

---

# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

9 July 2013

---

Based on the refuge and bodhicitta motivation that we generated earlier, we can now engage in the meditation practice. [meditation]

We can now generate the following motivation for receiving the teachings:

In order to benefit all sentient beings by liberating them from all suffering and leading 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 its meaning into practice well.

Generating such a motivation can definitely ensure that our time listening to the teaching will contribute to the flourishing of Dharma and the welfare of all sentient beings.

## 1.2.1. Offering substances that are not owned (cont.)

### 1.2.1.1. Offering substances

Last week we covered the list of unowned substances that can be offered. Now we turn to the way in which we offer these substances.

### 1.2.1.2. THE WAY OF OFFERING

The relevant lines from the root text are:

- 5cd. *Extending to the end of space  
All of these, which are unowned,*
6. *Having mentally created and offered them  
To the Able One, the supreme of beings, and  
his children,  
May those with holy qualities and great  
compassion  
Consider me with affection and enjoy these  
offerings of mine.*

The opening line, *extending to the end of space*, indicates the measure or extent of whatever offerings we are presenting. When offering flowers, for example, one can imagine that the whole sky is filled with flowers. With this visualisation the merit one gains will not be limited to offering just a few flowers. Rather it will expand to the extent of space. It is the same with all the other offerings. Not limiting an offering to one or two items but making such expansive offerings is a way to amass much greater benefit from the offerings.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with:

All the objects not possessed by anyone, having mentally created and offered them...

The implication of *all the objects* is that we can make offerings in the most expansive way. *All the objects* particularly relates to all the unowned objects, a list of which was presented last week. Another way to understand how to make extensive offerings would be, for example, when offering a flower then we can also bring to mind the particular beautiful features of the

flower such as its beautiful shape, colour, and scent. When one presents the offering, thinking in detail about all of its beautiful features, it becomes a much more expansive offering.

A significant point about mentally creating the offerings is that even though these objects are unowned external objects, when we personally take the initiative to mentally create and offer them expansively to the extent of space and so forth, they become offerings made from our own side. Also, the *Mandala Offering* is created in one's mind. As the six-session prayer reads, 'Holding in my mind an exquisite jewel-filled mandala'. So one needs to understand what this all actually means.

The next part of the explanation identifies the holy objects that we present the offerings to. As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary we make offerings:

...to the supreme of beings, the Able One, and his children, respectfully in a good way. May those possessing qualities and great compassion consider me with affection and enjoy these offerings of mine.

*The supreme of beings, the Able One* refers to Buddha Shakyamuni, who is also referred to as the supreme being of the bipeds (those who walk on two legs, i.e. humans). The term *Able One* indicates that he has overcome all adversities and acquired all good qualities. *And his children*, refers to the bodhisattvas. The manner of making these offerings is *respectfully in a good way*. The term *good way* can refer to the actual arrangements of the offerings, but more specifically it relates to presenting the offerings with the bodhicitta attitude in our mind. That is the optimum way to make the offerings.

When we present the offerings, we are also making a request to *those supreme beings possessing great qualities and who have great compassion*. *Possessing qualities* refers, of course, to the great qualities of the enlightened beings such as Buddha Shakyamuni as well as the bodhisattvas. Here one can envision those bodhisattvas who were the close disciples of the Buddha, such as Manjushri, Vajrapani, Maitreya, Samantabhadra and so forth who possess incredible qualities and who have great compassion for all beings. The greatest quality of the Able One, Buddha Shakyamuni, and the bodhisattvas is, of course, their unbiased and unflinching compassion for all sentient beings who are experiencing unbearable sufferings. They have no ulterior motives; the only concern of enlightened beings and the bodhisattvas is how to free all beings from suffering.

As explained in other teachings, if, from our own side we have suitable faith, there will be no doubt whatsoever about the capacity and the willingness for the enlightened beings and bodhisattvas to help us. So if we, from our own side, pay respect, and more particularly develop faith, we will be suitable receptacles for receiving their help. So, *consider me with affection*, implies that if we open our own mind with faith, we will definitely receive unceasing benefit and help from the enlightened beings and bodhisattvas.

With respect to the actual offering, *enjoy these offerings of mine*, indicates that one needs to imagine that having made these offerings, the buddhas and bodhisattvas very

gladly and joyfully accept the offerings, and for each moment that they accept an offering, they experience a fresh, new uncontaminated bliss in their mind. Here we need to note that this newly generated uncontaminated bliss does not mean that they are obtaining a new bliss that they have not obtained before. That is because *obtain* implies obtaining something by the virtue of overcoming a defilement. Enlightened beings have already abandoned all adversities and negativities, so we need to understand the difference between the generation of uncontaminated bliss and obtaining uncontaminated bliss. *Generating* uncontaminated bliss doesn't necessarily mean that it is newly obtained but rather that it is freshly experienced. It is reasonable to acknowledge that each time we make a new offering the enlightened beings experience new uncontaminated bliss.

### 1.2.1.3. THE REASON FOR OFFERING SUBSTANCES THAT ARE NOT OWNED

I have mentioned these points many times before but I'm not sure if you are holding onto them or you have just let them wash over you each time.

The verse relating to this topic reads:

7. *I have no merits and am very poor  
And have no other wealth to offer;  
Therefore, may the protector who thinks  
about the purpose of others  
Enjoy them merely due to the fact of it being  
for my purpose.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation of this verse commences with a qualm.

Argument: Why offer only offerings arisen from the mind? It is appropriate to offer diverse pleasant offerings.

The implication here is this: isn't it more suitable to offer real substances, rather than mentally created ones? This is a reasonable argument. Will it be sufficient to make mentally generated offerings if one actually has the means to make actual offerings? One way to understand this is that one only offers mentally created substances when one lacks the means to make actual offerings. So by offering mentally created substances one is not deprived of making offerings.

Another way to understand mentally created offerings is that we don't limit the actual offering substances, such as flowers and so forth, to a mere bunch of flowers. Rather they are mentally multiplied to fill the entire space.

Now if one only makes mentally created offerings when one has the means to make physical offerings then, as previous teachers have indicated, that could be a way to create the karma to be reborn into an area where we can see many nice things, but which we lack the karma to use. Life in the western world is a good example. We see fancy cars and houses and many beautiful things, but we can't use them all because we don't have the wealth to purchase them. Thus one should not resort merely to mentally created offerings if one has the means to make actual offerings.

Then Gyaltsab Je gives a direct answer to the earlier qualm:

Answer: Because I have not accumulated extensive merit previously I have become destitute, without desired enjoyments...

One reason for mentally creating offerings is that one is destitute now as a result of not having previously accumulated extensive merit. This implies that while one may have the means to reach some level of enjoyment, one does not have the means now to obtain whatever one wishes for. The first thing we need to understand here is that being poor and destitute now and not being able to experience desired enjoyments, is a result of not having accumulated extensive merit through acts of generosity in the past. So we need to understand that the law of cause and effect, or karma, is also being presented here.

If one has not engaged in the act of generosity in the past, then one will experience the consequence of being destitute or impoverished in this lifetime. The direct implication is that this is a consequence of not having accumulated extensive merit previously. So in order to secure good resources in the future, we need to engage in acts of generosity now, when we will have the means to accumulate merit. Thus, if one does not have the means to make extensive offerings now, then one has to resort to offering mentally emanated ones to accumulate merit.

Then Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Since I do not possess other wealth to offer, I request that the protector, who thinks singularly about the purpose of sentient beings, to enjoy this unowned offering for my purpose.

Gyaltsab Je is saying, 'Through being destitute and not having great wealth to make elaborate offerings as *I do not possess other wealth to offer*, I make this request to *the protector*, who is the enlightened being *who thinks singularly about the purpose of sentient beings*. Please accept *this unowned offering for my purpose*.'

Here, *my purpose* indicates for the purpose of accumulating merit, and abandoning both the deluded obscurations and the obscurations to omniscience. So for the personal purpose of overcoming the two main obscurations and amassing great extensive merit one requests those who have great compassion (such as the Buddha) to accept these offerings. In straightforward language, we are saying, 'Even though I don't have great extensive offerings, and I only have these meagre ones, please accept them out of your great compassion, as a way to fulfil my purpose of accumulating merit and so forth'.

However, we need to acknowledge that we do have the means to make basic offerings, such as water bowl offerings, flowers, fruit and so forth. But we should not limit whatever physical substances we may be able to place on our altar without too much effort or cost. Rather, that simple offering can serve as a base for the extensive, expansive offerings that one mentally creates. No matter how meagre or simple an offering may be, mentally turning it into an expansive offering is a way to accumulate extensive merit. This is the main point that we need to understand.

One needs to bring to mind that these are the extensive practices of a bodhisattva. Of course bodhisattvas have already generated bodhicitta, but prior to generating

bodhicitta they contemplated the benefits of bodhicitta as a way to develop that bodhicitta. As a cause for developing bodhicitta one needs to accumulate extensive merit, for which purpose one engages in the practice of making such extensive offerings.

Even if these practices involve some effort and hardship one will definitely reap the benefits and gain positive results. There was once an occasion where there were some other geshe visiting here, and as we were doing some practices, nice meals were brought to us. Geshe Jampel Sengye commented, 'Oh, they are bringing such nice food! We might be reaping the benefits of the difficulties and hardships we went through earlier in life'. I commented, 'Oh, I don't think we should limit the reaping of a good result to just merely receiving nice food now'. Geshe Jampel Sengye said, 'Well, that might be true, but couldn't we still consider the good things that we are receiving now are a result of our earlier hardships'?

### 1.2.2. Offering one's body

We now come to offering one's body, which is something that we definitely do possess.

The two verses relating to this outline read:

8. *To the conquerors and their children  
I always offer my body completely,  
May the supreme brave ones enjoy me!  
With respect I make myself your slave.*
9. *Being perfectly held by you  
I shall, without fear, benefit sentient beings  
in existence.  
I shall leave earlier negativities behind in  
every respect,  
And henceforth not create other negativities.*

In relation to the way of making an offering of one's body Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

Regarding the statement, "Since I have a body that can be offered thus I offer it":

To the conquerors and their children I offer completely and always this body of mine, giving up the mind that makes it completely mine. Please, supreme brave beings, enjoy it.

The **objects** to which one offers one's body are *the conquerors*, the enlightened beings *and their children*, the bodhisattvas. The **way** to offer it is *completely and always*; **what** one offers is *this body of mine*, and the **manner** is *giving up the mind that makes it completely mine*. Basically, this refers to giving up our sense of identity or attachment to our body. Normally, we naturally have a very strong sense of ownership of our body thinking 'this is *my body*', which is accompanied by very strong attachment and a very strong sense of identity. Leaving aside that strong sense of ownership and identity, one offers one's body to the conquerors and their children to use as they wish.

Next Gyaltsab Je states:

Please, supreme brave beings, enjoy it. The purpose of offering it is that I make myself your slave with faith and respect and will follow your advice according to your instructions.

Normally we use our body as a slave to our senses and to sustain ourselves. Here, one decides to use one's body to fulfil the wishes of the conquerors and their children. Offering ourselves as a slave or servant means to willingly follow every advice of the conquerors and their children. The king's commands to his ministers and subjects are followed because the king is their ruler, so they have to obey whatever command the king gives. Similarly, as specified here, one offers oneself with respect, willingly following the advice and instructions that have been given by the conquerors. Thus we are putting ourselves into the service of the conquerors and gurus and follow their wishes.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then raises another query: what does one accomplish by having offered one's body as a servant to the protectors? The answer is:

Having offered it, whatever action I do, since I am being held by you, the protector, I am unafraid of cyclic existence because I am relying on a refuge that is free from all fears, and I will benefit sentient beings.

The specific implication of the benefits of offering one's body to the supreme beings is that a supreme being is an ultimate *refuge that is free from all fears*. Offering oneself to a supreme being who is free from all fears, will free one from all fears, particularly the fears of cyclic existence. Because one does not fear the shortcomings of cyclic existence, one has a courageous mind, which is then used to *benefit sentient beings*.

So that is the ultimate purpose of offering one's body as a slave to the supreme protector, the ultimate refuge—as a way for oneself to become fearless in benefiting other sentient beings.

To extract the main points from these few lines; being a servant implies following every wish or command of the supreme beings. The object to which one is making this offering is the Supreme Being, who is free from all fears, the ultimate protector and refuge. From that one enjoys a state of fearlessness. However, it is not as though one is achieving that fearless state just for personal gain, to further strengthen one's sense of pride and ego. But rather, the purpose for being in a fearless state is to utilise that state to benefit other sentient beings. Here, one again reflects upon the elements of love and compassion in benefiting sentient beings.

Those of you who have received initiations will recall a similar pledge made to the guru at the end of the initiation: As I have offered myself to you as a servant, I will now follow whatever instructions you give.

Then Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the further endeavours in which one engages:

I will leave behind all the meaningless negativities that I have accumulated before, and I will not create new negativity, even at the cost of my life.

This is indicating the importance of purifying the negativities one has created in the past, and of making a resolution to no longer create any negativity. So, with a strong sense of regret of the previous negativities one has amassed, one feels compelled to purify them and not to create any new negativity.

### 1.2.3. Offerings that are emanated

Here there are two subdivisions:

1.2.3.1. The common offerings

1.2.3.2. Peerless offerings

Some translate the Tibetan terms, *lana yopa* and *lana mepa* as *surpassed* and *unsurpassed*, respectively. When we use the term *surpassed*, translated here as *common*, then that indicates that there are even greater offerings beyond that. *Unsurpassed*, translated here as *peerless*, implies there is nothing that surpasses that. So an unsurpassable offering is the highest form of offering, and there is no offering greater or grander than that.

There are twelve common or surpassed offerings. These all relate to normal worldly activities of our everyday life, which we transform into offerings.

The twelve common offerings are:

1.2.3.1.1. Bath

1.2.3.1.2. Clothes

1.2.3.1.3. Ornaments

1.2.3.1.4. Scents

1.2.3.1.5. Flowers

1.2.3.1.7. Food

1.2.3.1.8. Light

1.2.3.1.9. Crystal palaces

1.2.3.1.10. Blessing parasols

1.2.3.1.11. Instruments

1.2.3.1.12. The blessing that they may be continually in the aspect of offerings

#### 1.2.3.1.1. Bath

This has three subdivisions:

1.2.3.1.1.1. Bathing house

1.2.3.1.1.2. Way of bathing

1.2.3.1.1.3. Drying the body

One of our everyday activities is bathing ourselves. In order to do that we need to have a bathhouse, without which we cannot take a shower; then there is the manner of how to bathe; after which we need to dry ourselves. These are all normal daily activities which can be turned into offerings.

We can go through these quite quickly as they are easy to comprehend, and we don't want to take up too much time with them.

#### 1.2.3.1.1.1. Bathing house

10. *In a fragrantly smelling bathhouse  
With crystal ground, bright and sparkling,  
With pleasant pillars ablaze with precious  
objects,  
Decorated with canopies made from bright  
pearls,*

There are some variations in how to offer the bathing house: some mention visualising it in the space above. But, in our practice, if we have the merit field in the space above us, then it is good to visualise the bathing house in front of ourselves, in between ourselves and the merit field.

Again, Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary with a query, followed by an answer:

Where does one offer the bath?

In a bathhouse smelling fragrantly because of sprinkled sandalwood, with a floor of crystal, clear of colour, bright and completely clean...

So one visualises a beautiful bathing house with crystal panes and crystal floors.

...having adornments like conch shells and pillars blazing with precious objects,...

The *pillars* refers to the pillars at each corner of the bathing house, which are adorned with beautiful ornaments.

From the top being adorned with a canopy glowing from the bright pearls permeating it.

So basically the bath house is sheltered by a canopy adorned with many pearls.

We will not go into an elaborate explanation of these points here as I have explained them previously. So you can refer to previous notes. They are also explained in the preliminaries of the lam rim teachings, so you can refer to that text. The main point here is that one visualises that the holy beings in the merit field actually come into the bathing house, and take off their garments, which they put in beautiful places and so forth.

#### 1.2.3.1.1.2. Way of bathing

As presented in the teachings one visualises dakinis around the bathing house where the enlightened beings of the merit field are bathing. There are three particular dakinis: one which holds a vase; another holding a substance for cleaning the body, like what we call soap, and the third dakini holds a towel to dry the holy bodies.

11. *To the tathagatas and their children  
Out of many precious vases well filled  
With pleasant incense water, accompanied  
by  
Music and dance, I offer in various ways a  
bath.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation is:

One offers a bath to the tathagatas and their children out of many vases made from gold and other precious materials...

Here the dakinis use the vases to scoop up the scented water from the basin, and then pour that out as a way of showering.

That bowl is:

...filled with pleasant incense water that is fragrantly scented and has beautiful flowers in it, accompanied by music and dance.

The water has flower petals in it, which gives the water extra fragrance and scent. There are also dakinis who are playing music and offering dances.

#### 1.2.3.1.1.3. Drying the body

This visualisation involves drying the holy bodies at five points. First the water on the top of the body is dried, then the water on the right side of the body, followed by drying the water gathered on the left side. Then the water at the heart of the body is dried, followed by the water below the navel.

In the bathing ritual, a mirror is used to visualize the entire merit field in it. One needs to understand that the

---

five dots or points of drying represent the five Dhyani buddhas.

The next two lines of the verse relate to drying of the body:

*12ab. I thoroughly dry their bodies with  
Unequaled cloth, clean and infused with  
scent.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Then one dries the bodies of the objects of offering with unequalled cloth, which is soft and clean, and infused with pleasant scents.

Here *unequaled cloth* implies a very special cloth is used to dry the bodies of the holy beings. We don't appreciate towels that are too coarse or rough and need to have soft towels and soft clothing. Likewise, here we visualise the best cloth for drying the holy bodies.

#### 1.2.3.1.2. Clothes

I have previously extensively explained the specifics about the garments that are to be offered and you can refer to that.

The next lines of verse are:

*12cd Then I offer them holy and well-scented  
Clothes of nice colour;  
Various pure clothes, thin and soft.*

Here Gyaltsab Je explains:

Having dried their bodies I offer them holy fragrant garments of good colour...

If they are of the aspect of an ordained Sangha, then one offers the three types of robes, or:

...If they are in the aspect of a householder [or a layperson] then I offer them a variety of soft, fine clothes of good size and colour.

It is good to take note that in addition to making offerings to the normal objects of refuge, such as ordained Sangha, one also makes offerings to bodhisattvas in the lay aspect. This is another way to see the unbiased nature of Buddha's teachings. Suitable objects are to be venerated and are objects of offerings, whatever aspect they may be in. A bodhisattva having the aspect of a lay householder is depicted in lay garments, such as Manjushri, Maitreya and so forth. Ordained bodhisattvas include Shariputra and Maudgalyayana, who were the close disciples of the Buddha.

I have already explained how to discard old clothes.

#### 1.2.3.1.3. Ornaments

In our worldly life, it is not enough just to have fine clothes. It seems that one needs to beautify oneself even further with ornaments. So we can make offerings of these.

The verse relating to this is:

*13. And hundreds of supreme ornaments  
I offer also to the supreme Samantabhadra  
and Manjushri  
And to the ruler of the world and so forth.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je says:

I offer hundreds of supreme ear ornaments, bracelets, anklets, necklaces and so forth, to, among others, Samantabhadra, Mipham, Manjushri,

bodhisattvas in a lay aspect, and to the ruler of the world.

These are examples of bodhisattvas in the lay aspect, which implies that one need not make offerings of ornaments and so forth to ordained Sangha, bodhisattvas and so forth.

Of course in the worldly manner, after beautifying oneself with nice ornaments or jewellery, one will also apply nice smelling substances, scents and so forth. That is the next offering, which we can leave for our next session.

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