
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ལྷན་མཁའ་འགྲུབ་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Based on the motivation we have just generated, we will engage in our meditation practice. [meditation]

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

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

1.5.3 Dedicating it to be the cause of enjoyment

1.5.3.1. DEDICATING ONESELF TO BECOME THE CAUSE OF NECESSITIES (CONT.)

There are three verses under this heading, the first two of which we covered last week. The third verse reads:

20. *May I become a wish-fulfilling jewel, a pure vase,
A knowledge mantra or powerful medicine,
A wish-fulfilling tree or cow
For embodied beings.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je gives this explanation of the verse:

May I be a wish-fulfilling jewel and a pure vase for those desiring food and drink and the like; a knowledge mantra accomplishing the actions of pacifying and increasing and so forth for those wishing to achieve those actions; the great medicine called the extraction of essence, which dispels all sicknesses; a wish-fulfilling tree that gives what is desired, such as food and drink; and a wish-fulfilling cow that can give whatever is desired by embodied beings.

Dedicate in such a way repeatedly.

The first of the aspirations in this verse is to become a *wish-fulfilling jewel* and a precious or *pure vase for those desiring food, drink and the like*. A *wish-fulfilling jewel* is a metaphor for something that is able to provide whatever one wishes for. So dedicating one's virtues to become a wish-fulfilling jewel that fulfils all wishes, hopes and desires is an incredibly noble aspiration. The second metaphor is the mythological *pure vase*, which is an inexhaustible treasure-like vase that can provide all of the necessities such as food, drink and so forth.

The second aspiration is to be like a *knowledge mantra accomplishing the actions of pacifying and increasing and so forth, for those wishing to achieve these actions*. There are four specific actions that are accomplished through the great power of mantra as an aid to benefit sentient beings: they are the controlling, wrathful, *pacifying* and *increasing* actions. The dedication here is that one may be a knowledge mantra with which these beneficial actions are accomplished.

The next aspiration is to be like *the great medicine called the extraction of essence*. Medicines that extract the essence of all essentials are a panacea that *dispels all sickness*.

The next two lines of the verse refer to the mythological treasures of the *wish-fulfilling tree that gives what is desired, such as food and drink*, followed by the *wish-fulfilling cow that can give whatever is desired by embodied beings*. These are dedications to fulfil all the necessities of sentient beings. As you will recall, both the wish-granting tree and the wish-fulfilling cow are included in the *Long Mandala Offering*. The wish-fulfilling tree is also mentioned in the *Guru Puja* as part of one's visualisation of the merit field.

The final line in the commentary, *Dedicate in such a way repeatedly*, is an exhortation to dedicate over and over again whatever virtues one has accumulated in the manner indicated in verses eighteen to twenty.

1.5.3.2. DEDICATING FOR EXPANSIVE TIME AND ACTIONS

This heading refers to dedicating that our actions be expansive and timeless.

The relevant verse reads:

21. *Like the elements of earth and so forth,
And like space as well,
May I always be the basis for the many
necessities
Of the boundless sentient beings.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation of this verse reads:

May I always become, in many ways, the cause for the necessities of boundless sentient beings, like the four elements of earth, water, fire and wind are the basis for the actions of sentient beings, and similar to space, which is permanent.

From the *Stacking of Jewels*:

Bodhisattvas work for the welfare of sentient beings like the five elements.

As indicated in the commentary, when bodhisattvas serve sentient beings they become the *cause for the necessities of boundless sentient beings like the four elements of earth, water, fire and wind*. We can all relate to the fact that the basis of both ourselves and the external world is the four elements, and that nothing can be sustained without these four elements. So the four elements are incredibly vast causes of every material object. Using the four elements as an example indicates the expansive nature of the aspiration to provide the necessities for boundless sentient beings.

The next part of the aspiration is to be like *space which is permanent*. Just like time, space has no limits, and this is another example indicating the extent to which one aspires to benefit sentient beings.

The commentary quotes from the *Stacking of Jewels Sutra* as a source, indicating that these are suitable and valid ways of dedicating. The five elements are the elements of earth, water, fire and wind, plus the space element. So the extent of a bodhisattva's wish to benefit sentient beings is the same as that of the five elements, which serve as a basis for all phenomena to function.

The five elements serve as the basis of all phenomena to function, including ourselves.

- The *earth* element is said to establish the basis and firmness of our existence. It holds everything firmly together. For example, the earth element holds the components of a flower together, just as it does with our bodies;
- The *water* element nurtures that which is established;
- The *fire* element helps it to mature;
- The *wind* element helps it to increase. Another aspect of the wind element is that it allows external substances like plants and so forth and our bodies to remain fresh. Without the wind element, bodies and flowers, for example, would rot and wither away.
- The *space* element is said to be that which allows phenomena to be established. Without the space element nothing could be established, because there would be no space in which to establish it. For example, you can put a lid on a cup of tea, and it remains there even when the cup is full because of the presence of the space element. Generally within space there is compounded space and uncompounded space. The space in the sky above us is an example of uncompounded space, whereas very tiny particles make up compounded space. This distinction is good to note as well.

The extent to which bodhisattvas work for the sake of sentient beings by providing all the basic necessities is similar to the extent of the five elements establishing all existence. So this extraordinarily expansive dedication of one's merits is an extremely noble dedication. When one has accumulated virtues, then one can dedicate them in this way. However, even as an aspiration it is incredibly worthwhile and meaningful.

The dedications presented here are also a personal instruction on how to engage in everyday practice. People often ask, 'What kind of aspirations should I hold?', 'What are the kind of prayers that I should do?' So if you are in doubt about the kind of prayers, or the extent of how to dedicate your merit, then you need look no further than Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara* which explains very clearly how to make extensive dedications and aspirations. Furthermore, if you wonder about how to engage in the practice of prostrations, then again, you will find the explanation in Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara*. Likewise the *Bodhicharyavatara* explains how to do confession and purification practices. Rejoicing and requesting the gurus and the buddhas to remain is also explained in this very noble text, as is making requests for turning the wheel of Dharma to ensure the flourishing of the Dharma. So whenever we have a question about practice, we will find it explained very clearly in Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara*. The point here is that the benefit of studying this text is that it is the optimum resource on how to engage in our practices.

1.5.3.3. DEDICATING FOR UNINTERRUPTED CONTINUUM OF OBJECT AND TIME

Basically *uninterrupted continuum* means to continuously extend one's dedications and aspirations, without any interruptions. This means that nothing should come between one's aspirations, and to the extent they will

benefit sentient beings. The verse relating to this heading is:

22. *Likewise, may I be the cause for the livelihood
Of all the realms of sentient beings,
That stretch until the edge of space,
Until they all go beyond misery.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Likewise, may I also become the cause for the livelihood of all the realms of sentient beings, which extend to the edge of space, by benefiting them in infinite ways, until they go beyond misery.

Train the mind like this again and again.

Likewise, may I also become the cause for the livelihood of all the realms of sentient beings, which extend to the edge of space is an indication of vast numbers of sentient beings. *One benefits them in infinite ways, until they go beyond misery.* That is a reference to the uninterrupted time over which one extends one's dedication—until all sentient beings, who are infinite as space, reach the ultimate state of going beyond misery—which is complete enlightenment. Then the commentary exhorts us to *train the mind*, or meditate in this way, *again and again*.

The personal instruction is that we need to take every opportunity to make as many expansive dedications and aspirations as possible. It is through this sort of training that we implant the imprints to actually work for the welfare of sentient beings as extensively as the buddhas and bodhisattvas. We also gain an insight of how the buddhas obtained their state of enlightenment. Thus we get an inkling of the vast activities of the buddhas and bodhisattvas from the fact that they have surpassed these very extensive aspirations.

Here Gyaltsab Je is exhorting us to train our mind again and again. This means that we need to take every opportunity, not just once or twice, but again and again, to familiarise our mind with making these expansive dedications and aspirations. These are the means of a supreme practice.

2. ACTUAL

Having covered the explanations under the first heading in the chapter Preparation, we now come to the second heading, Actual, which explains how to actually take the bodhisattva vows. This is contained in the next two verses.

23. *Just as the previous tathagatas
Generated the mind of enlightenment
And continued in the gradual
Trainings of a bodhisattva,*
24. *I too shall generate the mind of enlightenment
For the welfare of sentient beings,
And train step-by-step
In the trainings.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

When the previous tathagatas generated the mind of enlightenment they initially generated the supreme wishing bodhicitta in front of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and then, to take the bodhisattva vows, they generated engaging bodhicitta. Subsequently, they trained and remained in the gradual bodhisattva trainings.

Likewise I, for the temporary and ultimate benefit of sentient beings, either in front of an actual preceptor

with pure bodhisattva vows, or in front of invoked buddhas and bodhisattvas, upon the request for attention, shall generate the wishing mind of enlightenment. Likewise, I shall train and remain in the gradual trainings upon having generated an engaging mind.

Repeat the verses three times, either after the preceptor, or, if there is none, after the invoked buddhas and bodhisattvas.

As the commentary explains, *we repeat these two verses three times after a preceptor if they are present, or if there is no preceptor, we imagine repeating them after the invoked buddhas and bodhisattvas.*

As you should know, there are two stages of generating bodhicitta: aspiring bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta.

It is when one generates the engaging bodhicitta attitude that one actually takes the bodhisattva vows with all the commitments. Generating the aspiring bodhicitta on the other hand, is not defined by the ritual of recitation. It involves merely generating an altruistic mind such as, 'May I obtain the state of enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings', accompanied by a commitment to not give up the altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment; and to adopt the four white dharmas, and abandon the four black dharmas or negativities. These eight dharmas were mentioned in chapter one and your homework then was to find out what they are.

Basically, generating aspirational bodhicitta involves making the commitment to generate that mind of enlightenment three times during the day, and three times during the night, and not to give up that aspiration. As it does not involve making a commitment to uphold all of the bodhisattva vows, it is a mere aspiration and not actually a vow.

Now, can those of you who do the *Six-session Guru Practice* tell me the line that comes after the four immeasurables?

Student: Not to give up the mind of enlightenment even at the cost of my life.

With aspirational bodhicitta one promises not to give up that aspiration, whereas with engaging bodhicitta, as exemplified in the *Six-session Practice*, one promises never to forsake those vows even at the cost of one's life. That's the main distinction between aspirational bodhicitta and the actual bodhisattva vows.

Aspiring bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta can be presented sequentially or simultaneously i.e. at the same time. This is a simultaneous presentation. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama indicated in Sydney earlier this year, when you take the vows sequentially, some lines relate to aspirational bodhicitta and other lines relate specifically to the engaging bodhisattva vows. He then very clearly distinguished the lines containing aspirational bodhicitta from the lines relating to the engaging bodhisattva vows. Do you recall that?

As presented in the *Six-session Guru Practice*, the manner of taking the vows is to first take refuge, followed by generating the four immeasurable thoughts and then generating aspirational bodhicitta, followed by engaging bodhicitta. Next comes the request to the gurus to please pay attention to us. Then one absorbs the deity and the

guru into oneself, and generates great joy. The main point is that the presentation in these two verses can be combined with the *Six-session Guru Practice* that some of you do regularly. Indeed, it is good to combine the two presentations to gain a complete understanding.

The purpose and manner of taking the vows

Returning to the commentary, *when the previous tathagatas generated the mind* refers to conquerors such as Shakyamuni Buddha, Mitrukpa, Amitahba, Medicine Buddha and so forth. At the beginning of chapter one there was an extensive explanation of what *tathagata* means.

Having generated *engaging bodhicitta the tathagatas subsequently trained in and remained in the gradual bodhisattva trainings*, which include the practices of the six perfections and the four means of gathering disciples. *Likewise I* indicates that just as the previous bodhisattvas generated aspirational bodhicitta, and then took the engaging bodhisattva vows, followed by engaging in the trainings of the six perfections and the four means of gathering disciples, I too will follow their example. The intention of this practice is *for the temporary and ultimate benefit of sentient beings*.

One way of taking the vows is *in front of an actual preceptor with pure bodhisattva vows*. Thus the preceptor should be someone who is endowed with pure bodhisattva vows. It is said that when one takes these vows in front of great pure masters who practise bodhicitta, it will help one to be conscientious about maintaining and upholding those vows. That is because the two mental factors of shame and embarrassment can easily arise when there is danger of breaching those vows. So taking the vows from an actual pure preceptor is quite significant.

If a preceptor is not present, one takes one's vows *in front of the invoked buddhas and bodhisattvas*. The commentary is clearly indicating that one does not have to rely on the presence of a preceptor in order to take the bodhisattva vows; one can also take the bodhisattva vows in front of the envisioned buddhas and bodhisattvas.

'*Upon the request for attention*' is another one of the elements of taking the bodhisattva vows. In the *Six-session Guru Practice*, there is this line: 'O lamas, buddhas and bodhisattvas, please pay attention to me'. So one seeks the attention of the lamas, the buddhas and the bodhisattvas in order to take the bodhisattva vows.

What follows from this is that, *I shall generate the wishing mind of enlightenment*. One generates the thought, 'For the sake of all sentient beings may I achieve enlightenment', which is aspirational bodhicitta.

Following that generation of aspiring bodhicitta, *I shall train and remain in the gradual trainings upon having generated the engaging mind*. Thus the engaging mind of bodhicitta is based on the earlier aspiration to achieve enlightenment for all sentient beings. What is added to the aspirational mind is the commitment, 'I will engage in the practices of the six perfections as way to develop my own mind, and engage in the practices of the four means of gathering disciples as a way to benefit others'.

As explained in the commentary, one *repeats* these two verses *three times*, and at the end of the third recitation the vows are actually established in one's mental continuum. As explained in the commentary, one repeats these verses either following a preceptor if a preceptor is present, or, if there is no preceptor, imagine repeating it after the invoked buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Of course, I have presented all of this previously, but I don't know how much you have retained. What also needs to be understood is that those doing, for example, the Nyung Nae practice, would take the eight Mahayana precepts in front of the preceptor if there is one present. If there is no preceptor present, then one takes those precepts in front of a visualised Avalokiteshvara; envisioning that one has taken those vows or precepts from Avalokiteshvara himself. Indeed, whenever one wishes to take the Mahayana precepts, it will suffice if one visualises all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and takes the eight Mahayana precepts in their presence.

In relation to *I shall train and remain in the gradual trainings*, the term *gradual training* is as explained by Gyaltsab Rinpoche. There are some variations in other texts, but most versions are quite similar.

The meaning of training gradually

Gyaltsab Je goes on to explain the meaning of training gradually.

The meaning of training gradually: Practices like the generosity of one's body should not be done with an impure mind. Otherwise it becomes a fault. It should be done when it does not become a fault and rather becomes a great accumulation of merit.

Using the example of the practice of generosity as an example, one needs to train first in practising generosity within one's comfort zone, i.e. begin with giving something small. Then increase that generosity gradually, so that even though there is a greater level of generosity it is still comfortable to give.

More specifically one is advised against giving one's body initially, as it could become a fault if one is not properly prepared. The perfect time to give one's body is when one has reached the level of training where it is only a means to accumulate great merit. When one reaches that level of training, it is permissible and appropriate to give one's body. So this presentation explains the meaning of training gradually by using an example.

Gyaltsab Je further clarifies:

Some opponents posit that the meaning of sequential training is that one trains sequentially in the three moralities according to boundary, and this is incorrect.

The three moralities are the morality of restraint, the morality of building up virtue and the morality of benefiting others. *According to boundary* refers to the fact that some have posited that the morality of restraint is practised during the first path, the path of accumulation; the morality of building up virtue is practised on the path of preparation; and the morality of benefiting others is practised on the Arya paths, from the path of seeing onwards. So the practice of training *sequentially* refers to

assigning each of the three moralities to one of the bodhisattva paths. However that is not correct.

As I have explained previously, all of the bodhisattvas' activities can be subsumed into two main categories: engaging in activities to ripen oneself and engaging in activities to ripen other sentient beings. There are no activities that are not combined in these two.

The morality of restraint and the morality of building up virtue are practices that specifically relate to ripening one's own mental continuum, whereas the morality of benefiting others is an activity of ripening other sentient beings. This is how all the bodhisattvas' activities are subsumed into the three moralities.

The six perfections can also be subsumed into two: those that are mainly to fulfil one's own purpose and those that are mainly practices to fulfil the purpose of others. I have explained this extensively in the past, however it will be presented later in this text.

Furthermore:

Others posit the meaning as having a separate ceremony for the generation of the engaging mind, and the engaging vows. This is also incorrect according to any of the great pioneers.

To take the engaging mind after having first taken the wishing aspiring mind and then training in the wish to practice the perfections is the supreme method that accords with the differences in different persons. It is also suitable to take the two minds sequentially in one ceremony.

Then Gyaltsab Je summarises his commentary on the actual method of generating the mind of enlightenment thus:

The way of taking them and so forth one can know from the earlier mentioned treatises of the great teacher.

The *great teacher* specified here refers to Lama Tsong Khapa.

Thus, I shall not elaborate on it here.

This is a reference to the explanations in Lama Tsong Khapa's texts, which I have also explained earlier. Perhaps it may seem that I elaborate too much, however it seems that whenever some point comes up I have already mentioned it somewhere else—but I don't know how much of it you retain.

What is important for us to really keep in mind is that these are the instructions on how to take the bodhisattva vows. For those who are inclined and who have previously taken the vows, it is permissible, indeed necessary, to take these vows throughout one's practices. As we have seen, we take these vows on the basis of refuge. So reciting the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Praye*, with the proper motivation and intention, and appropriate visualisation will suffice as a means to take the bodhisattva vows.

3. CONCLUSION

The conclusion is subdivided into two parts:

- 3.1. Rejoicing oneself
- 3.2. Inducing others to rejoice

3.1. Rejoicing oneself

This again is subdivided into two:

3.1.1. Achieving one's own purpose

3.1.2. Achieving the purpose of others

3.1.1. Achieving one's own purpose

This has three subdivisions:

3.1.1.1. Rejoicing by uplifting the mind

3.1.1.2. Meditating on conscientiousness after having found such a mind

3.1.1.3. Having found a mind that is difficult to find

3.1.1.1. REJOICING BY UPLIFTING THE MIND

There are two verses under this heading.

25. *After the wise ones*

Took very joyfully the mind of enlightenment,

To engage and increase

They praise the mind like this:

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

After the wise bodhisattvas have taken the two bodhicittas with a very clear joyful mind and faith, they engage in methods for it to not degenerate and to increase its practice. Towards this end they generate joy and praise the mind.

As the commentary explains, when *the wise bodhisattvas* take the *bodhicitta* vows they do so *with a very clear and joyful mind* that is full of *faith*¹. With this mind *they engage in methods for it to not degenerate and to increase its practice*. Thus, *they generate joy and praise the mind* that has been developed. In other words, when they see what they have generated, they develop a great sense of joy, and their mind is uplifted.

Gyaltsab Je introduces the next verse in this way:

If we explain how:

Then comes the verse.

26. *Today my life has become fruitful,*

The human existence was well attained.

Today I was born into the buddha family

Now I have become a child of the buddhas

Gyaltsab Je's commentary to this verse reads:

Today, as I generate the mind of enlightenment and take the vows, my life has become fruitful, my human existence has been well attained and the freedoms and endowments have become meaningful. Today I have been born into the family of the buddhas and become a bodhisattva.

In relation to the aspiration, 'When will I become a child of the Buddha', you generate joy by thinking 'Now I have become a child of the buddhas'.

As the commentary explains, the way to uplift the mind is by contemplating in this way: At this time, *when I have generated the mind and taken the vows, my life has become fruitful, my human existence is well attained and the freedoms and endowments have become meaningful*. This is indicating the great value and worthiness of generating such a mind. When we ask, 'How do we take the essence of a precious human rebirth?' then this is the most supreme way of taking the essence of this human rebirth with its freedoms and endowments — using it to generate that mind of enlightenment and taking the bodhisattva vows.

Our mind is uplifted when we contemplate how, by generating this mind, we have made our life most worthwhile and meaningful.

One further contemplates how, 'I have been born in the family of the buddhas and have become a bodhisattva'. The indication here is that generating bodhicitta and taking the bodhisattva vows is the hallmark of entering the path of the Great Vehicle. In fact, it is actually the doorway to the Mahayana path. So we contemplate, 'Today I have entered the Mahayana path, so I have actually entered the ranks of the Conqueror's children, and become a bodhisattva'. This is how one uplifts one's mind.

It follows that having developed these aspirations, one is keen about becoming a bodhisattva, thus generating the thought, 'When will I become a child of the buddhas? When will I become a bodhisattva?' The answer is, 'Today! Today is the day when I have fulfilled my repeated aspirations and endeavour to become a bodhisattva and thus become one of the Conqueror's children'. Thus, one generates joy by thinking, 'I have fulfilled my aspirations; now I am a child of the buddhas'.

If we wonder why the bodhisattvas are referred to as the Conqueror's or the Buddha's children, we need to recall that just as the crown prince who automatically succeeds the king carries on the lineage of his family, the bodhisattvas are those who carry on the lineage of the Buddha's doctrine. That is why they are referred to as the Conqueror's children'.

Even though Buddha Shakyamuni is not present in these times, we are definitely receiving his teachings and doctrines through his many lineage holders. Nagarjuna also explained this clearly in his commentary on bodhicitta—you would have received those teachings many times in the past.

Next Tuesday will be our last session for the year as I will be going to India earlier than I anticipated.

In any case, we have come to the auspicious point where we generate bodhicitta and joy about having generated that bodhicitta. Generating a sense of joy in partaking activities with a bodhicitta mind and attitude is the best way to really enjoy life.

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

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Edited Version

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¹ These are three points that are normally indicated in the teachings.