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# *Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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

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8 October 2013

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As usual we can engage in the meditation practice.

Now we can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put into it into practice well.

Generating this strong wish to benefit others will be extremely beneficial; it also encourages us and is really important for our practice.

As the Lam Rim teachings indicate, the states of mind that allow one to actually benefit other beings are great love, great compassion and the superior intention. These are three of the six causes of the seven-point cause and effect sequence, which produces the bodhicitta that compels one to actually benefit others. Whereas the first three - recognising all beings as one's mother, remembering their kindness, and wishing to repay that kindness - serve as the basis for developing that wish to benefit others. The Lam Rim presents very precise instructions on how to actually develop that bodhicitta state of mind. So if we rely on these instructions and put these very orderly steps into practice, then we can definitely develop the mind that compels one to benefit others.

The love and compassion that we need to develop, as presented in the teachings, is unbiased love and unbiased compassion. How wonderful it would be if we were to actually develop a love and compassion that does not discriminate between friends, enemies and strangers! What an incredible state of mind to develop! Once we develop that, then the Great Vehicle or Mahayana path will be established within our mental continuum. It will then be possible to practise on that path and obtain the fruit of the path. I personally feel that it is really important to put all one's energy into this core practice of developing unbiased love and compassion, which, of course, I attempt to do. It is definitely the case that without developing unbiased love and compassion, the rest of the Mahayana practices are not obtainable.

I feel like expanding on this point a bit more, however I will leave it for now. If one really analyses these points then the logical conclusion we reach is that this is really the core of our practice, for it is also a powerful means for accumulating merit and purifying negativities. So in this way we can see the great value of these practices.

## **4.2.2. The power of the base**

We have come to the second of the four opponent powers. What is the first power called?

Student: The power of regret.

Regret is not the literal translation of the Tibetan term. Does anyone recall the term used in the commentary?

Student: Power of thorough repudiation.

That's correct. So what is that power of repudiation?

Student: Recognising that we have created negativity.

More specifically, what is the mind that one should generate in order to develop the power of thorough repudiation?

Student: Fear of the consequences of that negativity that we have created.

That is correct. The way to develop that opponent power of thorough repudiation is to contemplate the consequences of the negativity that one has engaged in in the past. When one really thinks about these consequences in detail, great fear will naturally arise, and then the power of thorough repudiation will be generated in one's mind.

The second opponent power is the power of the base or reliance. So, what is the power of reliance?

Student: Refuge.

The Tibetan word for the power of the base or reliance is *ten kyi top*, and *ten* means to *rely*. Here it means to rely on the objects for one's confession and purification. So, what do we rely upon? It is explained that whatever objects we created negativity with are the very objects we need to rely upon to purify those negativities. We create negativities in relation to either the Three Jewels or sentient beings, so we have to rely on both the Three Jewels as well as sentient beings for purification.

Thus, by relying on the objects of refuge, one is able to purify one's negativities.

As presented in the commentary, this section has three subdivisions.

4.2.2.1. Relying on the refuge of the Three Jewels, starting right now

4.2.2.2. Relying on the powerful prayers of the children of the conquerors

4.2.2.3. Having gone for refuge, practising according to the advice

### **4.2.2.1. RELYING ON THE REFUGE OF THE THREE JEWELS, STARTING RIGHT NOW**

In accordance with the earlier explanation, when one is born in an unfortunate realm such as the hell realms, then there is no opportunity to rely upon the objects of refuge at that time. We need to take this as a personal instruction, and rely upon the objects of refuge ourselves, right now while we have all the conducive conditions, and not leave it for later when we may not have these good conditions.

The very outline itself presents the meaning of the verse of the text and it becomes most meaningful if we take it as a personal instruction. We need to take it as a reminder that relying on the objects of refuge will ensure that whatever practice we do becomes intact. We might assume that we are Dharma practitioners, but without genuine and strong reliance on the objects of refuge there is no real basis for our practice. Every attempt that we make in relating to this advice and putting it into practice makes the foundation of our practice established much more firmly.

To actually contemplate this, think about the words *relying on the refuge of the Three Jewels starting right now*. How do you understand them? Contemplating how it is essential to go for genuine refuge beginning from right now actually becomes the means to establish the foundation of our Dharma practice. The more we develop this mind of reliance on the objects of refuge, the more it lessens our clinging to the affairs of this lifetime. As the clinging to the affairs of this life reduces, to that extent, our Dharma becomes purer.

This is another way to relate to the meaning of what is presented here.

The two verses relating to this heading read:

47. *Therefore, from today onwards I take refuge  
In the Conqueror, the protector of migrators,  
Who works to rescue migrators  
And who eliminates the powerful dangers.*
48. *I also take perfect refuge  
In the Dharma that he understood,  
Which eliminates the dangers of cyclic existence,  
And into the assembly of bodhisattvas.*

Even though my intention is to try to go quite quickly through these verses somehow that doesn't seem to be happening! Gyaltsab Je's commentary on these verses is:

One does not find a refuge when one is reborn in the lower realms, even if one searches. Therefore I quickly take refuge in the Conqueror, the protector of migrators, who strives to rescue all migrators, and who has the perfect ability to eliminate all the very powerful dangers.

Further, I accept the Dharma that the Conqueror understood and taught, the Dharma Jewel that eliminates all the fears of cyclic existence.

I also accept the assembly of bodhisattvas that have attained the state of a superior, as friends helping to accomplish the path, and purely go for refuge to them.

When the commentary states *One does not find a refuge when one is reborn in the lower realms, even if one searches*, this is a clear explanation that as we will not be able to find refuge when we are reborn in the lower realms, we need to take refuge in the conquerors, from now on. What we need to understand from this presentation is that that developing a strong reliance on the objects of refuge, and taking refuge in them is the means to block the door to the lower realms. We actually shut the door to the lower realms by taking refuge.

If one were to ask, 'What is the method for blocking the doorways to rebirth in the lower realms?', then the answer is 'By taking refuge'. As presented in the teachings, if, at the moment of death, we have strong refuge in our mind that will, at the very least, definitely prevent rebirth in a lower realm in the immediate next life. Even if we have engaged in quite a lot of negativity during our life, if our mind is in tune with taking strong refuge at the time of death, then this completely virtuous mind will definitely prevent rebirth in the lower realms in the next lifetime. In contrast, if someone were to spend most of their life seemingly engaging in Dharma practice, but at the time of death their mind is not in a virtuous frame then, because of the non-virtuous state of mind at that time, they will have an unfortunate rebirth in the next life.

The only way that we can prepare ourselves to ensure that we are in a virtuous state mind at the time of death, is to continuously familiarise ourselves now with the conqueror Buddha Shakyamuni, which is done by meditating on and visualising the image of Buddha Shakyamuni while reciting the mantra. Whatever time we spend on a regular basis, such as meditating and reciting the mantra, even to the extent of remembering the Buddha in our daily activities, and every time before we go to bed, and perhaps even having dreams of the Buddha, then, due to that familiarity, it is said that an image of the Buddha will naturally come to mind very vividly at the time of death. Seeing an image of the Buddha and having faith in him at the time of death would be wonderful! Likewise with the familiarity one gains by

relying on a deity such as Chenrezig, or Avalokiteshvara as one's main deity; reciting the *Om mani padme hum* mantra and remembering Chenrezig daily and before going to bed, and even having dreams of Chenrezig, will also have the result of having very vivid clear image of Chenrezig at the time of death. It is said that it is as if one is actually in the presence of the Buddha or a deity at the time of death, which would have a soothing and calming effect, with no fears or anxiety whatsoever. This would be incredibly beneficial at that crucial time.

The commentary goes on to explain that due to this fear of a lower rebirth one *quickly takes refuge in the Conqueror*. The Conqueror is described as *the protector of migrators* because he entered the path that leads to enlightenment from the moment he first developed bodhicitta, and from that time onwards he completely dedicated his life to benefiting sentient beings through the practice of the six perfections and so forth. Through all of those practices, the Conqueror reached the ultimate state of having the perfect ability to help all beings eliminate all the fears of cyclic existence.

The qualities of the Buddha or the Protector are actually presented in the first line. When the text refers to *the protector of migrators, who strives to rescue all migrators, and who has the perfect ability*, the term *perfect ability* can also relate to the various enlightened qualities of the Buddha, such as the ten powers and so forth. The Conqueror has the ability *to eliminate all the very powerful dangers*, which are the sufferings of the cyclic existence of migrators. So for that reason, as presented at this point in the text, *I quickly take refuge in the Conqueror*, here, *quickly* indicates that from this moment on, one takes refuge in the Conqueror morning, day, and night.

Thus, the first paragraph of the commentary presents taking refuge in the Conqueror or the Buddha as a guide on the path. As this is a Mahayana refuge, one needs to also understand that the commitment one makes in taking refuge is that we take refuge in the Conqueror as our guide on the path until we attain the final state of enlightenment.

We need to understand that the second line, *I accept the Dharma that the Conqueror understood and taught*, refers to the two main aspects of the Dharma, which are the realisations and the oral teachings of the Buddha. Taking refuge in *the Dharma Jewel that has the ability to eliminate all the fears of cyclic existence*, indicates that one relies on the Dharma Jewel as the path that leads to the ultimate result of enlightenment. The Dharma Jewel also has two other aspects, which are the Mahayana truth of cessation and the Mahayana truth of the path.

When the third paragraph of the commentary states *I also accept the assembly of bodhisattvas that have attained the state of a superior*, the *superior* specifically indicates the *superior Mahayana state* of a non-returner. When the commentary states *as friends helping to accomplish the path, and purely go for refuge to them*, the word *purely* indicates that going for refuge to the Three Jewels needs to be free from deceit and doubt. It would be deceitful if one gives mere lip service to the words but does not actually have strong feeling of refuge. If one is not really convinced that the objects of refuge have the ability to protect oneself then that would be doubt. So *purely going for refuge* indicates having a heartfelt genuine mind of refuge that is free from deceit and doubt.

*Purely* also indicates having the conviction that the objects of refuge have the full capacity to free one from all fears. Having generated the fear of an unfortunate rebirth and cyclic existence, one develops an absolute conviction that the objects of refuge have the full ability to free one from those

fears. So, pure refuge is a heartfelt faith in the objects of refuge, knowing that they have the ability to free one from the lower realms and samsara.

To summarise the essential points, one goes for refuge with the two causes for going for refuge intact.

- The first cause is having generated fear of the lower realms and the suffering of cyclic existence in general, and urgently wanting to be free from those fears. Seeing that the objects of refuge have the ability to free one from those fears, one takes refuge in them.
- The second aspect of taking refuge is a heartfelt reliance on the Buddha as the guide, the Dharma, which is the Mahayana truth of cessation and Mahayana truth of path, and the Sangha, which is the supreme assembly of Mahayana arya beings. So one develops complete reliance on these three, and generates the mind, 'I will go for refuge to them until I achieve enlightenment'.

Having that single-pointed focus on the objects of refuge, and relying upon them single-pointedly is the way of taking Mahayana refuge. It is important to keep this summary in mind for your daily Dharma practice.

#### 4.2.2.2. RELYING ON THE POWERFUL PRAYERS OF THE CHILDREN OF THE CONQUERORS

Here *the children of the conquerors*, refers to the eight close disciples of the Buddha, which I think we listed in an earlier session.

The next two verses read:

49. *Having become afraid of the dangers  
I offer myself to Samantabhadra,  
Also to Manjushri  
I offer this body of mine.*
50. *Also the protector Avalokiteshvara,  
Whose actions are non-deceptive due to  
compassion,  
I implore in anguish:  
Rescue me, the sinner.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Having become afraid of the fears of the lower realms I offer myself to the child of the conquerors, Samantabhadra, who does many powerful prayers. Through this, please rescue me from the dangers.

Likewise to Manjushri, without others having to urge me I offer my body with a clear mind.

To Avalokiteshvara, whose non-deceptive actions for others are motivated by compassion spontaneously and uninterruptedly, I also implore in anguish to please rescue me, who is pitiful due to these dangers. Please rescue me the sinner.

When the commentary states, *having become afraid of the fears of the lower realms*, it is specifically indicating the three unfortunate rebirths that are explained in detail in the teachings. There are the unimaginable and unbearable sufferings of the hell realms, and the hungry ghost realm, and even in the animal realm, which is, of course, is familiar to us. It is unbearable to even think about the prospect of having to experience such suffering. Having generated such fear of the lower realms one *offers oneself to the child of the conquerors*.

The way to be free from the fears and the sufferings of the lower realms is to rely on, and take refuge in, the objects of refuge. As Lama Tsongkapa mentioned in one of his works, 'There is no certainty that we will not be reborn in the lower realms. Therefore we take heartfelt refuge in the objects of

refuge as only they have the power to protect us from this fear of a lower rebirth'.

*Children of the conquerors* refers to the disciples who were close to the Buddha. They are referred to as children because of being close disciples. Another implication of *children of the conquerors* is that it refers to those who hold the entire lineage of the teachings of the Buddha. So there are different implications of *child of the conquerors*.

*Samantabhadra* is one of the bodhisattvas who was a close disciple, *who does many powerful prayers*; while *I offer my body to the conquerors* is an entreaty, 'Please rescue me from the dangers'. Similarly with Manjushri, who was another close disciple, there is the proclamation, *without others having to urge me, I offer my body with a clear mind*.

Also *Avalokiteshvara*, whose non-deceptive actions for others are motivated by compassion spontaneously and uninterruptedly, indicates that Avalokiteshvara benefits sentient beings continuously and spontaneously. Avalokiteshvara is called Chenrezig, which in Tibetan means *that which constantly sees the sufferings of sentient beings*, and this indicates that Chenrezig's eyes are always open and always looking down at sentient beings with compassion. That is the connotation of the name Chenrezig.

*I implore in anguish*, means that out of desperation one implores the children of the conquerors, 'Please rescue me, who is pitiful due to these dangers. Please rescue me the sinner'.

Then Gyaltsab Je poses a question as an introduction to the next two verses:

If asked, 'In what manner?'

51. *The superior Essence of Space and  
The Essence of Earth and  
All compassionate protectors  
I implore from the heart to rescue me*
52. *I take refuge into the Vajraholder  
Whose mere sight causes the  
Angry minions of the lord of death  
To flee into the four directions.*

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Likewise I go for refuge to the bodhisattva superior Essence of Space and Essence of Earth, and to all greatly compassionate protectors who have love and have eliminated obscurations. I implore them from my heart: Please rescue me.

I also take refuge into the Vajraholder (Vajrapani), whose mere sight causes the angry minions of the lord of death to scatter into the four directions.

*I implore* is the translation of the Tibetan word *sol*, which has the connotation, 'I have something to request'.

Having listed three children of the Conqueror earlier, i.e. Samantabhadra, Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara, this verse refers to the bodhisattva *superior Essence Of Space* (Akasagarbha), the bodhisattva *Essence of Earth* (Ksitigarbha) and all compassionate protectors. The next verse refers to the Vajraholder, who is Vajrapani. I have explained the qualities of Vajrapani extensively in the past. Vajrapani has the power to eliminate adverse forces, obstacles and obscurations that hinder Dharma practice.

The other two close disciples which are not mentioned here are Maitreya and Sarvanirvarana Viskambhin (*Dripa nam sel* in Tibetan; the literal English translation is *clearing away all obscurations*). When the commentary says *I implore them from my heart*, it means that one makes a heartfelt request to be rescued by these children of the Conqueror.

The implication of mentioning the eight children of the Conqueror is that they are all *arya* beings and are worthy objects of refuge.

#### 4.2.2.3. HAVING GONE FOR REFUGE, PRACTISING ACCORDING TO THE ADVICE

The real implication of going for refuge is so that one will practise according to their advice. Also there are specific commitments that we need to uphold after having taken refuge.

In essence, practising the advice encompasses the practice of the three scopes. Another way of presenting this is that relying on the objects of refuge is the means to achieve the ultimate goal of complete enlightenment. What the advice actually entails is adopting those practices we need to accomplish - which is to accumulate virtue and merit - and abandoning that which needs to be abandoned, which are negativities. So, refuge is actually subsumed into these two practices of adopting and abandoning.

This is presented in the following verse:

53. *Previously I transgressed your words  
Now, having seen great danger,  
I take good refuge in you; by this  
Eliminate all dangers quickly I request.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this this verse reads

Previously I transgressed your words, committed negativities and did not practise virtue. Now, having seen the infinity of cyclic existence and the great dangers of the lower realms, I take refuge in you.

By my implementing what has to be practised and what has to be abandoned, according to your advice, please quickly eliminate all fears I pray.

*Previously I transgressed your words* refers to not following the advice of the Buddha. In essence, the Buddha advised us to shun negativity and create virtue. However, because of not having followed that advice, one has committed negativities and did not practise virtue, and as a result now finds oneself being completely overwhelmed by the sufferings of cyclic existence.

Seeing now that the consequence of not following that advice will lead one into *the infinity of cyclic existence*, the connotation here is that if one relies on the object of refuge to some degree, then it might free you from some of the great sufferings in the next rebirth. As explained earlier, by taking heartfelt refuge in the object of refuge at the time of death, one will be protected from rebirth in the unfortunate realms in the next life. However, merely taking refuge and not practising the advice means that one will still be reborn in cyclic existence, not only once or twice but for an infinite number of times.

When one thinks about that prospect, it becomes apparent that it is urgent that one follows the advice of the Conqueror and takes refuge in him, *by implementing what has to be practised and what has to be abandoned according to your advice.*

This means that we are saying that we will implement these practices of abandoning what has to be abandoned and adopting what has to be practised into our daily life. We really need to take this as personal advice. To this we can add a further essential, which is the three higher trainings of morality, concentration and generating wisdom. Practising the three higher trainings is another way to implement the Buddha's advice.

As mentioned previously, the more we really contemplate and take to heart the two causes of going for refuge, the

more firmly it is established, the stronger one's conviction in the infallibility of karma becomes. These are the essential practices that establish that foundation.

We will recite together the *Eight Verses of Mind Training*, and dedicate it to my old friend, Geshe Sonam Rinchen, who passed away on Saturday morning. He was a very dear Dharma friend; we studied together in the same class, under the same teacher, and went through many hardships and difficulties together. We shared whatever meagre food we had and escaped into India together, continuing our studies there later on. We shared difficulties and hardships and the joy of our studies and so forth for so many years. He was not just an ordinary geshe but someone who had accomplished great knowledge of the Dharma, both in understanding and in practice. Not only was he skilled in citing the teachings but he was also skilled in logic and reasoning. So he was endowed with the qualities of the scriptural understanding as well as the logic of the teachings. By sharing that great knowledge he benefited so many beings in his thirty-five years in the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. The many students and disciples who studied under him found him to be very kind in sharing his Dharma knowledge.

I tried to visit him when I was in India at the beginning of this year. I purchased a ticket to go up to Dharamsala but unfortunately the airline, Kingfisher, went bankrupt, so the ticket was useless. In any case the teachings didn't end on time. So I was not able to see him—in fact, I haven't been able to see him for many years.

From my side the best thing we can offer is our practices. With the recitation of the prayers we generate the wish that he come back again for the purpose of the teachings, and to benefit sentient beings. May he come back in another reincarnation and once again engage in the Dharma as a way to benefit other beings. With that sort of intention in our mind we make strong prayers, which will help us to make a connection with Geshe-la and meet him again in the future.

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

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