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## Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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

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The *Refuge and Bodhicitta* prayer that we have just recited should suffice to generate the proper motivation for our meditation practice.

Indeed the *Refuge and Bodhicitta* prayer is the most profound prayer that we say. If, while reciting the profound words through our mouth, we can also adopt the respectful physical gesture of prostration, and mentally go for refuge and generate the bodhicitta attitude then, within just a few minutes, we will definitely collect extensive merit. There is no doubt about that at all.

What needs to be purified are negativities, which we definitely have. But we also have the means to purify those negativities. And as explained previously, the optimum method to purify negativities is to rely on the objects of refuge and generate bodhicitta. We need to keep this point in mind.

If, after going for refuge wholeheartedly as we recite the prayer, we can visualise the objects of refuge merging into ourselves and thus blessing our mental continuum, our minds will definitely settle down. There is no question that any disturbing thoughts will definitely be appeased by taking refuge in this way.

Bearing that in mind we will now engage in the meditation practice for a few minutes. *[meditation]*

Now we generate the motivation to receive the teachings, by developing this strong intention:

In order to free all sentient beings from suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself, so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well.

During the *tong len* practice that we engaged in earlier, our intention was to take upon ourselves all the sufferings of all sentient beings, as well as the causes of that suffering and the very imprints giving rise to those causes, whilst in return giving them our happiness and virtues. With that intention in mind, we generate the motivation for the teaching, to reaffirm that having taken on the sufferings of sentient beings we generate the intention to lead them to the ultimate state of happiness i.e. enlightenment. The motivation 'I need to engage in the practice of listening to the teaching' complements the *tong len* practice that we have just done.

Indeed, engaging in any activity with that motivation in mind will ensure that one's life becomes most meaningful.

### 3.1.2. Achieving the purpose of others

#### 3.1.2.2. IT CAN ELIMINATE ITS CAUSE

##### 3.1.2.2.2. Eliminating the obscurations to knowledge (cont.)

The relevant verse reads:

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

We concluded the teaching last week with these lines, which indicate how bodhicitta serves as a means to remove the obscurations to knowledge, even the very subtle imprints in our mind that are the root of non-afflictive not knowing. This shows that it is our own responsibility to eliminate those imprints by applying the antidote to the obscurations to knowledge. We need to realise that we cannot expect others to remove our obscurations and that we need to take the initiative to do so ourselves. This is what we need to derive as a personal instruction.

#### 3.1.2.3. IT CAN ACHIEVE ALL BENEFIT AND HAPPINESS

This is subdivided into two:

3.1.2.3.1. Achieving all benefit

3.1.2.3.2. Achieving every happiness

##### 3.1.2.3.1. Achieving all benefit

This heading relates to achieving the ability to benefit all other sentient beings, and the lines that relate to this heading are:

32cd. *It is the essence of butter  
That is derived from the milk of Dharma.*

We need to see the connection between what is presented here and what we are attempting to do in our own practice. Our earlier meditation was based on wishing to bring about benefit and happiness for all sentient beings and eliminate all their suffering. *Achieving all benefit* through developing bodhicitta relates to the same intention, and it is good to remember this point.

As you know, one of the methods for developing bodhicitta is the technique of exchanging self with others. In order to engage in that practice one needs to train the mind to the point where we have no hesitation in exchanging self-interest with the interests of other sentient beings. Thus the *tong len* practice of giving and taking serves as a basis for training the mind in exchanging self with others. When we actually attain that state of being able to exchange self with others and then develop bodhicitta, we will experience tremendous joy. That is because we will have achieved what we are striving to achieve, which is a state of mind that works for the welfare of other sentient beings. That naturally brings us great happiness and joy.

We need to understand how all of these practices - beginning with the meagre attempts of training our mind now - lead to the higher state of actually developing this incredibly precious state of mind called bodhicitta. We need to see the connection between what we are attempting to do now and the ultimate result we intend to achieve.

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Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning of this verse quite succinctly:

This mind generation is the butter essence arising from churning the great ocean of milk that is the holy Dharma, with the churning wood of wisdom arising from listening and contemplating.

It is the essence of butter that can generate the taste of achieving each and every benefit, and therefore everybody should strive in it.

Here, the teachings or the doctrine of the Buddha are likened to a great ocean of milk. Butter is created by churning the milk with a wooden paddle, likewise listening to, contemplating and meditating on the Buddha's doctrine, is analogous to using a wooden paddle. Just as butter arises from churning the milk with a wooden paddle, wisdom arises from listening to, and contemplating and meditating on the Buddha's doctrine. Butter is actually a coarse substance that can be further refined to its essence by boiling it, and just like clarified butter, bodhicitta is the very essence of the Buddha's doctrine. This is similar to the presentation in *The Three Principles of the Path*, which states that bodhicitta is the very essence of the Buddha's doctrine that is praised by all the buddhas.

As the analogy explains, just as the tastiest part of butter is the essence of butter, the tastiest part of the Buddha's doctrine, its essence, is achieving the benefit of all beings through having cultivated bodhicitta. Therefore, one needs to develop that which serves as the very essence of the Dharma.

Developing the essence of the Dharma, which is bodhicitta, begins with the meagre attempts we make now of generating a genuine mind of consideration for others, with a genuine wish to help and benefit others. Part of our training is to develop that intention now to whatever extent we are able to. It would be quite lame to think, 'Oh, since I haven't yet developed bodhicitta, there is not much point thinking about it'. It is because of the very fact that we haven't yet generated bodhicitta that we are being exhorted to strive to develop it.

As mentioned previously, we do that by cultivating loving and kind attitudes to others with whatever means we have now. Then, slowly through our training and familiarity our mind will gradually become more and more attuned to having a genuine sense of concern for the wellbeing of other sentient beings. This then serves as a basis to further develop a genuine sense of love and compassion. This is how we make progress, and further develop the mind of bodhicitta.

The peerless instruction on the generation of bodhicitta by means of listening, contemplating and meditating is none other than this very text that we are studying now, the *Bodhisattvacharyavata*. This is the best source of advice to listen to, contemplate on and meditate on. So we have the most supreme instructions at hand on how to develop bodhicitta.

### 3.1.2.3.2. *Achieving every happiness*

This section of the text is explained in the following verse:

33. *The migrating guests wander on the paths of existence  
And wish to engage pleasant enjoyments;*

*It abides close to supreme happiness  
And satisfies the great samsaric guests*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The migrating guests wandering in cyclic existence on the paths of the three existences wish for the pleasant enjoyments of gods and humans.

This mind generation abides close to the supreme method for establishing happiness, and satisfies the many guests from cyclic existence because it establishes the higher status and definite goodness of all sentient beings.

I have explained many times what *cyclic existence* connotes. As teachings explain, that which binds one to the appropriated aggregates again and again through the influence of delusions and karma is cyclic existence. In other words, the contaminated aggregates that we possess now are an example of cyclic existence. Over countless lifetimes we have uncontrollably obtained such contaminated aggregates, through which we experience the shortcomings of sufferings and so forth. So the real cycle is obtaining the appropriated contaminated aggregates again and again through the influence of delusions and karma. It is as if we are bound to these appropriated, contaminated aggregates which serve as the basis for all unwanted misery and suffering. This is the real meaning of cyclic existence.

*The migrating guests* are those who are bound by delusions and karma to this existence of obtaining the contaminated aggregates again and again. The *paths of the three existences* are the desire, form and formless realms. Thus, beings circle in these three different realms again and again. All those beings in the cyclic existence *wish for the pleasant enjoyments of the gods and humans*. So, not only does bodhicitta bring the ultimate benefit and goodness of liberation and enlightenment, but it also serves as a means to bring about the temporary benefits of humans and gods while circling in samsara.

Furthermore, *this mind generation abides close to the supreme method for establishing happiness, and satisfies the many guests from cyclic existence*. The reason for that is that *it establishes the higher status and definite goodness of all sentient beings*. So bodhicitta serves as a means to establish beings in the temporary wellbeing of the most fortunate rebirth in cyclic existence, and while bringing that temporary pleasure and enjoyment, it ultimately brings the definite goodness of the state of liberation and ultimately, enlightenment.

Thus bodhicitta is the supreme method to benefit sentient beings because the generation of this mind brings about the temporary and ultimate wellbeing of sentient beings; that is the main meaning of this verse.

*Satisfying many guests* also has a connotation of being a most supreme offering. There are explanations in the teachings that one of the best ways of gaining merit is making unsurpassed offerings to the enlightened beings and benefiting sentient beings. Of all the offerings that one can make to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, offering bodhicitta is the best, because it brings benefit for all sentient beings. So the generation of bodhicitta is the most supreme offering and method for accumulating merit.

We need to really contemplate these points, remembering how the generation of the mind of bodhicitta is dependent on first developing love and compassion. Thus, we need to really think about the great value of developing love and compassion again and again and train our mind daily in the development of love and compassion. This means that in whatever activity we engage, whether it is eating or drinking or going about our daily business, we constantly remember, 'I am doing this as a means to benefit sentient beings'. When we eat something, we offer it first to the objects of refuge and then we remind ourselves that we are consuming it to sustain ourselves for the purpose of benefiting sentient beings. When we drink something, we accumulate merit by offering it, and then drink it to quench our thirst and nourish us as a means of supporting ourselves so that we can benefit sentient beings.

If we can relate to every activity this way, seeing it as a means to benefit sentient beings, then we are familiarising our mind with the wish to benefit sentient beings and actually utilising our daily activities for that purpose. So, in this way we slowly and gradually establish a firm foundation for developing bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is not developed instantaneously; it requires effort and a great amount of training.

Of course, in explaining this I am not implying that I have obtained any great experiential levels from practising in this way, but I can assure you that I do attempt to practise in this way. So if you ask me whether I attempt to do these practices then the answer is definitely, 'Yes, I do try to practise like this in my daily life'. If you ask whether I have achieved any great realisation from this practice then the answer will be, 'No, I have not'. However I find that there is great benefit derived even from my genuine attempts to practice. Thus, I entreat you to really familiarise your mind again and again with these practices, and then, through constant familiarity you will gradually see a transformation taking place.

When the commentary says *this mind generation abides close to the supreme method*, the Tibetan word *nyi-war-ne*, has the connotation of 'definitely abiding'. So the meaning here is that the mind generation of bodhicitta definitely abides as the supreme method for establishing happiness.

Thus, the generation of bodhicitta is an unsurpassable offering to the supreme enlightened beings, as it is the supreme means to satisfy the many guests in cyclic existence. Why? Because, it establishes high status and definite goodness for all sentient beings.

### **3.2. Inducing others to be joyful**

What is being explained here is that by generating the mind of bodhicitta, one induces joy in others. This can be understood with the analogy of someone who has the potential and ability to take care of all our needs by promising us, 'I will take responsibility for establishing your wellbeing and I will give you everything you need for your happiness'. Hearing such a promise would make us feel extremely joyful. Just the thought, 'Oh, I have someone who is going to take care of me', brings great solace and joy.

What actually is implied here, and this will be explained in the verse, is that someone who aspires to develop bodhicitta is making this promise to establish all beings in happiness: I will take responsibility for establishing all beings in a state of ultimate state of happiness and free them from all suffering. That is the vow that one makes.

The verse relating to this heading is:

34. *Today I have, in front of all protectors,  
Served migrators the hospitality of  
A tathagata and intermediate happiness.  
The gods, demi-gods and so forth should rejoice.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Today, in the presence of all the protectors, the conquerors and their children, I have invited all migrating sentient beings as guests and serve them the hospitality of becoming a sugata, one who has accomplished all ultimate benefit and happiness, and until they obtain that state I also give them the permission to satisfy themselves with the intermediate happiness of gods and humans.

'I' refers to oneself, and the time when the vows are taken is *today*. These vows or promises were made *in front of all the protectors, who are the conquerors and the children*, i.e. all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Then one continues, *I have invited all migrating sentient beings as guests and serve them the hospitality of a sugata*, which indicates that one has made the pledge to lead all sentient beings to that ultimate state of a sugata *who has accomplished all ultimate benefit and happiness*.

As indicated in the commentary, the ultimate intention is to lead all beings to the ultimate state of buddhahood, but until that state is obtained, one offers all beings the permission to be satisfied with the intermediate happiness of gods and humans.

Then Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

As such I have offered the supreme hospitality and from today onwards the gods, demi-gods, serpent kings and so forth should be happy.

This is to induce joy in others.

So others should be joyful because of the pledges that one has made today, in the presence of all the protectors, buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Then Gyaltsab Je exhorts us:

Preceding the generation of the two minds, as explained in this commentary:

This means that as a precursor to developing *the generation of the two minds* i.e. aspiring and engaging bodhicitta, one needs to:

Understand that mind generation upon having purified the disrupting conditions of the obscurations and building up the conducive conditions of the accumulations of merit, is the supreme way to take the essence of the precious human rebirth with freedoms and endowments, and strive in it.

This is an exhortation that the supreme means to develop the mind of bodhicitta is to engage in the practices of accumulating merit and purifying one's negativities. That is the supreme means to take the essence of one's precious human rebirth with its freedom and endowments. That is what we need to strive for.

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## Summarising Verse

Gyatso Je offers this summarising verse as a final exhortation:

They who understand they have attained a human  
rebirth with freedoms and endowments  
Should strive in generating the two bodhicittas,  
The essential meaning of all the teachings of the  
conquerors,  
The sole path traversed by the tens of millions of their  
children.

Anyone *who understands that they have attained such human rebirth with its freedom and endowments* indicates that those who have the wisdom to understand the value of the precious human rebirth, definitely need to strive in generating bodhicitta, which is *the essential meaning of all the teachings of the conquerors, and the sole path traversed by the tens of millions of their children.*

## II. THE NAME OF THE CHAPTER

The root text concludes the chapter with:

*This is the third chapter on taking the mind of enlightenment, from Introduction to the Actions of Bodhisattvas.*

The commentary reads:

This is the commentary on the third chapter called Taking the Mind of Enlightenment, from the commentary on the *Introduction to the Actions of Bodhisattvas*, called *The Entrance for the Children of the Conquerors*.

Now we come to the fourth chapter, the title of which is Applying Conscientiousness. To explain the context of this chapter, we need to return to the subdivisions introduced in chapter 1.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. THE ACTUAL EXPLANATION OF THE STAGES OF THE PATH

### 2.2. The method for taking the essence

#### 2.2.2. Explaining the individual meanings<sup>2</sup>

#### 2.2.2.2. THE WAY OF TRAINING IN THE PRACTICES OF GENERATING THE TWO MINDS

##### 2.2.2.2.1. Taking the mind of enlightenment

This was the content of the last chapter. Now we come to:

##### 2.2.2.2.2. The Way of Training in the Actions, the Perfections

This has four subdivisions:

2.2.2.2.2.1. The way of meditating on conscientiousness, the limb preventing the degeneration of the training in the mind of enlightenment<sup>3</sup>

2.2.2.2.2.2. Explaining the way of training in morality, by relating it to introspection and mindfulness, the methods for keeping virtuous dharmas pure<sup>4</sup>

2.2.2.2.2.3. Explaining the way of training in the remaining four perfections<sup>5</sup>

2.2.2.2.2.4. Explaining the way of practising the generosity of offering one's body, possessions and roots of virtue to others, by way of the limb of dedication<sup>6</sup>

This list encompasses all the remaining chapters.

The first three chapters of the text, as you would recall<sup>7</sup>, present the means of generating bodhicitta, which has not yet been developed. The next three chapters, Conscientiousness, Mindfulness or Introspection, and Patience present the means of maintaining the bodhicitta that has been generated. Chapters 7 to 9 present the means of increasing bodhicitta, and the final chapter dedicates the merits of bodhicitta.

#### 2.2.2.2.2.1. The way of meditating on conscientiousness, the limb preventing the degeneration of the training in the mind of enlightenment

This section also includes other practices that are needed for developing bodhicitta.

Conscientiousness is defined as state of mind that prevents one from being influenced by the delusions, and by maintaining enthusiasm it protects one from contaminated states of mind and increases virtue.

This definition has two main elements:

- It is a mental state of mind that prevents delusions from arising
- While maintaining enthusiasm it protects one from contaminated states of mind and increases virtue

That which encompasses all these attributes is called conscientiousness. Without conscientiousness, it said that one will not be able to engage in any of the three trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom. Therefore conscientiousness is an essential state of mind that we must develop if we wish to engage in our practice properly.

## CHAPTER 4: APPLYING CONSCIENTIOUSNESS<sup>8</sup>

The chapter has two elements.

- I. Explaining the text of the chapter
- II: The name of the chapter

### I. EXPLAINING THE TEXT OF THE CHAPTER

The chapter has three subdivisions

1. Short explanation of the way to meditate on conscientiousness
2. Explaining it extensively
3. Summary

#### 1. SHORT EXPLANATION OF THE WAY TO MEDITATE ON CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

The first verse of the chapter reads:

1. *After the children of the conquerors,  
Have very firmly accepted bodhicitta,  
They should unwaveringly strive always  
To not transgress the trainings.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explanation of this verse reads:

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<sup>1</sup> See the teaching of 26 March 2013.

<sup>2</sup> The following two subdivisions were listed in the teaching of 2 July 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Covered in chapter 4.

<sup>4</sup> Covered in chapter 5.

<sup>5</sup> Covered in chapters 6 to 9.

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<sup>6</sup> Covered in chapter 10.

<sup>7</sup> See 12 February 2013.

<sup>8</sup> To keep things manageable the numbering system starts again.

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After the children of the conquerors, the bodhisattvas, took very firmly the two minds of enlightenment as explained earlier, they should unwaveringly protect them with conscientiousness, so as not to wander from them for even a second.

They should also unwaveringly protect the trainings of the six perfections and the four ways of attracting disciples, so as not to waver from them, and that they never decrease.

I have already explained in the past the connotation of *children of the conquerors*, and also what *conqueror* refers to, so you may recall that. Having *very firmly* established *the two minds of enlightenment*, which were *explained earlier*, we must *unwaveringly protect them with conscientiousness, so as not to wander from them for even a second*. Furthermore *they should also unwaveringly protect the trainings of the six perfections and the four ways of attracting disciples, so as not to waver from them, and that they never decrease*.

What we need to understand from this is that once a bodhisattva generates the two states of mind of bodhicitta, there are only two activities that they will engage in from then on—activities that encompass fulfilling their own purpose, and activities that encompass fulfilling the purpose of others. The *six perfections* are specifically the means to fulfil one's own ultimate purpose, although they also directly benefit others. *The four ways of attracting disciples* are the activities that specifically and directly benefit other beings. Bodhisattvas have no other activities than these two.

The six perfections serve as a means to fulfil one's ultimate goal of achieving enlightenment, solely for the purpose of benefiting other sentient beings. As explained in the teachings, having generated a state of mind of bodhicitta, bodhisattvas are committed to striving to achieve enlightenment, which takes many eons of practice. So bodhisattvas need to ensure that they are not deprived of good conditions and that they have sufficient wealth and so forth over the many lives needed to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment. Because that takes many eons, one has to ensure that all the conditions are in place so as to be able to continuously engage in the practices until achieving the state of enlightenment. The supreme means of ensuring that one has the appropriate conditions of sufficient wealth and so forth is none other than engaging in the practice of *generosity*. That is how the practice of generosity is the optimum means to establish those necessary favourable conditions.

In order to engage in the practice of generosity to amass sufficient means in good conditions one needs to have a basis, which is a perfect physical body. This is obtained through none other than the practice of *morality*. Thus, morality is the main cause of obtaining a perfect body.

Furthermore, having amassed the perfect conditions of sufficient wealth and so forth, and having the perfect base of a sound body, one needs to have a good retinue if one is to make use of those conditions. In both a worldly context and for the Dharma, one needs to have an appropriate retinue to help us to utilise those good conditions. What brings about a perfect retinue is none other than the practice of *patience*. That is why the practice of patience is said to be essential.

We also need to ensure that whatever activity we engage in is completed. That which ensures that any activity reaches completion is none other than the practice of *enthusiasm* or joyous effort.

Then we need to make sure that all the earlier good conditions that we have obtained do not become a condition for delusions to arise. So we need to adopt the practice of *meditation* to ensure delusions do not arise.

Being able to discern what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded is essential, and the unmistakable discriminating *wisdom* is acquired through the practice of wisdom.

We can see the relevance of all of this to our own practice. By seeing the practical benefits of engaging in these practices of generosity, morality, patience, joyous effort, meditation and developing wisdom, we are further encouraged to engage in these practices to accomplish our ultimate goal.

The purpose of obtaining the perfect conditions we enjoy now is twofold: ultimately it is to benefit other sentient beings, and to achieve one's own ultimate goal. The first three perfections, generosity, morality and patience are a direct means of fulfilling the benefit of other sentient beings.

Our own ultimate purpose is gained through the wisdom that leads one to obtaining the bliss or happiness of liberation. However, if the mind is distracted and wavering then it is not possible to develop that wisdom. So, in order to cultivate that wisdom one needs to have a very stable and undistracted mind, which is established through meditation, in particular concentration.

The ultimate concentration is calm abiding and based on calm abiding one achieves the wisdom of special insight. The union of calm abiding and special insight can only occur after having first obtained calm abiding. So we need to understand that special insight is preceded by calm abiding. However concentration and wisdom cannot be established if one is lazy. Therefore the perfection of joyous effort is essential to achieve both one's own purpose as well to benefit other sentient beings.

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

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