It is a rather long story but I can give a brief account of the story of Captain Friend's Daughter, who was actually his son. Long ago there was a captain called Friend who really longed for a son, but every time a son was born to his wife it died soon after it was born. Thinking that there must be a spell on his family, he decided to name the next born son Daughter instead of son. In due course his wife bore a son, who he named Daughter, and indeed the son didn't die. Hence he was referred to as Captain Friend's Daughter. He grew up to be a fine young man and followed his father's footsteps, becoming a merchant and sea captain. He would go on sea voyages to buy wares from other places, and sell them on his return. Whenever he made a profit he would give it to his mother and he was also very generous to the poor as well.

On one occasion he set out on a dangerous voyage with some other merchants to find some particular jewels. Thinking of the great dangers, his mother was concerned and didn't want her son to go. So she tried to prevent him from leaving by holding on to his clothes, and lay down in the doorway so as to not let him pass. However, because he had decided that he really wanted to go on this voyage, he stepped over his mother's head and went out to his ship.

The ship was wrecked because of bad weather, but Daughter was spared. Clinging to a plank from the ship he drifted towards an island. It is said that once he landed on the island, he passed through many different kinds of magical valleys of great enjoyment. Eventually he came to a place where he witnessed people undergoing great suffering. In particular, he saw someone whose head was pierced by a turning cartwheel. When the cartwheel turned over his head it drilled through his skull which meant that his brains and so forth oozed out, which he licked up.

Captain Friend's Daughter asked the locals, 'Why is this happening?' What was the karma that this person created in the past to experience this kind of result now?' He was told that this was the result of this individual having kicked his mother's head in the past. When he heard that, Daughter immediately started to feel very anxious and fearful, remembering how he had stepped over his mother's head when he left home. At that very moment the cartwheel changed direction and headed towards his own head. When the cartwheel fell upon his head and started drilling a hole, he began to experience excruciating and unbearable pain. At that moment he thought, 'May this great agony and excruciating pain that I am experiencing now suffice to take

away the headaches of all sentient beings'. It is said that the moment he generated that intention, the cartwheel detached itself from his head and flew away.

There are different versions of what happened next. One says that after he had developed the intention to experience the suffering of headaches of all sentient beings, the cartwheel detached itself from his head and he went up to the pure lands. Another version says that he returned to his homeland. The main point of the story, however is that this individual practised the two main aspects of the giving and taking practice. Earlier, he had engaged in great deeds of generosity, giving his profits to his mother and also to charity; later he engaged in the practice of taking, when he took upon himself the suffering of all beings experiencing excruciating pain.

So, even just the wish to alleviate the headaches of others was the means for that person to accumulate a great amount of merit. That being the case, Gyaltsab Je argues:

If that is so, then what need is there to mention that the wish to eliminate infinite unhappiness of each sentient being, and to establish each of them with the infinite qualities of a buddha, has limitless merit?

If even the thought or wish to alleviate the headaches of sentient beings produces such great merit, then there is no need to mention the limitless merit that would be accumulated by generating the thought of eliminating the infinite unhappiness or suffering of each and every sentient being, and establishing their ultimate happiness with the infinite qualities of the buddhas.

Here we need to establish through logic how this altruistic wish of the bodhicitta attitude is a means to accumulate an extensive amount of merit. There is so much merit to be gained by thinking about alleviating the suffering of just one sentient being, or even one aspect of the suffering of other sentient beings. We can see that with examples from everyday life. When someone is suffering, we have a genuine wish for them to be free from the suffering, which is a really noble thought. Based on that wish to alleviate their suffering, we do everything in our power to help them to be free from that suffering. When someone is gravely ill and bed-ridden, then after generating the initial thought of wanting them to be free from the suffering, we might then do something practical to help them. Likewise, with the bodhicitta attitude, when we generate the wish for all beings to be free from all suffering and to lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, we can see, just through logic, how much more merit that would generate. This is how such an intention would result in limitless merit.

From this explanation we can also understand the teaching when it says, 'It is through the bodhicitta attitude that one can accumulate the most extensive merit as well as purifying extensive negative karmas'. These are important points for us to reflect upon: thinking about removing suffering from even one sentient being is a great deed, and the moment we generate the thought to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings, we accumulate a great, extensive amount of merit.

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

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