
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་མེས་པོ་འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷོ་ལ་འཇམ་པ་བཞུགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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Based on the motivation we generated with the prayers we have just recited, we can now engage in the practice of meditation. [*meditation*]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

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

2. THE ACTUAL EXPLANATION OF THE STAGES OF THE PATH¹

2.2. The method for taking the essence

2.2.2 Explaining the individual meanings

2.2.2.1. CONTEMPLATING THE BENEFITS OF ENLIGHTENMENT

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

2.2.2.2.1. Taking the mind of enlightenment²

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.

As I have mentioned previously, with anything that we wish to achieve there are certain factors that oppose that achievement and certain factors that contribute to it. Likewise with the development of bodhicitta, there are certain opposing factors and certain conditions that are conducive. The opposing factors are the negativities that have to be removed through purification practices, which was the topic of the second chapter, and the conducive conditions are the means by which we accumulate merit.

Some of the means of accumulating merit, such as prostrations and so forth, were discussed in the second chapter, and this outline continues that presentation, beginning with rejoicing.

As the outline indicates, the actual mind of enlightenment is generated after having built up the conducive condition of merit through rejoicing and so forth. This also implies having rid oneself of the opposing factors, which is done by confession and purification. What we need to derive from this outline is that if we wish to develop the mind of enlightenment we need to overcome the opposing conditions as well as acquiring the conducive condition of accumulating merit. Without engaging those two aspects, there is no way we can establish the basis for generating the mind of enlightenment.

Using sound reasoning and logic we can also understand that whatever result we wish to achieve, there are bound

to be some opposing factors that need to be overcome, and some conducive factors or conditions that need to be acquired, and both are necessary for success. So whatever result we seek, we need to endeavour to overcome the opposing factors and acquire or establish the conducive factors.

The heading *Taking the mind of enlightenment after having built up the conducive conditions of merit and rejoicing in virtue and so forth* is covered in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: TAKING THE MIND OF ENLIGHTENMENT³

I. Explaining the text of the chapter

II. The title of the chapter

I. EXPLAINING THE TEXT OF THE CHAPTER

The chapter has three sub-divisions.

1. Preparation
2. Actual
3. Conclusion

1. PREPARATION

This section has five sub-divisions:

- 1.1. Rejoicing in virtue
- 1.2. Requesting to turn the wheel of Dharma
- 1.3. Requesting not to pass beyond sorrow
- 1.4. Dedicating virtues
- 1.5. An auxiliary of the perfection of generosity: training in the thought of giving away body, possessions and roots of virtue

1.1. Rejoicing in virtue

This is further subdivided into three:

- 1.1.1. Rejoicing in the virtues that are the causes of higher status, and in their effects

Here the merit from rejoicing in virtues is held in conjunction with the causes for higher status and their effects. This means that the merit is not held with renunciation, or the mind of awakening (bodhicitta), or the wisdom realising emptiness.

- 1.1.2. Rejoicing in the virtues that are the causes of mere liberation, and in their effects

Here the merit from rejoicing in virtues is held in conjunction with obtaining liberation.

- 1.1.3. Rejoicing in the causes of highest enlightenment, and in their effects

1.1.1. Rejoicing in the virtues that are the causes of higher status, and in their effects

Higher status refers to taking a fortunate rebirth in the god realms or as a human being. This was explained in detail in *Precious Garland*, which was the last text that we studied.

The first verse of the chapter reads:

1. *In the virtues that give respite from the sufferings
Of the lower realms of all sentient beings,
And in the abiding in happiness of them that suffer,
I rejoice with pleasure.*

Gyaltshab Je's commentary explains the meaning of this verse as follows:

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

² The first subdivision of this heading was covered in Chapter 2.

³ The heading numbering begins again with the new chapter.

I rejoice in the causal virtues that give respite from the sufferings of the lower realms to all sentient beings abiding in cyclic existence, and which cause them to attain special higher status.

The Tibetan text begins with the words *all sentient beings abiding in cyclic existence*. By specifying sentient beings who are abiding in cyclic existence the text is referring to sentient beings who have the contaminated aggregates, also known as the appropriated aggregates. Having these contaminated aggregates means taking uncontrolled rebirths in cyclic existence again and again. We need to relate *sentient beings abiding in cyclic existence* to beings who are still suffering and bound to samsara, such as ourselves. There are of course many sentient beings who have abandoned cyclic existence, such as the arhats or foe destroyers, as well as the bodhisattvas abiding on the eighth ground and above.

For sentient beings who are bound in cyclic existence, rebirth in a higher status gives some *respite from the intense sufferings of the lower realms*, so we rejoice in the virtues that are the cause for obtaining that high status. Here virtues does not refer to virtues that are held by renunciation; rather we are rejoicing in the virtues that are the cause for merely obtaining the good result of higher status. Seeing others accumulating such virtues is also an opportunity for us to rejoice.

We need to be mindful that when we rejoice in virtuous activities it doesn't mean that we are developing an egotistical pride in our achievements. Rather, rejoicing is an act of great humility, in which one acknowledges that one has had a great opportunity to accumulate some virtue. When one dedicates that virtue for the benefit of all beings then it becomes a pure practice.

Rejoicing has many qualities: when one rejoices in the virtues of others it serves as an opponent to jealousy, and it actually serves as an antidote to overcome jealousy we might feel in relation to the good deeds of others. In addition, as Lama Tsong Khapa mentions, rejoicing is the optimum way to accumulate extensive merit with the least effort. Furthermore, whenever one rejoices, it can help to increase whatever merit one has accumulated in the past, it gives an impetus to accumulate more virtue now, and further encourages one to accumulate virtue in the future.

As explained in the teachings, the merit that one accumulates from rejoicing is vast and extensive. It is said that when one rejoices in the merit of those who are superior to oneself, one will obtain at least half of the merit that they have accumulated, just by virtue of rejoicing in their merit. If the other is of equal status, one will achieve the same amount of merit as they have. When one rejoices in the merit of someone who is lesser than oneself, one will obtain even more merit than they have accumulated. This is explained in sutras that I mentioned previously regarding the offerings made by King Prasenajit to the Buddha.

One of the main points about rejoicing is that it helps to increase merit by acknowledging that one has had a great opportunity to accumulate virtues. One needs to focus on the fact that one has had a great opportunity to accumulate merit, rather than feeling pompous that one has done a great practice. Holding this kind of attitude

will help to overcome pride. Otherwise one might develop an egotistical pride about meagre attempts of accumulating merit. Developing pride defeats the purpose of engaging in virtue—far from achieving good results from one's practice it can bring harmful results. Whatever virtue and merit that one accumulates needs to serve the purpose of reducing pride, rather than increasing it by thinking, 'I have done a great deed! I have accumulated so much virtue'. One needs to adopt a sense of humility and rejoice in the great opportunity of creating merit, and generate the thought, 'May I further get such opportunities to engage in virtue and accumulate merit again'.

The essential point is to recognise the difference between egotistical pride and genuine rejoicing. With pride, one starts to feel pompous and self-righteous about one's achievements, thinking 'I have done great practice!'. Whereas, rejoicing implies a feeling of genuine modesty, of subduing the mind and making it more gentle. If one ensures that the effort one puts into accumulating virtue becomes a means to subdue one's own mind, then one's attempts to accumulate virtue have served their purpose.

The main point is that rejoicing serves as an antidote to the negativities or vices that may otherwise arise in our mind. Genuine rejoicing opposes pride, while rejoicing in the virtues of others helps to overcome jealousy. This text and other teachings mention that by the mere fact of rejoicing in a bodhisattva's virtues and great deeds we accumulate extensive merit. These are important points to keep in mind.

So we can see the great practical value of the practice of rejoicing. We don't have to exert ourselves and go to great lengths of engaging in extensive practices—it basically comes down to having the right attitude. We can accumulate great merit thinking about the great deeds of the noble beings and rejoice in their great deeds, even while lying down.

The first part of Gyaltsab Je's explanation relates to rejoicing in the cause of the higher status. The second part is rejoicing in the results of the higher status. As the commentary reads:

I also rejoice in the result, i.e. the abiding of the suffering sentient beings in the happiness of higher status.

Rejoicing in the result refers to rejoicing in the result of the virtues that one has accumulated, which is obtaining the higher status. Beings who are *abiding in suffering* refers to beings who are abiding in the three types of suffering: the suffering of suffering, and/or the suffering of change, in addition to pervasive conditioned suffering. When beings who are experiencing the immense suffering of the lower realms are placed *in the happiness of the higher status*, they are temporarily relieved of the suffering of suffering of the lower realms. However they are still in the nature of suffering. So, as a result of the virtues that have been accumulated, beings who would otherwise have to repeatedly experience sufferings in the lower realms have now been placed in a temporary state of happiness in higher realms.

In the human realm we are familiar with the qualities of high status. There are those who have great wealth, good

physical features, who are renowned, and those who have fame and power. These are all qualities that we normally admire and even wish for ourselves, because there is a certain amount of happiness and wellbeing associated with them. So if we see others who have any of these qualities, then we can rejoice in their qualities rather than being jealous. This can then prevent many unhappy states of mind.

The immediate benefit we gain from rejoicing is that it releases our mind from the pangs of jealousy, as well as being a means to acquire merit. As mentioned previously, if we find ourselves with any of the good conditions that promote our wellbeing, we should rejoice as a way to overcome pride. When we rejoice in these conditions rather than being proud, we are acknowledging that we enjoy these conditions as a result of the virtues we have previously accumulated, which becomes the means to accept the good conditions we have now. This will enhance our sense of humility about having obtained these good conditions.

What I'm attempting to explain here is that one rejoices in the happiness of higher status obtained by those who are otherwise still abiding in the suffering of cyclic existence. A more vivid example is our own condition of having been reborn in the higher status of a human being. While we have been born as human beings, nevertheless we still experience all three levels of suffering; the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change and pervasive compounded suffering. Yet the mere fact of being born as a human comes with conditions that can provide a certain amount of happiness and wellbeing. Many of us are not deprived of resources such as wealth, being renowned, or having good features, which are some of the qualities of the high status. So while we still abide in suffering, we nevertheless have these good conditions that allow us to experience a certain amount of happiness and wellbeing. Many others also experience these good qualities and conditions, and we should rejoice in their happiness too.

Another significant point to grasp is that enjoying the happiness of higher status also gives us respite from the suffering of the lower realms. While we would all have experienced the suffering of the lower realms in previous lifetimes, it is as if we are now taking a break and enjoying a rest from the otherwise intense suffering of those realms. So we need to acknowledge that. If we don't utilise this opportunity in a proper way, the immense suffering we have previously experienced in the lower realms might continue in the future. Therefore we can't afford to be complacent; we really need to take on board that this is just a mere rest from the otherwise intense sufferings of the lower realms, and that we need to utilise these conditions now to the best of our ability.

So rejoicing is an incredibly profound practice and we should not underestimate its value. There are many different ways of rejoicing in the virtues, good qualities, status and so forth of others, as well as our own good deeds, virtues and merits of the past, present and future. In particular, we should keep in mind that rejoicing is a really practical practice that helps subdue our own mind and relieve a lot of unnecessary angst.

If we think about it, whenever we feel mentally unsettled, we will notice that it is very much related to what we see

and hear about others. We may see others doing very well and being successful and so forth, or hear about their achievements, which can cause us to feel very uncomfortable and unsettled, and create much mental pain. Then, out of jealousy, we may start to engage in criticism and so forth. So a lot of vices arise out of not being able to bear the good qualities and successes of others.

If we can really take on board the practice of rejoicing, then all of this unnecessary angst can be overcome. The achievements of others will no longer bother us because our mind will be happy and joyful about their achievements. If, whenever we see or hear about others doing well, we can immediately relate that to the fact that they are experiencing the good results of their past virtues and merits, and feel joyful about that, then that can really help to settle down our own mind.

As mentioned previously, it is very easy to develop a sense of pride in our own good deeds, virtues and achievements. Such egotistical pride destroys whatever virtues and merits we have otherwise accumulated. It is said that all of the Buddha's 84,000 teachings serve as an antidote to overcome the ego. So we need to understand how the practice of rejoicing is a means to overcome pride. When we develop a genuine sense of rejoicing, it helps to subdue the mind. Rather than feeling elated and pompous, we should feel grateful about having this opportunity. We should not be content with whatever skill or virtue we have developed but rather foster a keen wish to engage in practices to further develop ourselves. In this way we can see there are great benefits in this practice.

It would be really wonderful if we could find the means to overcome that which causes mental agony, such as a strong sense of pride as well as jealousy. There are those who have confided in me, 'I suffer from a strong ego'. When one acknowledges how ego hinders one's development, one can see how it is a great obstacle. Any simple practice that overcomes the agony and pangs of pride and jealousy, like the practice of rejoicing, is truly wonderful and of immense benefit.

1.1.2. Rejoicing in the virtues that are the causes of mere liberation, and in their effects

Here the virtues that one is rejoicing in *are the causes for mere liberation*. One needs to understand that in this context liberation refers to the liberation of hearers and solitary realisers from samsara or the cyclic existence. The very meaning of liberation is freedom. What are hearers and solitary realisers free from? From being bound to cyclic existence by karma and delusions. The analogy is of a person who is bound by a rope to a pole, who will gain his freedom when freed from those bonds. In applying the analogy, karma and delusions are like the rope which binds the person to the contaminated aggregates, likened to the pole, and we are the ones who are bound to contaminated aggregates by karma and delusions. Thus we experience various types of suffering as a result of being bound by karma and delusions to our own contaminated aggregates. That is how we need to understand the analogy of being bound by karma and delusions, and thus having to experience the various

types of suffering in cyclic existence. So the state of liberation is freedom from cyclic existence.

Mere liberation indicates that the virtues specified here are the virtues that are the cause for liberation from the sufferings of cyclic existence, but not the ultimate state of liberation, which is enlightenment.

The verse relating to this outline is:

2. *I rejoice in the accumulation of virtue
That becomes the cause for enlightenment.
I rejoice in the definite liberation
Of embodied beings from the sufferings of
cyclic existence.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

I also rejoice in the accumulation of the virtue which becomes the cause for the enlightenment of the hearers and self-liberators, such as the virtues that harmonise with liberation.

As mentioned previously, in this context *virtue* refers specifically to the virtues that harmonise with liberation. The *accumulation of virtue* refers to all of the virtues that are held with renunciation. Hearers and self-liberators achieve liberation by engaging in the ten virtues and the practices of the three higher trainings, which are morality, meditation and wisdom, on the basis of renunciation. So here we rejoice in our virtues that are in harmony with liberation, without any sense of pride, and we develop a joyful state of mind in having had the opportunity to accumulate such virtues.

Next comes rejoicing in the result, about which Gyaltsab Je says:

I also rejoice in the attainment of definite liberation from the sufferings of cyclic existence by embodied beings as a result of that virtue.

The *sufferings of cyclic existence* refers in general to the suffering of cyclic existence, and more specifically to having overcome pervasive compounded suffering, which serves as the basis for the other two types of suffering. The state of liberation is obtained when one is completely free from pervasive compounded suffering. One *rejoices* in the attainment of liberation from the sufferings of cyclic existence by the embodied beings, arhats or foe destroyers, the hearers and solitary realisers. So here rejoicing does not relate to ourselves, as we have not yet obtained liberation. The term *definite liberation* indicates that we need to rejoice in others having obtained that state. As we have not obtained liberation it refers to beings such as the hearers and solitary realisers and arhats, who have definitely achieved this state.

The practical benefit of rejoicing in this way is that it will establish an imprint in our mind to obtain the state of liberation ourselves. When we feel joyful and happy about others obtaining that state, we are acknowledging the great value of the achievement of that state of liberation, which is the state of being completely free from suffering.

Rejoicing like this encourages us to accumulate virtues which are held by renunciation. Any virtues we accumulate that are not held or based upon the mind of renunciation will merely become a cause for obtaining higher status. Rather than being completely free from the actual sufferings of samsara, higher status is only a

temporary release from the intense sufferings of the lower realms.

In comparison, the virtues which are not held or based on the mind of renunciation are not of much value. This encourages us to ensure that when we engage in virtue, it is based on a mind of renunciation, which means directing one's virtues towards the goal of being free from all the sufferings of cyclic existence, rather than just a temporary release from the suffering of the lower realms.

From this presentation we can also derive a greater understanding of the presentation of the three principals of the path, which are renunciation, the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta, and the realisation of emptiness.

- Virtues cannot serve as a cause for obtaining liberation if they are not held by the mind of renunciation. So the mind of renunciation is an essential element of the path, because it will ensure that whatever practice one does becomes a means to obtain the state of freedom from the suffering of cyclic existence.
- For any practice to become a cause for obtaining enlightenment, it has to be accompanied by the mind of awakening or bodhicitta. This altruistic mind ensures our practice of virtues and merits becomes the cause to obtain enlightenment. In other words, enlightenment is achieved in dependence on the merit accumulated held with the altruistic mind of bodhicitta.
- The realisation of emptiness ensures that whatever practice we do becomes an antidote to the very root of all our suffering, which is grasping at the self. Without the realisation of emptiness, we cannot overcome the grasping at the self.

That is why renunciation, bodhicitta and the realisation of emptiness are referred to as the three principal aspects of the path.

1.1.3. Rejoicing in the causes of highest enlightenment, and in their effects

The next two verses cover this heading

3. *I also rejoice in the enlightenment of the protectors
And in the grounds of the conqueror's children.*
4. *In the ocean of virtue that is the mind generation,
Which works for the happiness of all sentient beings,
And in the actions benefiting sentient beings
I rejoice with pleasure.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary states:

I also rejoice in the complete enlightenment of the protectors of migrators, and in the ten grounds of the Conqueror's children.

Here, *complete enlightenment* has the connotation that there is no enlightenment greater than the full enlightenment of Buddhahood. Nothing can surpass that final state of enlightenment.

The next part of the commentary reads:

I also rejoice with joy in the causes of these, the ocean of virtue that is the mind generation for complete enlightenment, which works for the happiness of all sentient beings, and also in the actions that benefit sentient beings.

Having presented the ultimate state of enlightenment and the ten grounds of the Conqueror's children, the commentary explains that *the causes of these* are firstly, *the ocean of virtue that is the mind generation for complete enlightenment*. The *mind generation of complete enlightenment* refers to the bodhicitta that is developed within the mental continuum of bodhisattvas. This bodhicitta is the cause of a great *ocean of virtues*, which indicates an incredible amount of virtue that bodhisattvas accumulate by working solely *for the happiness of all sentient beings*.

The second cause, *also in the actions that benefit sentient beings*, specifically relates to the actions or the deeds of the bodhisattvas which, as mentioned many times previously, are the six perfections. One thus acknowledges the great deeds of the bodhisattvas in practising the six perfections: the extent of their generosity, the deeds practised by the bodhisattvas to benefit sentient beings; the great extent of their morality and ethics that the bodhisattvas observe in order to benefit sentient beings; and likewise their patience, joyous effort, meditation and wisdom. Recalling the incredible deeds arising from engaging in the practices of the six perfections, one develops a genuine sense of appreciation and rejoices in the incredible deeds and merits of the bodhisattvas. As I have mentioned many times over, a glance summary of the bodhisattva path contains these two aspects: a being who is endowed with the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta, and who engages in the actions of the six perfections. The way to rejoice about this is then explained in the commentary:

On all of these I meditate with clear faith that is combined with mental happiness, and rejoice with pleasure.

So the way to rejoice is by *meditating* or contemplating these two aspects of bodhisattvas *with clear faith*. Of the different types of faith, clear faith refers to having a sound understanding of the qualities, combined with a sense of happiness and joy in acknowledging their great deeds. This is the way to rejoice in the causes of highest enlightenment and in their effects.

The different aspects of rejoicing are not too obscure. They are quite easy to understand and comprehend, so we can go through the following verses quite rapidly. Keep in mind that the practice of rejoicing is essential, a point specifically indicated when we take the bodhisattva vows when these lines are recited:

I take refuge in the Three Jewels
I confess all my negativities individually, and
I rejoice in the good deeds of myself and others.

As explained in the teachings, in order to develop even an aspirational mind of bodhicitta, the two main conditions need to be intact: purifying one's negativities, and accumulating merit. The rejoicing specified here is

one of the optimum methods for accumulating merit, and that is the significance of the practice of rejoicing.

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

Transcribed by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version

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