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# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Based on the motivation we have just generated in the recitation of the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in the practice of meditation.

[meditation]

You may come out of your samadhi now!

We have just attempted to engage in the practice of giving and taking in the form of a meditation practice. It would be very worthwhile if we could develop the determination to engage in this practice as much as possible in our everyday lives, so that our thoughts, actions and speech contribute to giving our happiness to others, while taking away their suffering. If we can apply this in our everyday life as much as possible, this would, of course, be most worthwhile.

The benefits one derives from doing such a practice are quite obvious. In countries like Australia, people are generally not deprived of sufficient food, clothing or shelter, and if that is the case then there are many practical ways to help them.

The most prevalent kind of suffering experienced here in the west tends not so much to be physical suffering, but suffering on a mental or psychological level. When suffering is of a psychological nature, people don't need physical help with food, shelter and so forth. Rather, the best form of assistance to someone who is experiencing mental or psychological suffering is companionship. We often see how true companions and friends really assist and help others. So we can see that there are many ways we can help others and that we don't need to be wealthy in order to extend our help to others.

We also need to apply the giving and taking practice in practical ways to those who are close to us, because if we can't apply it to them then there aren't many other practical ways to engage in practice. As mentioned previously, the problems of our companions are mostly psychological or mental ones, conflicts of interest and so forth. These problems are very prevalent because they often arise through their relationships with their companions and the partners and so forth. So the problems need to be solved within those relationships.

My way of taking a practical approach is to deal with the immediate situation, and then use that as a basis for improving and expanding one's practice. The practice can then be extended to help others on a broader level. If we are inclined to engage in this supreme practice of giving and taking then we need to remind ourselves again and again what it is that we are attempting to practise. Basically, it is a practice to increase and to further develop the sense of love and compassion within oneself. So it is worthwhile to make this determination: 'I need to try to implement the practice in every possible way, beginning with those who are close to me'. Many of you have found that the practice of *tong len* or giving and taking is a very beneficial one. If you want to gain further benefits from it then this is the way to go about practising it.

## 1.2.3. Offerings that are emanated

### 1.2.3.1. THE COMMON OFFERINGS (CONT.)

#### 1.2.3.1.4. Scents/Perfumed balms

The Tibetan word *jukpa* refers to perfumed balms that are applied to the body.

14. *The supreme smell that gives rise  
To all the smells of the three thousand worlds  
I apply to the able ones' bodies  
That are glowing like polished refined gold.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains this verse thus:

The supreme smell that gives rise to the fragrant smells of all the three thousand worlds I apply to the bodies of the able ones, ...

Here *smells of the three thousand worlds* implies that the fragrance of the balms pervade the whole universe. The *bodies of all the able ones* refers to Shakyamuni Buddha and all the enlightened beings.

Then the quality of the bodies of enlightened beings are presented:

... that are glowing and blazing like polished refined gold.

At this point one brings to mind the incredible qualities of the Buddha's body which are enumerated in the list of the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of the Buddha. As mentioned here, the Buddha's enlightened body is *glowing and blazing like polished refined gold*—it has a natural radiance that fills the entire universe.

When refined gold is polished it has a brilliant glow, and the radiance of the Buddha's body is much greater than that. *Blazing* indicates that the Buddha's holy body has such beautiful radiance, that the more it is seen by sentient beings the more they want to look at it. That is, by merely seeing the Buddha's holy body it produces great joy in the minds of sentient beings.

Earlier, when we were studying *Precious Garland*, we covered the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech and mind in detail. The qualities are also explained when identifying the objects of refuge. So here we can immediately relate to the qualities of the holy Buddha's body. Thus we can see that the earlier explanations serve as a basis to understand further references in the text. Otherwise we would have to spend significant time now in explaining the Buddha's qualities in detail.

#### 1.2.3.1.5. Flowers

We usually offer flowers in front of the image of the Buddha, enlightened ones and deities. In addition, we can also visualise offering flowers to Tara's head ornament, when we do the offering in the Tara practice. For enlightened beings who are in the aspect of a renunciate, we can also imagine offering flowers as a canopy above them. So we should not be limited to offering flowers in just one way.

Also, as depicted in some drawings, dakinis make offerings of flowers by sprinkling them from the sky. My interpretation of this offering is that it is said that certain celestial deities can't come too near humans because we have a foul smell!!! So, from the sky above, they sprinkle flowers onto enlightened beings who are on Earth.

On another level, when His Holiness the Dalai Lama teaches, he is addressing the humans sitting on the ground below him. But there are definitely celestial beings who are listening to the teachings at the same time. They don't sit at the same level as the humans but they are in the space

above. So we need to visualise them above a great lama or a master when they are teaching. Even where one has to give a teaching oneself, there may be celestial beings listening to it. So we need to visualise that. There are of course *nagas* at ground level, but celestial beings such as gods and *dakinis* are in the space above. So the main point is that offering flowers includes visualising sprinkling flowers from the sky.

The verse that relates to the offering of flowers is:

15. *To the offering objects, the able ones,  
I offer beautiful flowers, mandarava, lotuses,  
Utpala and so forth; all that are well smelling,  
In beautiful well-arranged garlands.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins with an answer to a rhetorical question, 'Who should I make offerings to?':

I shall make offerings to the able ones, the supreme objects of offering.

Then Gyaltsab Je poses another question, which he also answers:

With what? With pleasant flowers like mandarava, lotus, utpala flowers and so forth, which disperse all the fragrant scents. I also offer flower garlands well spread out and beautiful.

These flowers are not only beautiful to behold, but they have a beautiful smell. The Tibetan word *selma* is used here, which refers to loose petals or flowers that do not have stems. Thus, flowers with stems are offered as garlands, while flowers without stems are sprinkled or *spread out*. So the offering of flowers to the objects of refuge includes beautiful stemmed flowers as well as loose flowers.

#### 1.2.3.1.6. Incense

The first two lines of the next verse read:

16ab. *I also offer billowing clouds of smoke from  
supreme incense  
Pervaded by a scent that robs one of one's  
senses.*

The Tibetan word translated here as *incense* has a connotation of a substance which, when burnt, produces a beautiful aroma. This is an offering to the smell sense.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of these two lines as follows:

I offer billowing clouds of incense, spreading into the ten directions, of supreme well scented incense that robs one of one senses, like *akaru*<sup>1</sup> and so forth.

The offering here is substances that, when burnt, produce a sweet-smelling scent in the form of smoke. So in this visualisation we can imagine continuous billowing clouds of smoke being emitted from a sweet smelling substance such as incense or other substances which create that beautiful smell or scent.

#### 1.2.3.1.7. Food

The next two lines of the verse relate to the offering of food to the taste sense. They are quite easy to understand so we need not spend too much time on them.

16cd. *I also offer divine feasts made of  
Various foods and drink.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains:

I offer to the conquerors and their children various foods, like sugar cane, and various drinks; both as

divine feasts possessing various colours, smells and tastes.

One needs to be mindful about presenting the food offerings in beautiful clean containers. The food offering presented to the taste sense includes drinks as well, and it should have a variety of colours and taste and an enticing aroma. With some practices, we offer things that represent the traditional offering called a *torma*, which is a food offering to the deities or the enlightened beings.

Those who are familiar with tantric practices will recall that we visualise deities accepting the *torma* offerings by visualising a hollow tube of light descending from the enlightened being's mouth to the *torma*. The outside of the *torma* has the appearance of a hard substance, and inside is a nectar-like liquid. It is this nectar which is accepted by the enlightened being when they suck up its essence through the tube of light that serves as a pipe.

The reason why I relate this here is that there are many who do a regular Tara practice. When offering the *torma* in the Four Mandala Tara practice, the *sadhana* indicates that a HUNG at the tongue transforms into that hollow tube of light through which the Tara deity partakes of the essence of the *torma*. That is the visualisation that one does. However one does not need to do that visualisation every time one makes an offering.

One important thing to visualise is that one makes an offering of food or flowers to the deities respectfully and with both hands. So that would be good to visualise when presenting the offerings.

#### 1.2.3.1.8. Light

The first two lines from the next verse read:

17ab. *I also offer precious lamps  
Mounted on golden lotuses.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary then explains the meaning of these two lines:

I offer bright precious lamps mounted on bases of many arranged golden lotuses.

The *golden lotuses* serve as containers in which to offer the lamps. So, one can visualise light being offered in many beautifully arranged *golden* containers, which are in the shape of *lotuses*.

As the offering of light is an offering of illumination, it is an offering to the eye sense. However ordinary beings like ourselves may feel uncomfortable offering light which is placed too close to the eyes; we may feel that it is too bright and may actually burn the eyes. So as a way to comfortably make these offerings, we can imagine offering them the illumination of light by arranging them in front of the deity.

#### 1.2.3.1.9. Crystal palace

The next six lines of verse read:

17cd. *On clean ground anointed with incense  
I arrange delightful fresh flowers.*

18. *A beautiful crystal palace reverberating with  
melodious praises  
Ablaze with tassels of pearls and precious  
substances;  
Infinite, becoming an ornament of the skies,  
I also offer to the great compassionate ones.*

In explanation of this verse the commentary reads:

I offer to those in the nature of great compassion a beautiful [priceless] crystal palace ...

<sup>1</sup> A sweet smelling substance.  
Chapter 2

The Tibetan word *shalme*, translated here as beautiful, has the connotation of being priceless.

... where the well-polished floors are sprinkled with scented water, where delightful flowers are laid out,...

Again the Tibetan word *selma* specifies either petals or flowers without stems. Although not mentioned here, other presentations indicate that one visualises a beautiful throne, which is supported by eight snow lions (two on each side), in the middle of the palace.

... where goddesses sing melodious praises, and which are beautified with tassels made from pearls and various precious substances blazing with their splendid infinite light. With its infinite qualities it beautifies the essence of space and such becomes an ornament of the skies.

That is how the palace is visualised.

#### 1.2.3.1.10. Parasols

The verse relating to this heading reads:

19. *Precious beautiful parasols with golden handles,  
Seamed by dazzling ornaments,  
Well-shaped and uplifting when seen,  
I always offer to the able ones.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

I always offer beautiful parasols made from a variety of precious substances, with golden handles, the edges of the parasol are seamed by many dazzling jewel ornaments, and magnificently shaped so that it is uplifting for the mind just to see it.

Here we visualise a parasol of magnificent shape, with a rim encrusted with various beautiful jewels and ornaments. It is so beautiful that merely seeing it brings much joy. One offers the parasol to shade the heads of the enlightened beings.

#### 1.2.3.1.11. Instruments

Next is an offering of instruments for making music.

The verse for this reads:

20. *Further, may arrays of offering clouds  
Of instruments with delightful melodies  
That dispel the suffering of sentient beings  
Be scattered about.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

In addition to the earlier mentioned offerings, I also present offering clouds of instruments, such as clay drums, with delightful melodies that dispel the sufferings of sentient beings, and satisfy them just through hearing.

May arrays of such offering clouds be scattered about.

The Tibetan word *sosor ne*, translated as scattered, indicates 'may an array of such offering clouds manifest, residing separately in various locations'.

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

This is basically an aspirational prayer that all the offerings that have been presented continually abide, to please the senses of the enlightened beings.

The verse relating to this reads:

21. *May it rain unceasingly  
Precious flowers and so forth  
On the holy Dharma and all Jewels,  
Stupas and the holy bodies.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

May it rain unceasingly precious flowers and other offerings on the twelve types of scriptures ...

The *twelve types of scriptures* refers to the Dharma Jewel in the aspect of scriptures. When we make offerings to the Three Jewels, we can visualise texts to represent the Dharma Jewel, which is the speech of the Buddha in the form of writing.

The commentary continues:

... that are contained in the truth of cessation and the truth of the path ....

This is the actual Dharma jewel.

... on stupas that contain relics of the Buddha and physical representations of the body of the Buddha, such as paintings and so forth.

In the Tibetan translation, the aspirational prayer comes at this point.

May it rain unceasingly, until the end of cyclic existence, precious flowers and other offerings.

As mentioned previously, this is in a form of an aspirational prayer, referred to as 'blessing the offerings'.

#### 1.2.3.2. Unequaled or unsurpassed offerings<sup>2</sup>

The verse relating to this heading reads:

22. *Just as Manjushri and so forth,  
Make offerings to the conquerors,  
I make offerings in the same way to  
The tathagatas, protectors and their children.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Just like the empowered bodhisattvas Manjushri, Samantabhadra and so forth make offerings to the conquerors by emanating them into the whole of space, ...

*Empowered bodhisattvas* refers to high level bodhisattvas who, because of the level of concentration they have attained, are able to manifest incredible, expansive offerings that fill the sky. Taking that as an example to emulate:

I also make offerings to the tathagatas, the protectors of gods and humans, and their children.

In other words: 'Just as these great bodhisattvas present unsurpassable offerings, likewise I make these offerings'.

Then the commentary quotes from another sutra:

From the sutra *Precious Lamp*:

Most flowers are like canopies and are sent out by light rays; having arranged various flowers everywhere the great ones make offerings to the conquerors.

To further explain how to present unsurpassable offerings; as explained in other teachings, one visualises the entire space filled with offerings. This involves visualising the bodhisattva called the Supreme Being Samantabhadra in the aspect of a renunciate (i.e. wearing the robes of one who is ordained), his hands folded at his heart, holding a jewel between his palms. There is a more elaborate form of visualisation, but the condensed form is visualising oneself as Samantabhadra holding at one's heart the jewel held between one's palms. The jewel radiates innumerable rays of light which fills the entire universe. The method of building this visualisation involves visualising each tip of radiated light emanating further offerings. At the tips of each of the light rays that are radiated from the jewel, one visualises

<sup>2</sup> Previously presented as Peerless Offerings.

various types of offerings manifested. Then from each of the offerings, further light rays are emanated and then from each of the tips of the light rays emanated from the offerings, further replicas of the offerings manifest. Then from those offerings, light rays again radiate forth and from the tips of each of those light rays, further offerings are presented. So because there are infinite offerings that are manifested from infinite rays of light, the entire universe is filled with offerings, which is what we present to the enlightened beings; the buddhas and bodhisattvas. It is said that this visualisation is the easiest one for us ordinary beings to do as a way to present unsurpassable offerings.

Another interpretation of what unsurpassable offering means is that the unsurpassable offering is to engage in the practice of Dharma, and to uphold the doctrine. More specifically it refers to listening to the Dharma and putting it into practice. This form of unsurpassable offering is, of course, a very significant one.

Another way of explaining unsurpassable offering is to visualise one's own virtues from the three times transforming into offerings and then presenting those offerings.

Then there is the most supreme of offerings, which is the actual generation of bodhicitta.

It is good to also take note that these forms of unsurpassable offerings are not beyond our reach. We are already making attempts to engage in these practices. Upholding the doctrine means that if we are contributing to the preservation and proliferation of the Dharma, we are, in fact, making an unsurpassable offering. Furthermore, when we listen to the Dharma and make our own attempts to try to practise it, we are also making unsurpassable offerings. The very fact that we make attempts to accumulate virtue means that we have a basis of virtue to transform into offerings. And to whatever extent we are able, we are at least trying to aspire to generate the bodhicitta motivation.

We need to recall the earlier explanations to ensure our practices, such as upholding the doctrine of the Buddha, listening to the doctrine and trying to put it into practice and so forth become an offering. As mentioned earlier, the real offering is pleasing the minds of the enlightened beings and our gurus. When we engage in, or make an attempt to engage in this practice of upholding the doctrine, which is the source of happiness and goodness for all, or make attempts to uphold that, then that is definitely a means to please our gurus and the minds of the enlightened beings. Furthermore, listening to the Dharma and trying to put it into practice and so forth are the optimum means to please the minds of the enlightened beings. This is how we can ensure our practice becomes an offering.

There will be a bit of a change in our usual routine for the next few Tuesday evenings. Next Tuesday, 23 July, and the following Tuesday, 30 July, I will continue to teach. So, discussion night will be on 6 August. The seminar will be on 11 August, and you have to participate in that well. Tuesday 13 August will be the exam evening and as usual it is good to participate in that exam. On 18 August the annual White Tara initiation takes place.

It would be good for you to organise the seminar well, with good subjects, complemented with some meditation. If it is arranged early enough, people will have time to prepare well. In the past these seminars have been in the form of two groups engaging in discussion or debate. So, if it is done in that way, each group has to know what the subject is in

order to present it, and they also have to know the other groups' subjects, so that you will be ready to raise questions on their topic. And of course you have to be ready to answer questions that are raised by the other group.

As I regularly mention to the Monday night presenters, it is not sufficient just to write down notes of what you will be presenting. You also need to prepare yourself so you can answer questions when they are asked. Also one needs to be mindful when you present topics that have lists of different things. You do have to be able to list what they are. I wouldn't blame you if you get stuck in that situation once in a while. There have been some geshe who have prepared to explain a topic, but who were not prepared enough to give a precise list of the things they were presenting.

It is important for those presenting the Dharma (such as on Monday evenings) not to be satisfied with just preparing material from books and notes. It's important to do some internal preparation as well, which involves spending some time meditating and thinking about the topic that you are going to present. In that way the presentation will not be merely dry words, but because one has spent some time internalising it, it will carry some weight.

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

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