
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

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Based on the motivation that we have just generated, we can now engage in our meditation practice.

[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 myself, so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

1.5.1. Training in the thought of giving away one's body, possessions and roots of virtue

1.5.1.1. THE WAY OF GIVING (CONT.)

In our last session we introduced the topic of how we should give away our body, possessions and virtues of the three times.

The relevant verse reads:

11. *Also my body, possessions
And all virtues of the three times
I will give away without regret
To achieve the purpose of all sentient beings.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Also my body and possessions, such as food and drink, and all my virtues of the three times that are related to and contained in the three bases, I offer with a mind free from regret and dependence, to achieve the temporary and ultimate goals of sentient beings.

As explained in the commentary, one offers one's body, possessions and virtues to all sentient beings, for the purpose of *achieving the temporary and ultimate goals of sentient beings*. Giving should be *free from regret or dependence* on fame and so forth. Being free from regret, means that the gift should be free of any taint of miserliness. Any thoughts of, 'Oh, maybe I gave too much', or 'I wish I hadn't given that', would not be pure giving. Nor would giving in dependence on fame and so forth be a pure form of giving. In brief, giving should be done with the motivation of achieving either the temporary purpose of obtaining high status and liberation, or the ultimate purpose of achieving enlightenment. We need to keep that in mind.

One of the implications of being free from dependence is not to be dependent on a good result solely for ourselves, such as giving a meagre portion of our possessions with the intention of getting back more in return. Giving with such contrived intentions is not a pure practice of giving. Giving in dependence can also refer to giving in dependence on a greater return in the future, such as giving with the intention to accumulate the karma that will yield a good result in the future, just for ourselves.

That would be contrived giving because it is not free from self interest, i.e. it will be giving merely to achieve one's own purposes. The main point to understand is that if giving is contrived with impure thoughts of gaining good results merely for oneself, then that giving cannot be a cause for liberation and enlightenment. In fact, it is even doubtful whether it would be a cause for high status in one's future life.

We need to understand giving in the full context of the perfection of giving. As beginners we might not have developed the capacity to actually give away our body, possessions, and virtues right now; nevertheless these practices are presented as a significant method to help trainees develop the mind of giving.

As explained previously, the perfection of generosity can be divided into two stages. The *resultant state* of the perfection of generosity is where generosity has actually been perfected, thus reaching the stage of unsurpassed giving. The *causal aspect* of the perfection of generosity is to engage in acts of generosity while one is still training one's mind on the path to enlightenment. So the resultant name *perfection of generosity* is given to the cause—every act of giving, however meagre, being motivated by bodhicitta. Thus, we need to feel encouraged to practise generosity. We need to understand that this is how we train our mind to eventually have no hesitation in giving away our body, possessions and virtues for the benefit of others.

Another significant point is that this is a practice that overcomes self-grasping. Because of our self-grasping, we hold on to things very tightly, and so we are only able to give away limited amounts of our possessions and virtues, or our body. The stronger the sense of self-grasping, the more difficult it is to part from them.

If we begin by training in the thought of giving, then, as we develop the practice further, we can reach the point where we can give selflessly, without any hint of self-grasping. When one reaches the point where there is no hesitation in giving one's body, possessions and virtues for the benefit of sentient beings, then one has overcome self-grasping. If we are able to give away the very basis of our self-grasping, which is our body, our possessions and our virtues, then how could self-grasping exist alongside of that? It is just not possible. What we need to understand is that training in the perfection of giving is ultimately a means to overcome self-grasping, which is a much more profound way of understanding the benefit of practising generosity.

1.5.1.2. THE REASON ONE SHOULD DEFINITELY GIVE

This section is divided into two:

1.5.1.2.1. By giving up attachment to everything and offering one goes beyond misery or sorrow

1.5.1.2.2. Making offerings to sentient beings is appropriate as they are the supreme field for generosity

1.5.1.2.1. By giving up attachment to everything and offering one goes beyond misery, or sorrow

Here we can get the sense of the significance of the practice of generosity just from the outline. When the practice of generosity overcomes attachment, then by virtue of overcoming attachment at its very root, one will definitely obtain the state of liberation. As mentioned

previously, generosity is definitely connected with an understanding of selflessness, because without overcoming grasping at the self, one cannot possibly uproot attachment to one's body, possessions and virtues.

What I am sharing here is a more profound understanding of the practice, which is that by completely abandoning grasping at the self, one can overcome attachment to one's body, possessions and virtue. Then, as mentioned previously, there is no hesitation in giving, which in turn becomes a means to achieve the state beyond misery, or liberation. This is how we need to develop our understanding on a more profound level.

As we have learned from previous teachings, the essence of the path that is the main cause for achieving liberation, is gaining the realisation of selflessness, or emptiness. Thus emptiness, or selflessness, is the core realisation that one needs to obtain in order to achieve liberation. That is a key point to remember in this context.

The relevant lines of the root text are:

*12ab. Giving everything one goes beyond misery
My mind achieves the going beyond misery.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

My mind wants to achieve the non-abiding state beyond misery, and giving up one's body, possessions and all roots of virtue for the purpose of others, enables one to achieve that aim.

The *purpose of others* indicates that the giving has to be free from self-interest, and that one is giving entirely for the benefit of others. When it is free from self-interest, generosity *enables one to achieve one's aim*, which is to attain the *non-abiding state beyond misery*. From the very outset one practises with the aim of achieving that state beyond misery, which has two levels. One level of the non-abiding state beyond misery is where the deluded obscurations have been overcome. The other level is having overcome both the deluded obscurations as well as the obscurations to omniscience, i.e. the imprints of the delusions, and thus obtaining the ultimate state of enlightenment.

When taking the vows of ordination as a monk or nun the novice says, 'I take these vows with the intention of seeking liberation', so at the very outset the purpose of taking the vows is indicated. They are made with the intention of seeking liberation, which is why these vows are called the self-liberation vows. In fact any individual can seek liberation. If we have the mind that wants to achieve the non-abiding state beyond misery, then we can achieve that goal by engaging in the practice of giving up one's body, possessions and virtues for the purpose of others.

The commentary concludes with:

Hence it is appropriate to give up everything.

So giving one's body, possessions and merits is an appropriate practice.

1.5.1.2.2. Making offerings to sentient beings is appropriate as they are the supreme field for generosity

As sentient beings are the supreme field to accumulate merit, it is appropriate to make offerings to them.

The remainder of verse twelve reads

*12cd. To surrender everything at once
Is the supreme offering to sentient beings.*

The explanation in Gyaltsab Je's commentary is quite clear:

To surrender everything at once is equal to offering it, and to offer to sentient beings is the supreme offering, because through this offering one attains enlightenment.

Surrendering *everything is equal to offering everything*, but specifically making that offering *to sentient beings is the most supreme form of offering*. The main point here is that by offering to sentient beings, one attains enlightenment.

As explained here, the reason why sentient beings are supreme objects for practising generosity is because through the practice of generosity one will obtain the ultimate state of enlightenment. The very fact that we are able to engage in practices of purification and the accumulation of merit is due to the existence of sentient beings. As one of the lines in the *Eight Verses of Mind Training* reads, 'Sentient beings are more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel'. As explained in these teachings, sentient beings are extremely precious because by relying on them we will gain all our temporary and ultimate goals.

For example, meeting our temporary needs of food, clothing, and shelter is dependent on other sentient beings. Furthermore, the practices that are the causes for achieving liberation and the ultimate state of enlightenment are also dependent on sentient beings. Without sentient beings we could not engage in the practice of the six perfections—generosity, morality, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom. We engage in these practices only in relation to sentient beings, so sentient beings are the cause for us to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment.

If we wish to acquire wealth, we need to depend on others who have wealth—without the wealth of others how could we acquire wealth ourselves? Furthermore, to acquire knowledge we have to depend on teachers and instructors who can impart that knowledge. Thus, to achieve anything we have to depend on others.

As Shantideva mentions later on in this text, the moment we see sentient beings we need to generate the thought, 'It is through these beings that I will achieve enlightenment; thus I behold them with great love'. It is with this understanding that one looks at others with eyes of loving kindness. As Shantideva says so very succinctly, the moment we see any sentient beings we need to remember, 'These are the very beings that will help me achieve my ultimate goal of enlightenment'.

So the appropriate way to relate to any sentient being that we encounter is to recall their great kindness, and view them with loving kindness. Although these are very profound ways of training our mind they are quite easy to understand, and as we learn these techniques and methods we can slowly train our mind in appropriate conduct towards others. These are supreme methods to maintain our positive attitude towards other sentient beings.

If we are really keen on practising patience we will welcome those who test our patience! Otherwise how would we ever know what levels of patience we have actually developed? So rather than considering someone who irritates us as an enemy, or someone to be avoided, we can welcome the opportunity to further develop our practice of patience. Then we can definitely hold them dear, seeing them as a spiritual friend, a teacher, and an aid to our practice. When we really think about these truly amazing methods for developing our mind, we gain a sense of how astonishing the bodhisattva practices are. Then, at the very least, we can be inspired to undertake the same training. The great master Atisha was known to have a very irritating attendant. When others commented on that, Atisha said, 'It is thanks to him that I am rapidly developing my practice of patience!'

1.5.1.3. HOW TO PRACTISE AFTER THE OFFERING

Having made our offerings, how do we practise? What attitudes should we develop?

This has three subdivisions:

1.5.1.3.1. Henceforth I give up the idea of having control over my body

1.5.1.3.2. Explaining the meaning of this extensively

1.5.1.3.3. Relating it to suitable action

1.5.1.3.1. Henceforth I give up the idea of having control over my body

Gyaltsab Je begins his commentary on this section with this query:

How should one act after having offered one's body.

The answer to that is presented in this verse:

13. *Since I have offered this body
To all sentient beings, to do with it as they
please,
They can always kill it, criticise it,
Or beat it; whatever pleases them.*

The commentary goes on to explain:

Now that I have offered this body to all sentient beings to do with it as they please, it depends on what pleases them. They can always kill it, insult it with words or physically beat it and so on. I must give up attachment to my body and completely give up my anger towards others.

As the commentary explains, *I have offered this body to all sentient beings to do with it as they please*, which means you offer your body for others to do whatever they please with it. Since our body now depends on them, whether they choose to *kill* us or *insult* us or *beat* us is up to them. Thus by giving up attachment to one's body, one will *completely give up* any *anger* towards others when they inflict any kind of harm.

We can actually derive a great deal of inspiration from these words. We can see that that these extensive forms of dedications are also related to the practice of patience. When we reach the point of actually giving away our body, possessions, and virtues for the sake of others, then how could we become angry when this offer is taken up? There would be no reason to be angry when others harm one's body or criticise or insult one, because there is no longer any sense that one's body, possessions and virtues

belong to oneself. This is the optimal way to practise patience, as it gives us the means to not hold any grudge, or retaliate when others harm us.

Giving away our body, possessions and even our merits for the sole purpose of benefiting others is a supreme practice that prepares us for the last stages of our life. There will be no sense of attachment, because we will have already given up our body, possessions and even our merits, and dying with a mind free of attachment is the best way to experience death.

Giving away one's virtues for the purpose of others is, in fact, the best means to acquire an inexhaustible stock of merit. We can easily understand the process of using our body and possessions because they are tangible objects. But how do we use up our virtue? It is said that every pleasant experience is a result of virtue. So whenever we experience a temporary good result we are actually using up our merit and virtue. Whereas, if we dedicate our virtues for the benefit of all sentient beings, then whatever virtue we accumulate will be inexhaustible. So the act of selflessly giving away our virtue to all sentient beings is actually a supreme means to create an inexhaustible amount of virtue.

These practices are supreme methods to further increase our merits. When we understand the deeper benefit of this practice, we will develop a genuine sense of enthusiasm about engaging in the practice. Our strong sense of holding on to our possessions and body and virtues and so forth comes from a very narrow-minded and selfish attitude. Our self-cherishing is likened to an animal's horn, which is hard to its core. So, in order for this hard and tough attitude of selfishness to soften, we need to engage in these practices. When we take these practices to heart and gradually engage in them, then our strong sense of self-cherishing mind will start to loosen and become soft like wool. Indeed our whole demeanour will begin to transform to naturally become more gentle and kind.

1.5.1.3.2. *Explaining the meaning of this extensively*

14. *Whether they use it for play, amusement
Or to ridicule it,
Since I have already offered it
Why should it concern me?*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Since I have already unconditionally given my body to others, they should be able to do with it as they like. Henceforth, why should I concern myself with protecting it, even though they use it for play, amusement or ridicule it.

As the commentary explains, *since I have already unconditionally given my body to others they should be able to do whatever they like with it*. So *why should I concern myself with protecting it*, when others try to *ridicule* or *play* with it? There are times when people say things in jest that can go down the wrong way, which can be a source of hurt and so forth. If we have a strong sense of clinging to our identity, we are more vulnerable and prone to getting hurt.

The point here is that since we have given our body for the sake of others, then even though they use it for amusement or ridicule, it should not concern us—they

can do with it whatever they see fit. So here we can see the relationship between the practice of generosity and the practice of patience. As we have already given our body to others, we will willingly accept their ridicule or use of us as a source of amusement, and not retaliate by becoming angry.

1.5.1.3.3. *Relating it to suitable action*

This heading refers to ensuring that one's actions are suitable rather than inappropriate.

The next two lines of the verse read:

15ab. *I shall allow them any action
That does not harm them.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

I shall let them do any action with my body that benefits self and others and does not harm self or others at all times, now and in the future.

As the commentary explains, *let* others use *my body* with *any action* that will benefit self or others, and which will *not harm self or others*. Using the words *at all times* means now and in the future, referring to both temporary and ultimate benefits. One allows others to use one's body for whatever purpose they wish, as long as it does not cause harm, and brings benefit in this lifetime, as well as forming the basis to refrain from harm while benefitting others in future lifetimes.

1.5.2. *Dedicating it to be the source of inexhaustible virtue*

This heading has three subdivisions:

1.5.2.1. Dedicating it to be only the cause of the welfare of others

1.5.2.2. Dedicating the thought as the cause for inexhaustibility

1.5.2.3. Dedicating the action as the cause for inexhaustibility

1.5.2.1. DEDICATING IT TO BE ONLY THE CAUSE OF THE WELFARE OF OTHERS

This implies dedicating our practice to only benefit other beings and not cause them the slightest harm.

The next two lines of the verse are:

15cd. *May looking at me
Never be meaningless.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

May it never become the cause for sentient beings to be disappointed when they look to me for help.

These are really incredible aspirations which, if we reflect upon them, are really meaningful and inspiring. This dedication in brief is, *may* the mere sight of my body be *a cause* of benefit, and never a cause of harm, and *may it never* be a *cause* for others *to be disappointed*.

1.5.2.2. DEDICATING THE THOUGHT AS THE CAUSE FOR INEXHAUSTIBILITY

The verse relating to this is:

16. *Whether a mind of anger or faith,
Arises, directed at me,
May it become the cause for all their
purposes
To be continually fulfilled*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Regardless of whether it is a mind of anger or faith that has arisen, when directed at me may it become the cause that in all lifetimes all their temporary and ultimate aims are achieved.

Here *faith* can also refer to being appreciated by others. *Whether* others relate to me out of *anger* or out of appreciation, may that be *a cause* for the *achievement* of *all temporary and ultimate aims* in *all lifetimes*. So here is another incredible aspiration for the benefit of others.

1.5.2.3. DEDICATING THE ACTION AS THE CAUSE FOR INEXHAUSTIBILITY

The relevant verse reads:

17. *May whoever affronts me,
Harms me otherwise,
Or backstabs me
Have the fortune of enlightenment.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

May whoever affronts me verbally, or otherwise, physically harms me, or stabs me in the back, may all these actions become the cause for them to have the fortune of attaining the great enlightenment.

The Tibetan term translated here as '*affronts me verbally*' has a particular connotation of others criticising you to your face, rather than using slanderous, negative words behind your back. So the aspiration is that when someone harms me *verbally* in this way, or physically harms me, may all these harmful actions become the cause for them to have the fortune of attaining great enlightenment. We need to remember that these dedications are the great aspirations made by the Conqueror's children, the bodhisattvas.

1.5.3. *Dedicating it to be the cause of enjoyment*

This section is subdivided into three

1.5.3.1. Dedicating oneself to become the cause of necessities

1.5.3.2. Dedicating for time and expansive actions

1.5.3.3. Dedicating for uninterrupted continuum of object and time

1.5.3.1. DEDICATING ONESELF TO BECOME THE CAUSE OF NECESSITIES

There are three verses in this section of the text.

18. *May I become a protector for the unprotected,
A guide of those travelling along a path,
A ship, ferry or bridge
For those who want to cross.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

May I become thus a protector for those without a protector, in all lives a guide for those travelling along a path, a ship, ferry or bridge for those wishing to cross the waters.

The first aspiration is *may I become a protector* or refuge *for those without a protector* and who are in distress.

Next is *in all lives may I be a guide for travellers on a path*. In the past people like traders and so forth needed to travel long distances on foot, through treacherous, unfamiliar lands with many dangers. So, being a guide was a really useful and beneficial way to benefit others.

Furthermore, *may I also be a ship, a ferry and a bridge for those wishing to cross the waters*.

This relates to the distance to be crossed. To cross the oceans you need a ship. Over a shorter distance a ferry will suffice to make the crossing, while bridges can be built to cross small creeks and rivers. So the aspiration is to be a means for beings to cross over to the other side of the water.

19. *May I become an island for those wishing an island*
A place of rest for those who wish to rest
A slave for all embodied beings
Who desire a slave

Here the commentary explains:

May I become dry land for those who wish for an island, a lamp for those who desire a lamp, a resting place for those who desire to rest, a slave for all those who desire a slave.

When people have been at sea for a long time they need to find land where they can rest and replenish their supplies. So for those who desperately need to find land, *may I be like an island* with nice trees and so forth, for them to rest and enjoy.

Next is *a lamp for those who desire a lamp*. In ancient times it would be hard, if not impossible, to read texts and so forth in the evening without a lamp. So a lamp is essential to be able to read and study, for example. Thus a lamp can provide the means to benefit others. A more subtle connotation of a lamp is that it that removes the darkness of ignorance.

May I be a resting place for those who desire to take a rest. The Tibetan word *mal* also implies bedding. So here the aspiration is not only a place to rest but also for bedding, such as mattresses, cushions and for those in need to take a rest.

Lastly the text says, *May I be a slave for those who desire to have a slave*. The Tibetan word *dren*, literally translated as slave, doesn't carry a negative connotation. The connotation is more like an obedient assistant. So the dedication is to be an assistant that does everything for those needing help - such as the sick, the impoverished, the weak and the aged - helping them to fulfil all their needs and providing them with what they wish.

After calling for a show of hands of those who would not be going away at Christmas, Geshe-la then asked everyone to make an effort to attend the puja marking the passing away of Lama Tsong Khapa which, he said, would be very beneficial. He said that since there were so many staying home over the break there should not be an empty gampa.

He reminded us that many have commented how beneficial it was that there were sessions being held over the teaching break. The leader of the puja and classes will be Ally's Andrews and it would be good for her to have a few supporters.

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

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