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# *Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

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Based on the refuge and bodhicitta prayer and motivation that we have generated, we can now engage in meditation.

The most important thing is to visualise sentient beings who are deprived of happiness and genuinely and sincerely wish them happiness and goodness. Focus on beings who are experiencing tremendous suffering, and develop a very strong intention to free them from that suffering; to do one's utmost to make it happen, for them to be free from suffering. So with that intention in one's heart, engaging in the practice becomes more meaningful. Without visualising sentient beings deprived of happiness and experiencing suffering, and wishing them to be free from suffering, then one's meditation practice is on the surface with no real substance. [*meditation*]

So we'll now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

In order to benefit all sentient beings, to lead them to ultimate happiness and free them from all sufferings, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. For this purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice well.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

#### **3.1. Rejoicing (cont.)**

Having completed the topic Achieving One's Own Purpose we now turn to the second part of this section of the text.

##### **3.1.2. Achieving the purpose of others**

Achieving the purpose of others is based on aspiring to develop the mind of enlightenment, the bodhicitta attitude. What is being encouraged here is to develop that mind so that one will be able to benefit others. Benefiting others is really the ultimate point of why we are striving to develop this state of mind that aspires to achieve enlightenment. So, the main point is to familiarise one's mind again and again with the intention to benefit others. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentions regularly, at our beginners' level, whilst we might not have developed actual bodhicitta yet, we can definitely generate the intentions 'I will not harm any living being' and 'I will engage in benefitting others as much as I can'. His Holiness says that even generating this state of mind at a beginners level can serve as a substitute for bodhicitta. Thus, focusing on this intention regularly and establishing it firmly in our minds is highly meaningful.

When we intentionally devote ourselves to cultivating this state of mind and further strengthen it, then as it becomes firmly established the result is that our mind naturally becomes happier and more joyful. Through this familiarity one is in fact establishing all the right

conditions to develop actual bodhicitta, whereby the joy and happiness in our minds will increase unceasingly.

Indeed, developing this intention directly opposes the self-cherishing mind; an attitude that is completely obsessed with one's own self interests and which has a strong focus merely on 'I' or 'me'. As this positive state of mind that intends to benefit others opposes the self-cherishing attitude, it also serves as an antidote for overcoming the manifest levels of grasping at the self. Whilst it is not an actual antidote for abandoning the grasping at the self at its very root, it does serve as a means to minimise an otherwise strong sense of grasping at the self. For as long as one maintains a firm intention to benefit others and not to intentionally harm them in any way, there is no room for anger to arise, no room for jealousy to arise and no room for the strong sense of 'I' or 'me', that which focuses merely on one's own personal interests, to arise. Thus, whilst directly opposing the self-cherishing mind, it can also loosen the strong hold of the self-grasping mind.

If we were to sincerely investigate, we will come to notice that on a daily basis most of our thoughts, ideas and attitudes are driven by a strong grasping to the 'I'. An exception may be when we are sleeping, but in the waking period during most of our activities, if we were to ask ourselves, 'What is the driving force behind my actions?' we will find that it is mostly driven by self-interests which are related to a strong sense of grasping to the 'I'. As such, familiarising ourselves with a state of mind that opposes such a strong focus on the 'I' becomes a very high level practice. We need to adopt practical ways to cultivate the means to help overcome our chronic obsession with the self-cherishing mind.

Generating a positive attitude in one's mind and trying to maintain it becomes an optimum meditation practice in itself. As one becomes familiar with this positive attitude and maintains it, the mind naturally settles down to a clear and calm state. It is also an optimum Dharma practice because one is actively following the core advice of the Buddha: not to harm any living being and only benefiting sentient beings. This is really the ultimate intention and advice of all buddhas and bodhisattvas. Buddha Shakyamuni clearly mentions in the sutras: 'if you harm sentient beings you are harming me; if you benefit sentient beings you are benefiting me'. Notice the Buddha doesn't say, 'if you harm me then that is negative'. Rather, he says: 'If you don't wish to harm me stop harming sentient beings. If you wish to benefit me then benefit sentient beings'. So this shows the unequalled love and compassion that Buddha has for all sentient beings. Intentionally generating this state of mind and focusing on it becomes an optimum means to benefit oneself in this and future lives. In relation to both short-term and long-term benefit, it is really the optimum practice because it serves the purpose of fulfilling the wishes of all sentient beings. We can all relate to the fact that every single sentient being only wishes for happiness and does not intentionally wish to experience any suffering. So, when we actually generate a state of mind that wishes all sentient beings to experience happiness and further engage in ways to benefit them, whilst wishing all beings to be free from suffering and actively

refrain from harming them, then one is actually fulfilling the needs and wishes of *all* sentient beings. One is not leaving any sentient being out, because every sentient being ultimately has this same wish. Thus, the practical approach to understanding the great benefit of generating this state of mind is to remember that you are ultimately fulfilling the wishes of all sentient beings.

By understanding this we can relate to how the bodhisattvas are always engaged in fulfilling two purposes: their own purpose, which ultimately is to fulfil the purpose of benefiting other sentient beings. Thus cultivating this state of mind benefits oneself by calming one's own mind. While I cannot personally claim that I have much experience, I do spend significant time generating this state of mind. I find that it really helps to settle and quieten the mind and make it more receptive to being virtuous. To that extent it becomes a very practical means to induce a positive and pure state of mind. If one makes a genuine attempt, one will definitely see the practical benefit on one's own mind. Thus, I encourage you and remind you again and again of the practical benefits that such a state of mind brings.

This outline, *Achieving the Purpose of Others* is subdivided into three categories.

#### 3.1.2.1. It can eliminate the sufferings of sentient beings

This points out again that serving the purpose of others requires eliminating their sufferings and very succinctly shows how this is done.

##### 3.1.2.2. It can eliminate its cause (its obscurations)

Again, not only does this mind eliminate the suffering of sentient beings but also the very causes which are the obscurations. Even though it is not explicitly presented here, we can relate this to the Four Noble Truths, particularly the first Noble Truth of suffering, and the second Noble Truth, which is the origination of suffering. If you can relate generating the bodhicitta attitude to the Two Truths it helps to eliminate suffering of sentient beings as well as the cause, the origination of suffering.

The obscurations here relate specifically to the deluded obscurations and the obscurations to omniscience, which encompass the origin of suffering. We derive a deeper understanding when we relate it to the Four Noble Truths.

##### 3.1.2.3. It can achieve all benefit and happiness

Take special note that this relates to not only being able to achieve some minor level of happiness, but all benefit and happiness. So this is the extent to which the bodhicitta mind can benefit.

#### **3.1.2.1. It can eliminate the sufferings of sentient beings**

This is further divided into five sub-categories:

##### 3.1.2.1.1. It can destroy the lord of death

##### 3.1.2.1.2. It destroys poverty

##### 3.1.2.1.3. It destroys sickness

##### 3.1.2.1.4. It destroys the suffering of existence in general

##### 3.1.2.1.5. It destroys specifically the sufferings of the lower realms

#### **3.1.2.1.1. It can destroy the lord of death**

Amongst the various sufferings we experience e.g. suffering of birth, sickness etc. this heading relates particularly to the suffering of death.

The first two lines of the verse relating to this point are:

*29ab. It is also the supreme nectar  
Destroying migrator's lord of death.*

The commentary explains:

This bodhicitta is also the supreme nectar that destroys the lord of death through whom migrators die without freedom of choice.

*Dying without freedom* means that sentient beings have no choice over their mortality and have to experience death. That is the meaning of dying without freedom.

Bodhicitta serving as *the supreme nectar that destroys the lord of death* indicates that while there are other kinds of nectars, like those produced through the achievements of humans and gods, bodhicitta is the most supreme, as it is the one able to destroy the very lord of death. Thus, bodhicitta is likened to nectar of immortality. The *Prayer to Maitreya* reads:

Bodhicitta bars the way to unfortunate destinies;  
It is the great teaching that leads to the highest realms;  
And even to the state beyond old age and death.  
To the mind of enlightenment, bodhicitta, I prostrate.

We can relate here to how bodhicitta is the supreme method for overcoming the lower rebirths, the supreme means for achieving the higher realms, and the supreme means to overcome aging and death.

In praise of bodhicitta, His Holiness the Dalai Lama quoted this very verse in the teachings in Sydney last year. This verse definitely summarises the qualities of bodhicitta. This is exactly how it is presented in the text here — developing bodhicitta becomes the means to overcome all unfortunate rebirths, leads one to the higher realms and to the state of being free from aging and death. Here the ultimate state of immortality is liberation, and the ultimate liberation is enlightenment. While it is possible to obtain the self-liberation of the lower vehicles without developing bodhicitta, i.e. the hearers and solitary realiser's state of liberation, there is no way that one can achieve enlightenment without first developing bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the optimum cause for achieving enlightenment, and by relating to the benefits of developing it and maintaining it in one's continuum, a strong sense of awe can be generated in one's mind. Thus, one contemplates how wonderful bodhicitta is and the extensive benefits it brings. By developing bodhicitta one is able to achieve the most incredibly profound goal. Thus, by relating to the benefits of bodhicitta in this way, one will develop a great sense of awe, and a real inspiration that will leave the strong positive imprints to develop bodhicitta in one's mind. One will be inclined to develop bodhicitta oneself, because one sees the great value in it.

One needs to understand the explanation here in its proper context. When it says it can *destroy the lord of death* it is not referring to obtaining a miraculous feat, such as going around destroying suffering in other beings and freeing them from death without them having to create

any causes and conditions; this is definitely not what is being implied here.

Developing bodhicitta will definitely have a great positive effect upon others. As the great Khunu Lama Rinpoche mentions<sup>1</sup>:

The sheer fact of having bodhicitta within one's own mental continuum,  
Naturally brings great solace to others  
Even animals feel a great sense of comfort and fearlessness,  
Not to mention humans and other beings alike.

So, developing bodhicitta oneself, even without any intentional activity on one's part, can bring so much comfort and ease to those around oneself.

However, the actual way that it eliminates sufferings and destroys the lord of death is by imparting the methods and teachings to others, particularly the teachings on what to adopt and what to discard. By presenting beings with the unmistakable teachings of how to accumulate virtue and abandon negativities, and when they adopt those teachings and practices, they will overcome their own sufferings and the causes of sufferings, ageing and death. Imparting advice to others needs to be in accordance with understanding their mental disposition and with a loving and kind attitude. Thus, presenting the unmistakable teachings to others with love and compassion is dependent on having developed bodhicitta oneself first. So this is how developing bodhicitta oneself actually helps to eliminate sufferings and death in other sentient beings. This is the proper way to understand this point.

As mentioned in the commentary, the way bodhicitta destroys the lord of death is by leading sentient beings to the ground which is free from old age and death.

### 3.1.2.1.2. *It destroys poverty*

The indication here is that bodhicitta becomes a cause to overcome or destroy poverty. The next two lines of the verse read:

29cd. *It is also the inexhaustible treasure  
That eliminates sentient being's poverty.*

The commentary meaning is that

Because it gives inexhaustible material and Dharma, this mind generation is an inexhaustible treasure that eliminates the poverty of migrators.

Actually the meaning of the verse and explanation is quite clear. Generating bodhicitta also becomes the ultimate means for achieving the state where one has complete control over material gain as well as Dharma. When a bodhisattva reaches the eighth ground they obtain complete control over material wealth and knowledge of Dharma, and thus it becomes inexhaustible. It is like having an *inexhaustible treasure* house that can *eliminate the poverty of migrators*.

So this is how bodhisattvas benefit sentient beings. Initially, through their acts of generosity and kindness to others, they gather sentient beings close and then they impart their knowledge of the Dharma.

Other benefits touching on the same point are presented by Khunu Lama Rinpoche as:

The nectar of the mind is bodhicitta,  
The jewel of the mind is bodhicitta,  
The moon of the mind is bodhicitta  
The sun of the mind is bodhicitta.

We can see that the way Khunu Lama Rinpoche presents the benefits of the bodhicitta from his own experience is aligned to how Shantideva presents the same meaning of the benefits of bodhicitta. Through his work from his own experience, we can definitely see that Khunu Lama Rinpoche was definitely a great practitioner of bodhicitta. Khunu Lama Rinpoche also said:

Bodhicitta is the optimum way to benefit others,  
Bodhicitta is the optimum means for guiding others,  
Bodhicitta is the optimum means to teach others.

It is presented in poetic form with very succinct meaning regarding the benefits of bodhicitta. Furthermore, he mentions:

If one wishes to benefit other sentient beings, that is done through bodhicitta;  
If one wishes to be the friend of others, then the best way to do that is through developing bodhicitta.  
Being a source of reliance, then that is achieved through bodhicitta.

Khunu Lama Rinpoche also mentions that if one wishes to be a virtuous teacher to others, then the optimum way is by generating bodhicitta. This is in line with what Lama Tsong Khapa mentions—without generating the wish for others to be free from suffering and for others to obtain happiness there is no way that one can really benefit others. So, the wish to benefit others is based upon wishing others to be free from suffering and to gain happiness.

### 3.1.2.1.3. *It destroys sickness*

The verse which relates to this is the next two lines:

30ab. *It is also the supreme medicine  
Pacifying migrators' heavy diseases.*

The commentary reads:

It is also the supreme medicine that thoroughly pacifies all diseases of migrators.

The meaning of the verse is very clear here. The commentary explains *bodhicitta is the supreme medicine that thoroughly pacifies the disease of migrators*. The meaning here is linked to the earlier explanation, that the way it pacifies the diseases of other migrators is by presenting them with teachings of what to adopt and what to discard, to achieve the state of being free from disease.

As explained in the teachings, the ultimate source of migrators' sickness and disease is basically the three poisons: attachment, anger and ignorance. These really serve as the basis for all kinds of diseases and all sufferings. So the way bodhisattvas benefit beings to eliminate their sicknesses is by presenting antidotes to the three poisons. To overcome attachment, meditate on the unattractive features of the object of attachment. To overcome anger, meditate on love. To overcome ignorance, meditate on interdependent origination and emptiness. Presenting specific antidotes overcomes specific delusions, which are the very causes of all sufferings and diseases. Meditating on them and applying the antidote becomes the means to overcome the particular diseases of attachment, anger and

<sup>1</sup> Khunu Lama Rinpoche, *Vast as the Heavens, Deep as the Sea*.  
Chapter 3

ignorance, thus overcoming all sickness. This is how bodhicitta becomes the means to eliminate the sicknesses of other beings.

#### 3.1.2.1.4. *It destroys the suffering of existence in general*

The verse which relates to this is the next two lines:

*30cd. It is the fruit tree that is a resting place for  
migrators,  
Who wander the paths of existence and are  
tired.*

The commentary reads:

It is also the fruit tree that provides a cool resting place for the migrators who are wandering on the paths of existence and are tired.

The analogy presented in the commentary is that like a tree that provides a cool resting place, those who need that rest are *migrators*, endlessly wandering on the path of existence and extremely tired. The teachings refer to the three types of existence: birth, death and the intermediate state. So, endlessly cycling through the three types of existence, migrating from one existence to the next, beings are extremely tired. Just as a large fruit tree would provide a cool resting place for those travelling in the heat and sun, bodhicitta is the optimum means for providing that ultimate rest for beings who are wandering in cyclic existence. Some texts would relate this explanation to the path of the medium scope, so bodhisattvas would show the path of the medium scope to those who are trainees in the medium scope, particularly solitary realisers and hearers. General existence is explained here and it means destroying the sufferings of the existence in general by leading to the optimum state of liberation.

The main point is that bodhicitta serves as a means for beings who are wandering on the path of cyclic existence to obtain that ultimate rest of achieving liberation, being free from all samsaric existence.

#### 3.1.2.1.5. *It destroys specifically the sufferings of the lower realms*

The verse which relates to this is the next two lines:

*31ab. It is the universal bridge that liberates  
All migrators from the lower realms.*

The commentary explains that

Generating the mind of bodhicitta is also the universal bridge that liberates all migrators from the lower realms.

The analogy of the universal bridge indicates presenting teachings on adopting the ten virtues. Beings then follow this advice, adopting the ten virtues as the means to free themselves from the lower realms or to be reborn again in the lower realms. So this is how to understand how the bodhicitta attitude becomes the supreme means to present the teachings in accordance to beings' capacity and mental disposition; to present unmistakable methods and ways to be free from various types of sufferings, particularly the lower realms. It shows that when bodhicitta has been developed, it spontaneously helps sentient beings without much effort from one's own side. Also, it establishes a very suitable foundation for those who listen to the advice and teachings to naturally be able to adopt that advice and benefit from it. So this again

shows the way by which bodhicitta becomes the supreme means to benefit others.

In summary, the main points that have been presented here are how bodhicitta serves as an optimum means to overcome the various levels of sentient beings' sufferings; that it destroys the sufferings of existence in general and particularly helps to destroy the sufferings of the lower realms. This is done by benefiting others. The first step of benefiting others is when bodhisattvas lead sentient beings to the state of liberation from the sufferings of cyclic existence in general. The next step of benefiting sentient beings is when bodhisattvas lead them to the higher status, free of the suffering of the lower realms.

Other commentaries explain the analogy of bodhicitta serving as a universal bridge. The connotation is from a Tibetan word for an actual bridge or platform from which you cannot go back. Providing this platform reverses beings from the lower realms and establishes them in higher rebirths to serve as the means to obtain the highest goal of liberation and enlightenment. This becomes the very basis for beings to further develop the causes which liberate them from samsara and the ultimate liberation of enlightenment.

#### 3.1.2.2. IT CAN ELIMINATE ITS CAUSE

Cause refers specifically to the causes of a suffering existence (samsara) and a rebirth in a lower realm. The two main causes are explained in the subdivisions of this outline:

3.1.2.2.1. Eliminating afflictive obscurations

3.1.2.2.2. Eliminating the obscurations to knowledge

##### 3.1.2.2.1. *Eliminating afflictive obscurations*

The verse which relates to this is the next two lines:

*31cd. It is the moon shining in the mind  
That eliminates migrator's misery of the  
afflictions.*

The commentary reads:

This mind generation is also the shining moon that eliminates the heat and misery of the afflictions of migrators. That is, it has the power to eliminate all afflictive obscurations.

As mentioned previously, Khunu Lama Rinpoche's verse indicated that bodhicitta is the moon of the mind and the sun of the mind. This explanation also relates to moonlight or the cooling light of the moon.

The commentary explains that this mind generation is like *the shining moon, eliminating the heat and misery of migrators' afflictions*. This is because *it has power to eliminate afflictive obscurations*. Using this analogy, moonlight has a cooling effect which eliminates the suffering of the heat felt during the day when it is very hot. As soon as the sun sets and the moon rises, the moon's cooling light eliminates the suffering of extreme heat. Likewise here, the heat is an analogy for the actual misery (or afflictions) of the migrators, all their sufferings. The analogy explains that bodhicitta is that which eliminates all the afflictive obscurations of sentient beings. The main afflictive obscuration is grasping at the self and the delusions in general, but particularly grasping to the self. When bodhicitta has the power to eliminate this, there is no way for sufferings to be

experienced, because when the cause of suffering is completely eliminated from the mind there is no way to experience the result, which is suffering. This is how bodhicitta serves to bring this about.

It is good to note here the descriptions of specific symbols, such as the moon, sun and lotus. For example, whenever images of deities or buddhas are presented on the moon, the symbolism of the moon represents bodhicitta. The symbol of the sun represents wisdom realising emptiness. Enlightened beings seated upon a lotus, sun and moon disc actually represent the significance of developing bodhicitta and the wisdom realising emptiness so the individual beings obtain the ultimate state of enlightenment and become a Buddha, an enlightened being.

### 3.1.2.2.2. *Eliminating the obscurations to knowledge*

The verse which relates to this is the next two lines:

32. *It is the great sun that dispels  
The vitreous humour of not knowing.*

The commentary reads:

It is also the great sun that dispels from the root the non-afflictive not knowing of migrators, the cataract-like obscurations to knowledge. The reason for this is that the wisdom realising emptiness is adorned with great accumulations that exhaust the seed of the obscuration to knowledge.

As explained in the commentary, *it is also the great sun that dispels from the root the non-afflictive not knowing of the migrators, the cataract-like obscurations to knowledge*. Firstly, *the non-afflictive not knowing of migrators* refers to the obscurations to knowledge (which as the analogy refers to here, are like cataracts that causes the eyes not to see clearly). What obscures one from seeing ultimate reality directly is the mistaken appearance that obscures one from clearly seeing both truths simultaneously. For as long as one has obscurations to knowledge, one will not be able to see the Two Truths simultaneously, and one's current mistaken view serves like a veil to have mistaken appearance. Because bodhicitta serves as a means to overcome this obscuration to knowledge and remove the veil of mistaken appearance, it is like the great sun.

To further explain this analogy, the sun becomes the means to eliminate darkness because as soon as it rises darkness is completely eliminated. In a similar way, bodhicitta removes the cataract-like obscurations to knowledge completely. The commentary explains that *the reason for this is that the wisdom realising emptiness is adorned with great accumulation, and this exhausts the seed of the obscurations to knowledge*. Bodhicitta serves as the means for obtaining a great accumulation of merit. The merit based on love and compassion is generated when engaging in the practice of the six perfections; also extensive practice of generosity. All can be accomplished through the power of bodhicitta.

Furthermore, extensive practices of morality are accomplished through bodhicitta, also patience and joyous effort and meditation and finally, the wisdom realising emptiness. When the wisdom realising emptiness is complemented with bodhicitta, it becomes the optimum means to accumulate extensive merit and completely exhausts the seeds of the obscurations to

knowledge, by completely eliminating it from the mind stream.

It has now been explained that developing bodhicitta is the ultimate means for overcoming all faults and obscurations and acquiring all qualities to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment. It shows how bodhicitta serves as a means, and from the moment it is developed along the path, it achieves all the realisations and leads to the ultimate state of omniscience. This is all based on having developed bodhicitta; it becomes the very root and cause.

We'll conclude for the evening by reciting the prayer *The Eight Verses of Training the Mind* and dedicate it to the late Norman Henderson who, while he might not have been a member of Tara Institute, was definitely a very diligent student, coming here regularly. I have known him from when I was at Chenrezig Institute in Queensland. He used to come when I was up there, so I remember him and have known him for a long time; he is like an old friend. As he passed away recently, we'll dedicate the merit of the recitation of the prayer to him and also to Liam's grandfather who passed away recently.

I had already explained the visualisation that we can adopt for this practice, so I don't need to do that again. So, we try to do that visualisation as we recite the prayer.

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

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