
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་མཉམས་དཔའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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Sitting in an appropriate posture, focusing our mind inward, and bringing to mind the motivation we have generated earlier, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [*meditation*]

It is important to also generate an appropriate motivation for receiving the teaching such as: 'In order to benefit all sentient beings, to liberate them from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching, and put its meaning into practice well'.

2.3.2.1. THE VALIDITY OF THE BENEFITS OF THE WISHING MIND (CONT.)

2.3.2.1.2. There is no other superior intent to benefit than that

Having mentioned the benefits of the wishing mind earlier, the text is re-emphasising that there is no greater superior intent to benefit than this. The root text states:

23. *Regardless of whether it is father or mother,
Who has such intent to benefit?
Regardless of whether god, sage,
Or brahmas, do they possess it?*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je begins with a question:

In the transitory world, what father or mother who wishes to benefit their child has such an intent to benefit?

The intent to benefit referred to here is the wish for all beings to obtain supreme happiness and to be free from all suffering, i.e. wishing bodhicitta. So, what is being explained here is that there is no greater intent to benefit others than bodhicitta. The text explains the reason for this being so by comparing it to the intent to benefit that other beings in the transitory world have, such as fathers and mothers who have the intent to benefit their child. Although in our contemporary world we would regard the parent's intention to benefit a child to be one of the highest and noblest, it is however merely focused on the child's welfare for this life only. Thus a parent's intentions for their child's welfare would be in relation to the child having sound health and being free from illness; receiving a good education so they can earn a lot of money and become rich and famous; having good companions; and to become powerful. One could argue, in our mundane or contemporary world there is no higher intent than that. Gyaltsab Je then asks:

What other person has such a wish to establish supreme happiness?

This is a rhetorical question indicating that indeed there is no-one else in the transitory world who has such an intent to establish others in supreme happiness.

Then Gyaltsab Je answers his question:

Not the gods or the true speaking sages, and not the brahmas who abide in the four immeasurable thoughts have such a mind to benefit.

As a way to understand why others in the transitory world don't have such an intent to benefit, one might wonder if it is because others lack any sense of love for others? As explained earlier, parents have a great amount of love for their children. Yet even fathers and mothers, who love their children dearly, don't have the intention for their child to obtain supreme happiness. Even though in the transitory world the greatest wish to benefit is the one that parents hold, they don't have that intention to benefit their children beyond this life's goals.

If one further wonders, is it because others lack clairvoyance that they don't have such intent? As explained in the commentary, not even the gods, such as Indra who has great clairvoyance, have such an intent to benefit. If one wonders, is it perhaps because others lack knowledge that they don't have this intent? Further, even the true speaking sages, such as the great sage Serkya who had vast knowledge and was skilled in so many arts and treatises, don't have that intent to benefit. Is it because others lack the intention to benefit others altogether that they don't have that intent to benefit? To remove such doubts the text explains that even brahmas, who abide in a joyful land with the four immeasurable thoughts, do not have that intent to benefit. Brahmas live in the joyful lands where there is no immediate suffering and they are endowed with the four immeasurable thoughts, such as immeasurable love and so forth, so they definitely have the intention to benefit others. However, even their intent to benefit can't equal the intent to benefit others to obtain supreme happiness.

Here it is good to reflect on this presentation to really get a sense of how noble and how superior this intent to benefit others, which is based on the bodhicitta attitude, really is. It is the highest intent to benefit others, which surpasses all other forms of intention to benefit others in the transitory world. In our worldly system we might ask what could surpass a parent's love and their intent to benefit their children? What could be greater than that? However, as explained, the intent to benefit others that is based on bodhicitta is far superior to that.

We might feel that even though parents have the best intentions for their children, they are not really able to benefit their children to the greatest extent as they lack the knowledge and don't have clairvoyance. We may feel that having clairvoyance would be the optimum way to benefit others. However, as pointed out in the text, although being clairvoyant is a tremendous mental achievement, without the intent of benefiting others based on bodhicitta, that clairvoyance in itself does not suffice to be able to benefit other beings to the fullest extent. Simply put, just having clairvoyance is not such a big deal in comparison to the bodhicitta attitude. The benefits of bodhicitta far outweigh any benefits one may gain from developing clairvoyance, and it is a far more meritorious attitude to meditate on and to cultivate.

Furthermore, we might feel that if one has immeasurable thoughts of benefiting others, such as that in which a brahma abides, then that mind might be the noblest intent to benefit others. However, as pointed out here, the

intent to benefit others based on bodhicitta outweighs even that. These are important points for us to reflect on. If whatever intent we might have to wish to benefit others is merely focused on the worldly benefits of this life, then it is a very limited intention to benefit compared with the bodhicitta attitude. But even though we haven't developed bodhicitta yet, just generating the thought, 'I will not harm any living being, and do whatever possible to benefit others', is extremely beneficial for our mind, and is a means for us to acquire merit. As mentioned previously, it is really important that we generate such thoughts on a regular basis.

Some of the practical ways to generate the bodhicitta attitude that I explained in previous sessions are exactly in accord with the text that His Holiness the Dalai Lama will be covering in the teachings in Sydney, *Vast as the Heavens, Deep as the Sea, Verses in Praise of Bodhicitta* by Khunu Lama Rinpoche. Just last weekend I made a commitment to myself to read this text again. It's incredibly uplifting and really inspiring. And the ways to cultivate the bodhicitta attitude are exactly as I have explained to you earlier, so it is not really difficult to understand at all. Reading the text would also be good for you who are intending to go to the teachings to prepare yourself. The beautiful presentation really inspires us to generate that mind ourselves.

In my last session, I explained how, when a bodhisattva generates that bodhicitta attitude, then whatever activity they engage in will become a meritorious act. Even such activities as walking or sleeping or even opening a door and so forth will generate merit. That is exactly how it is explained in Khunu Lama Rinpoche's text, which explains the many ways of turning what would normally seem to be mundane activities into great meritorious deeds by generating the bodhicitta attitude. As I mentioned earlier, the text is not very difficult to comprehend, and the passages and verses are easy to understand. They are extraordinarily beneficial for anyone who is inspired to develop the bodhicitta attitude. Reading this text will further inspire anyone who has even just a spark of that inspiration. So I exhort you to read it.

The presentation in the text is very meticulous. It first encourages us to remember bodhicitta in every activity that we engage in. When sitting remember bodhicitta; when you are standing remember bodhicitta; when you walk remember bodhicitta; and before you sleep remember bodhicitta. The author first exhorts one to remember bodhicitta, then gradually exhorts one to actually generate bodhicitta, when sitting, walking, eating and before sleeping. So the text exhorts us to generate the bodhicitta attitude at a beginner's level. The text essentially complements this very text that we are studying, *The Bodhisattvas Way of Life*. It unmistakably puts the onus on us take the initiative to do as it instructs.

Our daily activities can be basically summarised into four activities: we are usually sitting, eating, walking about, or sleeping. So, the main point here is to always be mindful while engaging in those activities to take the opportunity to remember bodhicitta. The great master Atisha advised us, 'When you are alone, watch your mind; when you are with others, watch your speech', which is very beneficial

and practical advice. Of course this instruction was given with respect to Dharma practice, but even in a worldly context it is also very relevant and applicable. These are really important points to keep in mind.

Other Kadampa masters have also pointed out that the best instruction is to look into one's mind, the best companions are mindfulness and introspection, and the best knowledge is the wish to benefit others. That very succinctly summarises the main points. All the great masters have presented such succinct yet very poignant instructions about how to go about our daily lives.

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

The relevant verse is:

24. *These sentient beings have not generated
Previously such a mind for their own purpose,
Not even in their dreams;
How would they generate it for others?*

Here *these sentient beings* refers to those beings mentioned earlier, such as parents who have great love for their child, gods who have clairvoyance, the sages who have great knowledge and brahma, who has the four immeasurable thoughts in their mind. As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Sentient beings have not previously generated such a mind for themselves, and not even dreamt of it in their dreams. So how could they manifest it now while they are awake?

If sentient beings don't have an intent to benefit others in their dreams then how can they manifest this attitude when they are awake? The main point here is that if they don't have the intention to benefit others even in their own dreams, meaning for their own purpose, then how could they have that intention to benefit others while they are awake?

This relates to points that I have emphasised in many teachings. Without having developed renunciation, there is no possible way to develop love and compassion for others. Hence, there is no possibility of developing bodhicitta without renunciation. If we were to look at it sequentially, one needs to first develop renunciation, i.e. the wish to renounce the suffering of samsara oneself, and based on that, one generates the altruistic wish for others to be free from the suffering of samsara. These are very important points to reflect upon, and there are many such points in the Buddha's teachings.

One needs to first have an experience oneself and only then can one relate it to others. This, in its simplest term, is the point to consider. Here the first experience is one of being completely overwhelmed by the suffering of samsara. That generates a keen longing to be free from that suffering, and one has developed renunciation when that mind unceasingly and spontaneously has this longing to be free from the sufferings of samsara.

Then we relate it to others and see how all other sentient beings are in the same plight. Based on our own experience and understanding of the suffering of samsara and wishing to be free from that, we can wish other sentient beings to be free from that suffering as well. Then, based on that, one develops the altruistic attitude of bodhicitta.

As I have related earlier, a good example that portrays the way one's own experience makes such a great difference in the way one relates to others, is found in the army. A general who has reached his rank by progressing from the lowest ranks will interact and relate to others with kindness and understanding, which will differ greatly from those who become generals because of their connections. The general who has reached their high rank from lowly beginnings has endured the whole range of experiences and hardships. So they can relate to new recruits and understand the difficulties they may face.

Again and again the teachings emphasise that without developing renunciation first, there is no possibility of developing bodhicitta. Furthermore, the development of renunciation has to be based on practising morality. As explained in the teachings, if one practises pure morality without renunciation, then that practice of morality will suffice merely as a cause to obtain high status such as being born as a human or in one of the celestial god realms in the next life. That practice of morality, as pure as it may be, cannot be a cause to obtain liberation unless it is combined with renunciation. It is only when one develops renunciation based on the practice of pure morality that the practice of morality will be a cause to obtain liberation.

2.3.2.1.4. Praising it as a summary

The next verse contains similar points:

25. *Others do not generate this mind for the welfare of others
Even for their own purpose.
This distinguished precious mind,
Something special unprecedented was born.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

While it has not been generated even for a moment by other sentient beings for their own sake, for this precious wondrous exalted mind wishing to attain enlightenment in order to place all sentient beings in happiness and abandon their suffering, which has not arisen before, to be generated now by bodhisattvas is praiseworthy. Thus others also need to hold it as being praiseworthy and strive for it.

The main point presented here is that the precious superior mind of a bodhisattva, the wish to attain enlightenment in order to place all sentient beings in the ultimate state of happiness and to free them from all suffering, has not been generated for even a moment by other sentient beings for their own sake. So when the bodhisattvas generate such a mind, others should acknowledge and praise it, and strive to develop it themselves.

What is referred to here as the *distinguished precious mind* is the actual bodhicitta that encompasses the engaging mind. It doesn't refer merely to the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, but to the mind aspiring to achieve enlightenment that is combined or held with engaging in the deeds of the six perfections.

It is really important to reflect on what kind of mind bodhicitta is? What is the superior intention? By contemplating these questions and gaining a profound understanding, we will naturally develop a genuine admiration and respect for bodhisattvas, who are the noble beings that are endowed with this mind of

bodhicitta. As explained in the teachings, the mind of a bodhisattva is bodhicitta, and the actions in which they engage in are the practices of the six perfections. Thus in both thought and deed they are incredibly noble, and surpass all other ordinary beings who may be endowed with good thoughts and engage in basic good deeds.

The only intent of a bodhisattva is the wish to benefit others, and for the sake of all other beings they aspire to achieve the highest goal of enlightenment. In fulfilling that aspiration their deeds and actions are completely selfless and solely for the benefit of others. Thus a bodhisattva does not even have an atom of self interest—their only intention is to benefit others. As a way to appreciate the great extent of that intention and to understand just how noble it is, we can consider the example of someone who has the altruistic intention to benefit all the people in Australia, with no self interest at all. If we think about it, completely dedicating one's whole life to the welfare of each individual in Australia would be an incredibly noble deed, wouldn't it? If doing that is, from a worldly perspective, great and admirable, then just imagine how great it would be for someone to have the intent to benefit not only the people of Australia and this world, but all sentient beings in the entire universe. Imagine not leaving out a single living being, but wishing to benefit all sentient beings equally and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness and freedom from all suffering. We can only try to fathom how incredible that is. This is how we can think about the intentions of bodhisattvas.

In practical terms, even non-Buddhists such as Christians seem to appreciate the teachings on bodhicitta. As I have related previously, when I went to a Christian monastery up in the Yarra Valley I met a young Christian monk there. I don't know how much understanding he had of bodhicitta but he did say to me, 'The teachings and the explanations you have of bodhicitta in your Buddhist tradition are really incredible and astounding'. He seemed to really relate to that. Indeed, who wouldn't appreciate such a state of mind and the intent to benefit others?

2.3.2.2. THE VALIDITY OF THE ENGAGING MIND

That is subdivided into three:

- 2.3.2.2.1. Actual
- 2.3.2.2.2. Its validity
- 2.3.2.2.3. Clearing away doubt

2.3.2.2.1. Actual

The relevant verse reads:

26. *The cause for the joy of all migrators,
The remedy for the suffering of sentient beings,
The merits of the precious mind,
How can it be comprehended?*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

If the benefits of the wishing mind are very great, then the benefits of the mind that is held by the practice of the perfections are even greater.

Having gained a sense of the great benefits of the mere wishing mind, one can naturally understand that the benefits of the engaging mind are far greater. At this point we can reflect upon the differences between the wishing mind, the mere aspiration to achieve

enlightenment, and the engaging mind, where the aspiration is combined with actual deeds, and actions such as the six perfections.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Since it works to achieve the happiness of higher status and definite goodness of all migrators, ...

As explained in the commentary, with wishing bodhicitta one also works to achieve the happiness of higher status and definite goodness. Generally speaking that is the goal of the small and medium scopes, which is a good result and a desirable achievement. Khunu Lama Rinpoche explains this very point in his text when he states that the bodhicitta attitude itself will suffice as a means to obtain one's temporary goals of high status and definite goodness (liberation). Thus the temporary good results and benefits such as obtaining high status and liberation are obtained through the cultivation of bodhicitta.

Here we can take note that when he praises bodhicitta His Holiness the Dalai Lama often uses this verse from the prayer to Maitreya:

I prostrate to bodhicitta,
The mind that reverses the lower realms,
Shows the path to high status,
And guides one to freedom from ageing and death.

This verse indicates how bodhicitta suffices to free one from the lower realms, leading one to high status, and it frees one from the fears of aging and death, which indicates liberation.

You would have heard His Holiness reciting this verse and praise it in his teachings, so it's good to keep this in mind. I am older than you are and my brain should be weaker, but somehow I seem to remember these points that His Holiness presents. You of course have much fresher minds.

Then Gyaltsab Je explains:

... it is the cause for their joy and the precious wish-fulfilling jewel that is the medicinal elixir that destroys the sickness of suffering of all sentient beings.

The point here is that bodhicitta itself will suffice to obtain one's temporary goals such as high status and definite goodness or liberation. Furthermore it brings about happiness for all sentient beings and is thus like the precious wish-fulfilling jewel.¹ Bodhicitta is a wish-fulfilling jewel that serves as a medicinal elixir which destroys the sickness of all suffering. It is not as if bodhicitta is able to cure only some kinds of sufferings while not managing to cure others. Rather it is able to overcome the entire range of sufferings of all sentient beings.

Then Gyaltsab Je asks this rhetorical question:

How can one put a measure to the merits of such a mind, since it is infinite?

The merits for developing bodhicitta are said to be infinite, in support of which the commentary quotes from the *Sutra Requested by Viradatta*:

From the *Sutra Requested by Viradatta*:
The merits of the mind of enlightenment,

If they were put into form
All the sphere of space would be filled
It is even more than that.

As indicated here, if the merits were in tangible form, then even the extent of space will not be sufficient to hold the merits of generating bodhicitta. We can also recall Nagarjuna's explanations in his *Commentary to Bodhicitta*, where he explains that the merit that one accumulates from a single moment of generating bodhicitta cannot be expressed, even by all the buddhas.

Then the commentary ends this section with:

More extensively, one can know from the *Compendium of Deeds* where it quotes the *Array of Stalks Sutra*.

2.3.2.2.2. *Its validity*

Here, we can relate the validity of the engaging mind to the three valid reasons that establish validity.

The verse relating to this heading reads:

27. *If even the mere intent to benefit
Is far superior to offerings to the buddhas,
What need is there to mention the striving
For the happiness of all sentient beings?*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

It is taught in the *King of Concentration Sutra* that even the mere motivational thought, 'I shall attain enlightenment to rescue all sentient beings' is more meritorious than making offerings to all of the buddhas found in the billions of buddha fields.

If this is so, then what need is there to mention the infinite merit of striving extensively in the practice to achieve the highest happiness for all sentient beings?

When the *King of Concentration Sutra* mentions the mere intention or aspiration to achieve enlightenment to rescue all sentient beings, we understand that to refer to the wishing mind. The merit from the wishing mind is far more superior than making offerings to all the buddhas found in the billions of buddha fields.

As explained in the teachings, there are billions of buddha fields, so to make offerings to billions of buddha fields would mean that each offering would be immensely extensive. As the *King of Concentration Sutra* indicates, the intention to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings is much more meritorious than that. Shantideva is saying that if that holds for the mere wishing mind, then *what need is there to mention the infinite merit of striving extensively in the practice to achieve the highest happiness for all sentient beings*, which is the engaging mind. i.e. the intention combined with the actual practices. The point here is that generating this engaging mind gives rise to far more extensive merit.

We need to rely on scriptural authority that withstands the three-fold analysis, such as the *King of Concentration Sutra*, because the extensive merit gained from developing bodhicitta falls within the category of extremely obscure phenomena, and thus cannot be validated by valid perception and valid inference.

The threefold analysis

As presented last week, there are three categories of phenomena: obvious phenomena, slightly obscure phenomena and extremely obscure or subtle phenomena.

¹ If one possesses this legendary jewel, all of one's wishes are fulfilled.

Obvious phenomena are not contradicted by valid perception. When the Buddha talked about obvious things such as the colour of the snow mountain being white, then that can be validated by a valid perception. Of course, someone with jaundice will not see it as white but as yellow, but that is not a valid perception because their perception is impaired. Thus, an obvious object can be analysed and be validated as being true by mere valid perceptions that confirm it as being true.

Slightly obscure phenomena are not contradicted by valid inference based on the force of evidence. For example, when the Buddha taught that the nature of products is that they are impermanent and transitory, this can be analysed and validated by the valid inference holding it to be true. The opposite, which is that products are permanent, does not hold as it does not withstand analysis using valid reasoning. The Buddha's statement that things do not have a self, for example, is also within the category of slightly obscure phenomena, so it has to be validated through valid inference.

Extremely obscure phenomena are validated by scriptural authority. This means that the analysis is based on validating the phenomena by reference to scriptures that withstand the three-fold analysis. Examples of extremely obscure phenomena are the subtleties of karma, and the extensive merit gained from bodhicitta, which is in this category. So we need to rely on citations from the Buddha's teachings, i.e. the scriptural authority of a valid being, to validate such extremely obscure phenomena.

The syllogism to validate the *King of Concentrations Sutra* is: Take the subject, the *King of Concentrations Sutra*: Its contents are infallible—because it is a citation that it withstands the three-fold analysis. I have explained this syllogism several times in previous teachings, so it would be good for you to look it up as way to expand on your understanding on this. I will not go into further detail now.²

I remember that on one of His Holiness's visits some years ago, His Holiness presented the very same topic in his teaching that I had just taught. After the teaching Lobsang Jinpa commented, 'His Holiness went into great detail on that particular topic. He must have been intending that for the senior geshes who were present', indicating that it would have been too obscure for general listeners. However, I later heard that many students who had been attending my classes actually understood what His Holiness was presenting, based on what I had explained in our classes here.

That might have been a way for you to gain a little bit more confidence in my teachings [laughter]. You may gradually develop confidence in my teachings like that!

2.3.2.2.3. *Clearing away doubt*

First of all, certain doubts that might go through our minds are presented. Doubts such as if sentient beings naturally don't want to experience suffering and they naturally want happiness then wouldn't they be capable of working that out for themselves? Why would we have

to actually do it for them? Those sorts of doubts are raised and then the teachings explain how to clear them away. Shantideva wrote these poignant lines, which are often quoted in the teachings:

28. *Though having the wish to destroy suffering
They run directly to suffering itself or alone;
Though desiring happiness, due to ignorance
They destroy their happiness like an enemy.*

Due to ignorance specifically refers to being ignorant of what righteous things to adopt and what negative things to discard or abandon.

This presentation relates particularly to the practices that are presented in the small scope of the lam rim teachings. This is, of course, my personal interpretation as to how this definitely relates to the practices presented in the small scope. More specifically, ignorance refers here to not knowing how to adopt virtues such as the ten virtues and how to shun or to abandon the ten non-virtuous deeds. Overcoming that ignorance is the way to stop creating the causes for one's own suffering.

This teaching is not really all that difficult to understand. It's just a matter of reading it, trying to contemplate it and then trying to integrate it into your own way of thinking. That's how it will benefit you. Even if you are not able to practice it in extensive ways with large numbers of beings, it is important to begin with your own companion or partner. It's important to begin at home and really try to practice this teaching with those you relate to in your everyday life.

Our mental agony seems to begin with a lack of harmony with our very closest companions. So if we can make peace, beginning with those we live with, then we will have a joyful smile and a happy mind. The reason we live with companions is so that we can derive a mutual benefit, but of course our predicament is that often we seem to receive a lot of harm from the very person from whom we feel we can gain benefit. The reason why we seem to have more intense anger towards someone who is supposed to be close is because of that very expectation we have: 'I expected to gain benefit from this person, but instead of benefit I am receiving harm'. That is why anger erupts like a huge fire in our minds. I have often mentioned that if children don't respond well to their parents and have a good rapport with them, then there is a significant reason for parents to feel distraught and unhappy.

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 Bunnnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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² This threefold analysis is discussed in the teachings of 19 June 2001, 18 November 2003, 23 October 2007, 15 November 2011.