
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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

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Having generated our motivation with the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in meditation, focussing single-pointedly on the practice.

[meditation]

It would also be good to now generate the positive motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

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

Familiarising ourselves with these positive intentions is extremely beneficial. At the very least we can familiarise our mind with the thought of how wonderful it would be if all beings could be free from suffering and abide in ultimate happiness, and then think, 'May I be able to do that'. If we can remind ourselves again and again of this intention, and periodically bring it to mind in any activity we engage in, we will be familiarising ourselves with the basis of love and compassion, which then becomes the foundation for developing bodhicitta within our own mind. Familiarising ourselves with this attitude is incredibly meaningful and beneficial. Although as beginners we have not yet developed actual bodhicitta, this sort of attitude can be a substitute for that bodhicitta attitude at our level.

In our last session we completed the first of the ten chapters of the *Bodhicharyavatara*, which explained the benefits and the many great qualities of bodhicitta. The main topic of the second chapter is how to engage in the purification of negativities.

It is good for us to identify what negativity is, as well as its opposite, virtue. **Negativity** is defined in the teachings as that which brings about unwanted or unpleasant consequences. So any activity that brings about unpleasant consequences is engaging in negativity. The opposite of negativity, **virtue**, is that which brings about positive and pleasant consequences for oneself.

We can succinctly identify negativity by referring to the ten non-virtues, which are easy to list. The lam rim teachings explain karma in great detail—the different types of karma, the four pathways of creating karma and so forth. Through this we can understand in greater detail how one creates and engages in negativity. The opposite of the ten non-virtues are the ten virtues, which we can also relate to the lam rim teachings. Thus we will be able to see that intentionally engaging in the ten virtues is a way of accumulating virtue.

We need to have a reason to engage in the practice of abandoning non-virtue and negativities and adopting

virtue. Why do we need to abandon negativity and adopt virtue? The reasons can be understood when we think about the unpleasant consequences of negativity and the positive results of virtue. If we don't wish to experience unpleasant results, then we need to abandon negativity; if we want to experience positive results then we need to adopt virtue. It's as simple as that! When we relate this basic understanding to the extensive explanations in the lam rim teachings, we will gain a broader picture of how karma works, which would be really meaningful.

Relating to the lam rim teachings will broaden our understanding of the range of material about karma. So if we are asked, for example, to teach about karma, we will not be short of material to relay—if, that is, we have studied the lam rim. On a practical level it is good for us to expand our own understanding by referring to other teachings, both for our own development as well as to present the topic to others. Then, when a situation arises where we need to present the Dharma to others, we will readily be able to access the knowledge that we have gained from our study of the texts. It is good to take this practical approach to studying the texts.

I've heard comments that the *Bodhicharyavatara* is an easy text to teach. I personally feel that it is not that easy at all to teach the *Bodhicharyavatara* thoroughly; one needs to have a broad understanding of the lam rim teachings, the Madhyamaka teachings, the mind training teachings, as well as a good understanding of tenets.

In the past, in our recitations of the *Bodhicharyavatara*, as you were doing the recitation in English it seemed to take much longer. In particular, when we came to the ninth chapter I would hear you recite terms such as Chittamatra, and I wondered where that came from in the actual text. Later I learnt that the ninth chapter was translated as a commentary, and was not in verse form.

I can safely say that I have made every attempt to study the earlier mentioned subjects, so it's not as if I am trying to present this text without having done any prior study myself. Even though I cannot claim to be able to give you a profound explanation, I have at least attempted to complete the study. I have to assume that when His Holiness the Dalai Lama thanked me, it was because what I'm presenting here might have some value and benefit. There would be no reason at all for His Holiness to thank me about anything else.

1. THE PREPARATORY ACTIONS FOR EXPLAINING THE STAGES OF THE MAHAYANA PATH¹

2. THE ACTUAL EXPLANATION OF THE STAGES OF THE PATH

2.2. The method for taking the essence

2.2.2 Explaining the individual meanings²

2.2.2.1. CONTEMPLATING THE BENEFITS OF ENLIGHTENMENT (CHAPTER 1)

2.2.2.2 THE WAY OF TRAINING IN THE PRACTICES UPON GENERATING THE TWO BODHICITTAS

This is subdivided into two.

2.2.2.2.1. Taking the mind of enlightenment

2.2.2.2.2. The way of training in the perfections

¹ These headings relate to the structural overview of the entire text. The numbering of each chapter is self-contained.

²This heading was introduced on 26 March 2013.

The two bodhicittas were explained in detail in chapter 1, so here we need to be able to immediately reflect on our understanding of what these two bodhicittas refer to.

From just the outlines alone we can see how profoundly the material of the text is presented. Just one heading can carry the whole entire path within it, as is the case with this outline. It implies that having cultivated and developed the two types of bodhicitta (the awakening mind that aspires to enlightenment and the mind that engages in the practices), the next step is to actually engage in the practices, such as the six perfections and the four means of gathering disciples. So this outline is concisely referring to the bodhicitta attitude as well as the practices of the six perfections.

Even just this one line can be a basis for contemplating the entire presentation of how a bodhisattva practises along the path. As mentioned here, the two bodhicittas refers to aspiring bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta, which can be developed using two specific techniques. With regard to the seven point cause-and-effect technique, it would be good to reflect on what those six causes and their effects are, and contemplate each point. Then we can contemplate the various points within the exchanging self with other techniques. As training in the practices refers to the six perfections, we can reflect on the nature of generosity and how it is practised, and likewise morality, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom and how each of these are practised. The bodhisattva's practices also include the four means of gathering disciples, which are the means by which a bodhisattva gathers disciples.

2.2.2.2.1. Taking the mind of enlightenment

This has two main sections.

2.2.2.2.1.1. Confessing the disruptive conditions, the negativities, by way of the complete four powers, after having done the preliminaries of prostrating, offering and going for refuge

2.2.2.2.1.2. The actual taking of the mind of enlightenment after having applied the conducive conditions of accumulating merit such as rejoicing in virtue and so forth.

The precious mind of enlightenment, or bodhicitta, is not generated spontaneously. Rather, it depends on specific causes and conditions of which there are two types, abandoning the disruptive conditions that have to be purified, and adopting the conducive conditions for developing bodhicitta that need to be acquired.

The **conducive conditions** are acquired through the accumulation of merit. Without the accumulation of merit there is no possible way to generate bodhicitta within one's mental continuum. Therefore, various methods of accumulating merit are presented in the teachings as a way to acquire the conducive conditions for generating bodhicitta.

The disruptive conditions are the negativities. Thus the negativities need to be purified, for without purifying the negativities there is no possible way to develop bodhicitta. So an extensive explanation of how to purify the negativities is also presented here.

Nagarjuna explains how one definitely needs to accumulate extensive merit as a way to develop bodhicitta, while Asanga explains how one definitely needs to have faith, in order to develop bodhicitta.

The optimum way to incorporate both of these aspects of accumulating merit and generating faith is to engage in making offerings. In addition to accumulating merit the very act of making offerings in an appropriate way will induce faith in the holy objects.

2.2.2.2.1.1. Confessing the disruptive conditions, the negativities, by way of the complete four powers, after having done the preliminaries of prostrating, offering and going for refuge

Having applied the conducive conditions of accumulating merit such as rejoicing in virtue and so forth, taking on the mind of enlightenment begins with engaging in the conducive preliminaries of prostrations, making offerings and going for refuge. Then one engages in the practice of purifying negativities by way of the four opponent powers.

We need to take this presentation as a personal instruction. If we aspire to develop bodhicitta, then we need to engage in the preliminaries. It is not as though we can skip the preliminaries, and suddenly develop bodhicitta. Without engaging in the preliminaries, there is no way we can develop bodhicitta. Therefore we need to identify what the preliminaries are and what the practices involve, and then attempt to really engage in those preliminary practices. That is the optimum method to establish the basis for developing bodhicitta within ourselves.

There are texts that will help us to identify the preliminaries. One of these is *Bodhicharyavatara*, the text we are studying. The lam rim teachings present the preliminaries as well, particularly in the practices of the small and medium scopes, which are the preliminary practices for developing bodhicitta. So we can refer to these texts to gain a good understanding of the correct sequence of engaging in the preliminaries. Then we can confidently present the preliminary practices to others if they ask us. So understanding the preliminaries is for our own benefit, as well as the benefit of presenting it to others.

CHAPTER 2: PURIFYING NEGATIVITIES

The chapter has two subdivisions:

- I. Explaining the text of the chapter
- II. The title of the chapter

I. EXPLAINING THE TEXT OF THE CHAPTER³

The chapter is divided into four sections:

1. Offerings
2. Prostrations
3. Refuge
4. Confessing of negativity with the four complete powers

In the lam rim the first of the preliminaries is prostration, whereas here the first practice is offering; except for the order there is not much difference.

³ To keep things manageable the numbering system starts again for each chapter.

1. OFFERINGS

This has two main headings:

- 1.1. The need to make offerings
- 1.2. The actual practice of offering

The Tibetan word for offerings is *chopa* which comes from the Sanskrit word *puja*, and it has the connotation of pleasing the minds of the gurus, buddhas and deities such as Tara and so forth. So, when we imagine that the object of one's offering is pleased, we are making the actual offering. For our own sake, making offerings is to be understood as an antidote for overcoming miserliness.

The manner of presenting the offerings is clearly presented in the lam rim.

First of all the offerings themselves have to be pure. That is they have to be free from deceit, which is sub-divided into two categories:

1. Free from deceit on a causal level.
2. Free from deceit on a motivational level.

To be free from deceit on the **causal level**, one needs to ensure that the object of offering is not obtained through wrong livelihood, or acquired through heavy negativities. Wrong livelihood involves pretentious behaviours and so forth. The teachings explain four different types of wrong livelihood. We can, however, offer what we have obtained from others if others have given it to us willingly. Even if we have to ask for donations or beg for an offering, as long as it is given willingly it can be offered, as it would not be an offering obtained by a wrong livelihood. Otherwise, if something is obtained from pretentious behaviour and so forth, then the offering has been obtained through causal deceit, and thus will not be a pure offering.

On a **motivational level**, the offering has to be free from the eight worldly concerns, i.e. not made with the eight worldly concerns in one's mind. This is extensively presented in the lam rim. Offerings made out of worldly concerns are tainted and cannot become a cause for liberation and enlightenment.

The lam rim teachings present this under the heading of the Six Preliminary Practices. The first of these is to clean the area well first and then arrange the altar with the representations of the three objects of refuge. The offerings have to be on a clean surface, presented in clean containers and so forth, and also arranged very beautifully. When we make water bowl offerings for example, the water bowls have to be arranged neatly and so forth. It is good to understand these details of how to engage in the practices of offering so you can incorporate them into your daily practices. I have previously explained this in detail and it is also good for those of you who were present to refer to those notes.

In addition to the text we are studying, I exhort you to refer to the lam rim teachings which have a very detailed presentation. We cannot forget about the lam rim teachings when we are studying *Bodhicharyavatara*, and it is good to complement our study of this text with the lam rim as a way to enhance your understanding.

It is good to note Gyaltsab Je's meticulous presentation where he uses the outlines as a way of explaining and summarising the body of the text.

1.1. The need to make offerings

The first verse of this chapter reads:

1. *To take this precious mind,
I make wholesome offerings to an ocean of
qualities:
The tatagatas and the holy Dharma,
The stainless Jewel, and the buddhas' children.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je commences his explanation of this verse as follows:

One respectfully makes offerings in thought and action in a wholesome way, with exalted objects.

Here, *exalted objects* refers to the actual objects of offering. What is to be offered has to be an exalted object. This implies these are objects that are free from deceit, i.e. that they are pure objects. The manner of offering is *respectfully*. *In thought and action* can refer to offering with the intention to benefit all sentient beings, to lead them to the ultimate state of happiness and to free them from all suffering.

This is another very meticulous presentation by Gyaltsab Je. It is a concise explanation of the complete form of making an offering in relation to both our physical actions and our thoughts; our gestures in relation to the object itself; and the substance we offer and so forth. All of that has been presented in these few words.

The presentation in the commentary follows the order of the Tibetan version of the verse. Following his explanation of making offerings Gyaltsab Je asks:

To what end?

In other words, for what purpose do we make the offerings. The answer to that is:

For the purpose of taking the precious mind, from which all the masses of goodness of all sentient beings arise.

That is an explanation of the first line of the English translation of the verse. As a way of explaining the following lines of the verse, the commentary presents this rhetorical question:

To which object?

That is to say, to what objects are we presenting the offering? Again it is good for us to understand the meticulously logical quality of the presentation, which reflects how our mind works. It poses questions as a way to quell doubts or queries as they are likely to arise. After the explanation that one should make offerings respectfully in a wholesome way, and that the objects have to be exalted objects, one might ask, 'For what purpose? Why would one need to do that?'

So Gyaltsab Je next presents the objects to whom one presents the offering:

As one makes offerings to the tathagatas and the holy superior beings, and also to the holy Dharma Jewel, the Mahayana truth of cessation that is free from adventitious stains on top of being naturally pure, and the truth of the path, is an object of offering.

The ocean of qualities that are the children of the buddhas, such as the superior lord Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri and others, are included as well.

The meaning of *tathagata* was extensively explained at the beginning of chapter one, so we can refer to that. A

tathagata is an enlightened being. The *holy superior beings* are the bodhisattvas (of which we have also given an explanation). The *holy Dharma* refers here to the Dharma Jewel which is the Mahayana truth of cessation and truth of the path. *The Mahayana truth of cessation* consists of that which is *free from adventitious stains*, which is *naturally pure*. *Free from adventitious stains* refers to the *cessation* of the deluded obscurations, and *naturally pure* refers to the obscurations to omniscience. Thus cessation includes being free from both the deluded obscurations as well as the obscurations to omniscience. That is what the cessation means in the Mahayana Dharma Jewel. Then the *truth of the path* is also included in the Dharma Jewel. Thus the two aspects of the Dharma Jewel are *cessation* and *the truth of the path*. *The ocean of qualities of the children of the buddhas* refers to the *holy superior beings*, as mentioned here.

1.2. The actual practice of offering

This is subdivided into three:

- 1.2.1. Offering substances that are not owned
- 1.2.2. Offering one's own body
- 1.2.3. Offerings that are emanated by the mind

1.2.1. Offering substances that are not owned

This section has three subdivisions:

- 1.2.1.1. Offering substances
- 1.2.1.2. The way of offering
- 1.2.1.3. The reason for offering substances that are not owned

1.2.1.1. OFFERING SUBSTANCES

The substances that we offer are:

2. *Whatever flowers and fruits there are,
Whatever medicines there are,
Whatever precious objects there are in the
world,
Whatever clean and beautiful waters there are,*
3. *High mountains and likewise,
Forested areas, isolated and beautiful,
Flowering trees adorned and weighted with
flowers,
All trees whose branches are weighted down
with fruit,*
4. *Divine and worldly smells and
Incense, wish-fulfilling trees and precious trees,
Uncultivated crops and
Further, ornaments suitable as offerings,*
- 5a. *Lakes and ponds adorned with lotus flowers,
And beautiful swans making pleasant sounds.*

Offerings classified as unowned offerings are those things that are not personally owned by oneself. In fact, these are the best offerings for those of us who feel that we don't have much to offer. When we think about these lines of verse, we will find we have no shortage of offerings.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary elaborates on each of the substances listed in the verses.

The unowned flowers of the world, such as lotuses and so forth;

Lotuses and so forth are an example of very beautiful flowers. When we are out and about in a beautiful park or garden, rather than just enjoying it for our own personal pleasure, we can immediately remember to

mentally offer these beautiful flowers to the objects of veneration—the objects of refuge. It might be inappropriate to pick a flower as soon as we see it; if it is completely unowned then maybe that's fine, but not if we are in someone's garden or a park where we are not allowed to do that. The advice is to mentally offer the beautiful flower as soon as you see it. The *Mandala Offering* refers to visualising, which means a mental offering. There can be no dispute if you do that, as you will not be actually taking anything from the environment.

One needs to understand that these are incredible ways for us to take every opportunity to engage in practice and accumulate virtue. As soon as we see a flower we can immediately seize that as an opportunity to make an offering, which is a way for us to accumulate virtue. So it is in these small and moderate ways that we need to start accumulating merit and virtue.

Then as the commentary continues:

- Whatever fruits there are such as aryara and so forth;
- Whatever medicines there are such as camphor and so forth;
- Whatever precious substances there are in the worlds such as gold, silver and so forth;
- Whatever clean and pleasant waters there are such as lakes, ponds and so forth;

This means that whenever we come across small lakes or ponds we can immediately offer them.

The eight mountains of gold and so forth;

These are mythological offerings. Here one visualises offering great mountains of gold and so forth to the objects.

Likewise forests, isolated and beautiful areas;

Along with the objects of offering such as beautiful forests and so forth, *isolated and beautiful areas* are areas that are conducive for meditation, in particular, for developing calm abiding. So these sorts of places can also be objects of offering.

Flowering trees that are weighted down and adorned with their flowers;

Trees fully in bloom with beautiful flowers are also objects that can be offered.

Trees whose branches are bent by the weight of their ripe pure fruits;

Here, we visualise trees laden with fruit, like mangoes or apples, where the branches are weighed down with their load of fruit.

Pure scents of gods, nagas and so forth, natural ones, applied ones and created ones;

Pleasant incense;

Natural ones refers to pleasant scents that are naturally fragrant. *Applied ones and created ones* refers to those which are created or applied by the mixing of substances, such as incense. So *incense* is included in the category of scents which are created, meaning that you have to put many substances together in order to create the nice smell.

The wish-fulfilling tree that gives what one needs and wishes, and trees made out of precious substances;

The wish-fulfilling tree is a mythological tree that is said to bear whatever one wishes for. Now, of course, we refer to a mythological tree, but it is very possible that such trees did exist when the merit of the beings in the world was much greater.

Lakes as one thinks they should be and ponds for bathing, that are adorned with lotuses, where beautiful swans make pleasant sounds;

It is very good for us to visualise these beautiful places and areas to make as offerings. Visualising such an offering can be really soothing and pleasant, and it is really a form of meditation. Visualising pleasant objects can really lift you up and make you feel quite joyful.

The crops that grow by themselves without the need to plough the fields and

This again relates to the time called the fortunate era, when it is said that beings on this planet didn't need to sow seeds to reap a crop. In fact, it is said that if a crop was harvested in the morning, it would already be growing again by evening. This was a fortunate time when merit was very high. It is also said that it declined when humans started to amass things for themselves, when they didn't have to. I think this is one of the heaps on the long mandala offering, the *Mandala of the Thirty-five Heaps*.

All unowned offerings are summarised in this last offering:

Beautiful ornaments that are suitable to be offered to the tatagatas.

In summary, whatever offering that is suitable to be offered to the tatagatas can be offered. This also implies that there may be certain offerings which are not suitable to be offered, either mentally or actually.

It is also explained in the teachings that we should use the best substances we can afford as an offering. There is a Tibetan sweet cake made out of butter and tsampa which turns mouldy and green if you keep it for too long. Cutting off the mouldy part and offering it would not be suitable. Nor is it suitable to offer a plant with yellowing leaves. In other words one should not be making offerings of substances that one would not use oneself. 'Oh, this is spoiled, I cannot use it, so I might as well offer it!' would be the wrong way of making an offering. Rather one should offer things that are in their prime.

On a personal level, these explanations encourage us to make offerings on a regular basis in whatever way that we can—water bowl offerings, or flowers or even visualised offerings of beautiful parks and so forth. That is a way to accumulate merit in our daily lives.

Offering substances such as one's wealth will not deprive us of food and drink. Rather it will be the reverse; it will be a cause for us to have even more food and drink. So you need not worry that you will be losing out by making offerings of your food and drink to the holy objects.

Whenever we can make actual offerings of substances we obtain them through our own means. Whenever that is not possible we can use unowned objects as a way of making offerings. So what we have learned here is that we are never deprived of means or substances for offerings. As the teachings mention, it is not the lack of

substances that will deprive us of making offerings to the holy objects, but rather the lack of faith.

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

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