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# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱུང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའི་སྣོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual we will now engage in our meditation practice.

[meditation]

Now we can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.

It needs to be understood that generating a motivation prior to receiving the teachings secures the time we spend as a meaningful practice. In fact, with a proper motivation, the attention one pays to the topic being presented is actually a form of meditation. The purpose of meditation is to keep the mind in virtue. While a single-pointed meditation focuses on one particular object, listening to a teaching with a proper motivation is also a form of meditation practice. That is because it is a means for keeping one's mind in virtue. The teacher definitely has to maintain a focused mind, because they have to be focused on the teaching material. Likewise the listeners also need to take the initiative to keep their minds focused on what is being presented. When the attention that one pays listening to the teachings is complemented with the earlier positive motivation, then it definitely becomes a very meaningful meditation practice.

As I regularly mention, we need to incorporate the practices that we do here into our daily life, and then we will have integrated the Dharma into our lives. Just sitting piously for a few minutes at a time may not be really enough if we want any real transformation to take place.

## 3.1. One should be respectful since it generates qualities (cont.)

### 3.1.3.1.3. Refuting objections

This has three subdivisions:

3.1.3.1.3.1. Refuting that it is unsuitable to meditate on equal faith, because of not having equal qualities

3.1.3.1.3.2. It is suitable to equally meditate on faith, because the greatness of having faith in both is equally the cause for enlightenment

3.1.3.1.3.3. It is suitable to have faith, because the merits of making offerings to sentient beings, who possess parts of the qualities of a buddha, is infinite

#### 3.1.3.1.3.1. Refuting that it is unsuitable to meditate on equal faith, because of not having equal qualities

This section refutes the thought that since sentient beings and enlightened beings don't possess the same qualities, it would be unsuitable to think that one could have equal faith in both.

This is a very reasonable doubt, and the following verse is a presentation of the way to overcome that doubt.

114. *Not through the qualities of thought,  
But through the result, sentient beings  
Also equally have qualities.  
Therefore they are equal.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je begins with a statement of the doubt or argument:

Argument: Even though sentient beings are a field of merit, since they do not have equal qualities it is unsuitable to make offerings to them as to the buddhas.

Then he explains the meaning of the verse, which serves as an answer:

Answer: There is no such fault, because they are not made equal through the qualities of thought, but because they are the same in being the cause for enlightenment. Thus if one is equally respectful to sentient beings, because they also have the qualities of enlightenment, they are therefore equal fields of merit.

The main point is that sentient beings and enlightened beings are *equally a field of merit*. As explained previously, a field of merit is an object through which one accumulates merit. Enlightened beings are a field of merit for making offerings, and sentient beings are also a field of merit as an object of generosity. Indeed, sentient beings are a supreme field for accumulating the merit of generosity. Making offerings to the enlightened beings and holy objects is, of course, also considered to be a practice of generosity. However the real beneficiaries of an act of generosity are sentient beings. Therefore they are the supreme object of one's generosity, and since one accumulates merit in relation to them, they are considered to be fields of merit.

While accepting that both sentient beings and enlightened beings are fields of merit, the doubt being expressed here is that since *they do not have equal qualities, it is unsuitable to make offerings to them as to the buddhas*. The main point about this doubt is thinking, 'because buddhas and sentient beings don't have equal qualities there is no reason to have equal faith in both'.

*They are not made equal through qualities but because they are the same in being the cause for enlightenment* explains that even though they are not equal in having the same qualities, they are equally the cause for enlightenment. The lam rim teaching also makes this same point in stating that the cause for one's enlightenment relies equally both on the teacher, who presents the teaching, and sentient beings, on whom one relies as an object for engaging in the practices. As both are the same in being the cause for enlightenment, one needs to rely equally on the buddhas who present the teachings and sentient beings who are a condition for one's practice.

In simple terms, if one has to rely equally on both as causes for one's own enlightenment, then how can it be reasonable to only have faith in one and not the other? It would be quite unreasonable. *If one is also respectful to sentient beings then one will gain the qualities of enlightenment. Therefore they are equal fields of merit*. They are equal in being the causes for one's enlightenment.

**3.1.3.1.3.2. It is suitable to equally meditate on faith, because the greatness of having faith in both is equally the cause for enlightenment**

This further emphasises how it is suitable to meditate on faith in both enlightened beings and sentient beings, as both are equally the cause of enlightenment. The relevant lines of verse present this point very meticulously.

115. *Any offerings to those with the mind of love  
Are the very greatness of sentient beings.  
Any merit of having faith in the buddhas  
Is again a greatness of the buddhas.*

116.ab *There is a part establishing the dharmas of a  
buddha  
And therefore they are asserted to be equal*

Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning as follows:

The offerings to those endowed with the mind of love for all sentient beings, which is taught to be infinite merit, are the very greatness of the sentient beings that are the object of that love.

Any merit of having faith in the buddhas is again a greatness of the object of the faith, the buddhas alone. Therefore, having faith in both contains equally the causes that establish the dharmas of a buddha and therefore they are both equally asserted as suitable.

*The offerings of those endowed with the mind of love* refers to limitless love, focusing on limitless *sentient beings*. Therefore, the infinite amount of merit that is accumulated from developing a limitless mind of love for a limitless number of sentient beings is said to be the *greatness*, i.e. the qualities, *of sentient beings*. One obtains *infinite merit* because of the greatness of the object, which is limitless sentient beings.

Likewise, the merit of having *faith in the buddhas is again a greatness of the object of that faith*, which are *the buddhas alone*. When one generates faith in a buddha, one again accumulates an infinite amount of merit because of the greatness or the qualities of the buddhas. As one accumulates infinite amounts of merit through the greatness of the objects, *they are both equally asserted as suitable objects of faith*.

From this we can derive a personal instruction. When we do the *tong len* meditation, for example, we are attempting to generate love and compassion. The scope of the love that we are attempting to generate is, as explained here, love for an infinite or limitless number of sentient beings. When one ensures that one is focusing on the practice of giving and taking in relation to limitless sentient beings, then that becomes a means for one to accumulate an infinite amount of merit. So we can see that if we do our regular *tong len* meditation with a proper motivation and proper recollection, then it is not just a simple practice. Because it is very profound, it is a means to accumulate great merit. So one needs to ensure that one fully embraces the practice, on the basis of a deeper understanding of the explanations that have been presented here.

In summary, the main point is that the infinite merit that one gains by generating a limitless mind of love for a limitless number of sentient beings, is due to the greatness that are the qualities of sentient beings. Likewise the merit that one gains from generating faith in the buddhas is due to the greatness, or the qualities of the

buddhas. Since both are equally a part of the Buddhadharma that one practices as a means to accumulate the causes for enlightenment, they are equally an object of faith.

**3.1.3.1.3.3. It is suitable to have faith, because the merits of making offerings to sentient beings, who possess parts of the qualities of a buddha, is infinite**

The next six lines of verse, which relate to this, read:

116cd. *Not at all equal to the buddhas  
With an ocean of infinite qualities*

117. *Even giving the three realms for the purpose  
Of making offerings to those few in whom  
appears  
A mere part of the qualities of those  
That are only an accumulation of qualities, it  
would be too little.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

From the side of the qualities of thought they are not equal, because they are not at all equal with the qualities of the buddhas that possess an infinite ocean of extensive and difficult to fathom qualities. Although the qualities are not equal, there are some that have parts of the qualities of the buddhas who are an unequalled accumulation of supreme and great qualities. To give all objects of the three realms for the purpose of making offerings to them would still be too little. What need is there to mention others?

What is being explained here is that in relation to the qualities of thought or mind, the qualities of sentient beings do not equal the qualities of the buddhas, who possess an infinite ocean of extensive, and difficult to fathom, qualities.

*Although the qualities are not equal*, however *there are some who have parts of the qualities of the buddhas*, and *to give all objects of the three realms for the purpose of making offerings to them would still be too little*. This indicates that making offerings to someone who has even a part of the qualities of the buddhas is a cause for extensive merit. *What need is there to mention others?* This rhetorical question implies that if the merit of making offerings to someone who only has a partial quality of the buddhas is extremely extensive, then there is no need to mention the extensive merit gained by making offerings to all sentient beings.

**3.1.3.2. SUMMARY**

The verse relating to this reads:

118. *A part of that which generates the supreme  
dharmas  
Of a buddha exists in sentient beings.  
Merely through this they become equal  
And it is suitable to make offerings to sentient  
beings.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Though they do not have qualities equal to the buddhas, since a part of the cause that generates these supreme qualities exists in sentient beings, they become equal merely through this. Hence it is suitable to respect sentient beings and make offerings to them as to the buddhas.

As the commentary clearly explains, *though they do not have qualities equal to the buddhas*, a part of the cause that generates these supreme qualities exists in sentient beings. While sentient beings don't have equal qualities to the

buddhas, the enlightened beings, there is a part that serves as cause for one to accumulate those great qualities of the buddhas. Through this they become equal in being a field of one's faith. *Hence it is suitable to respect sentient beings and make offerings to them as to the buddhas.* This is the summarising point.

### **3.2. One should be respectful because one has faith in the buddhas**

This is subdivided into two:

3.2.1. One should be respectful because they view all sentient beings like an only child

3.2.2. Showing subsequently as a summary that one also needs to be respectful to sentient beings

#### **3.2.1. One should be respectful because they view all sentient beings like an only child**

This has three subdivisions.

3.2.1.1. Establishing the main method needed for becoming enlightened

3.2.1.2. To confess the disrespectful things engaged in earlier

3.2.1.3. Refraining from future disrespectful actions

##### **3.2.1.1. ESTABLISHING THE MAIN METHOD NEEDED FOR BECOMING ENLIGHTENED**

This is subdivided into two:

3.2.1.1.1. Identifying the main method for repaying the kindness of the buddhas

3.2.1.1.2. Achieving that very action

###### **3.2.1.1.1. Identifying the main method for repaying the kindness of the buddhas**

Having presented that, through to the buddhas' teachings and kindness in presenting those teachings, one gains the means to accumulate the merit for achieving enlightenment, the question is what is the best way to actually repay that kindness?

The relevant verse reads:

*119. Further, apart from making sentient beings happy,  
How can one repay the kindness  
Of those that are honest friends  
And accomplish boundless benefit.*

Gyaltsab Je's explanation in his commentary reads:

Further, another reason for treating sentient beings respectfully: The buddhas, induced by great compassion, are honest friends of all migrators who act without being asked and establish boundless benefit for them. Apart from making sentient beings happy, how can one repay their kindness? There is no better offering to please the buddhas than to work for the benefit of sentient beings.

*The buddhas, induced by great compassion, are honest friends,* means that the buddhas have no ulterior motive in benefiting others—there is no deceit and no intention of getting something in return. In other words, they benefit *sentient beings selflessly*, and they do so *without being asked*. Thus they *establish boundless benefits* for sentient beings. So the enlightened beings, in serving sentient beings, are honest and extend their benefits, even without being asked, and are thus *friends of migrators*, which establishes boundless benefits for sentient beings.

The great compassion of the buddhas was developed in the countless lives of their training on the path to enlightenment, where, as bodhisattvas, they repeatedly and unceasingly familiarised themselves with the mind of great compassion. Having attained enlightenment, the compassion with which they acquainted themselves over numberless lifetimes, transforms into unsurpassed compassion. Due to that, sentient beings regard the buddhas as great, honest and unfailing friends, who will be ready to help without any request being made. Unlike temporary small benefits, the buddhas offer boundless benefits that extend to alleviating all the sufferings and problems of sentient beings.

The second part of the commentary indicates that the way for sentient beings to repay the kindness of these unfailing, honest friends, who help without being asked, is by making other sentient beings happy. Apart from that there is no other way. This is expressed as a rhetorical question: *how can one repay their kindness, apart from making sentient beings happy?* This implies that there is no other way to repay the kindness of the enlightened beings, the buddhas, apart from actually making other sentient beings happy.

Furthermore, *there is no better offering to please the buddhas than to work for the benefit of sentient beings.* There is no other way to repay the kindness of the enlightened beings than by actually benefiting sentient beings by making offerings to them, making them happy and so forth. This is yet *another reason for treating sentient beings respectfully.*

###### **3.2.1.1.2. Achieving that very action**

Here there are three subdivisions:

3.2.1.1.2.1. Being patient when harmed by sentient beings

3.2.1.1.2.2. Abandoning the arrogance that focuses on sentient beings

3.2.1.1.2.3. Abandoning harm

###### **3.2.1.1.2.1. Being patient when harmed by sentient beings**

Even though this was presented earlier, it refers here to being patient when harmed by sentient beings, as a means of repaying the kindness of the buddhas.

As one doesn't want to upset sentient beings and make them unhappy, one needs to practise patience when harmed by sentient beings. The verse relating to this reads:

*120. If one repays the benefit of those  
That give up their life and enter without respite,  
Then even if one is harmed greatly by them,  
One solely treats them with everything  
wholesome.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning as follows:

Benefiting sentient beings repays the kindness of the buddhas, who gave up their life for sentient beings, and who would even enter the hells without respite. Hence, even if one is harmed greatly by sentient beings one not only does not get angry, but one should strive solely to benefit them through one's three doors with everything wholesome that establishes all happiness for them.

As explained here, the act of *benefiting sentient beings repays the kindness of the buddhas, who gave up their life for*

*sentient beings, and who would even enter the hells without respite.* This is explaining the unimaginable extent of the buddhas' practices to benefit sentient beings—their unceasing toil, giving up their bodies for the sake of other beings, and even going to the hells without respite. This is in accordance with the *Commentary on Bodhicitta*, which explains how, for the sake of sentient beings, bodhisattvas have no hesitation in engaging in any austerities in order to work for sentient beings. Their sacrifices are all for the sake of sentient beings.

If one is harmed by sentient beings now, then, as a way to remember and show faith in the buddhas, one should not only not become angry with them, but one should strive to benefit them through one's three doors *with everything wholesome that establishes all happiness for them.*

Engaging in the practice of being able to return harm with benefit is in fact possible when one contemplates and trains one's mind in thinking in this way. As the teachings have mentioned, there is nothing that one cannot achieve through acquaintance. Therefore acquainting oneself with this way of thinking will make it possible to actually return harm with benefit, rather than retaliating. With the practice of patience it is possible to return harm with benefit rather than harm.

At a practical level, the best way to apply this advice is with one's closest companion. As I emphasise regularly, in any kind of relationship one cannot expect to always hear pleasant words, and never hear unpleasant words. That is unrealistic. Indeed there will be times when, while a bit upset, or not in the right state of mind, the other might make some inappropriate comment or gesture. If one takes the initiative to not return that unkind word or gesture with unkindness, and tries to practise a bit of patience, and show an appealing gesture or a smile, then that will prevent a lot of difficulties that might otherwise arise. If one fails to practise patience, and decides to become upset and angry and retaliate with more inappropriate gestures and unkind words, then the problem will just escalate and worsen. Then that relationship will be harmed.

Of course this advice is not limited to sorting out the problems of couples and helping them to maintain a good relationship. The scope is much greater than that. Nevertheless ordinary life is where we really need to practice. We need to begin our practice with the individuals that we are dealing with on a regular basis. That is how to incorporate the teachings into our life in a practical way.

There have been people who have confided in me that this advice has been helpful when they have put it into practice. When someone comes home from work, don't get into the habit of querying them about their day if they come in with a worried face. Say 'Go and relax. Have a shower. I'll make you tea and a nice meal'. Speak quietly, and don't insist on asking 'Why are you upset?' which will only aggravate them even more.

### 3.2.1.1.2.2. Abandoning the arrogance that focuses on sentient beings

This is, yet again, very practical advice for our daily life. The verse relating to this is:

121. *One should not be ignorant and generate pride  
Or be competitive with those  
That even the very ones that are one's lords  
Regard without concern for their own bodies.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on this verse reads:

Further, one should not be ignorant and generate arrogant pride or be competitive in any action with the sentient beings for whose purpose the very buddhas, that are one's lords, work without concern for their own bodies. One should abandon pride and be respectful.

As the commentary explains, one should not allow an *ignorant* mind to *generate* arrogance, *pride or be competitive with the sentient beings, for whom the very buddhas that are one's lords work, without concern for their own bodies.* This is explaining that it is inappropriate to generate pride and arrogance towards sentient beings, who are the very beings the buddhas have sought to benefit by sacrificing their lives and giving away their body, wealth and so forth.

If the enlightened beings hold these sentient beings so dearly and work endlessly for their benefit, then it would be totally inappropriate to develop a sense of arrogance and competitiveness with sentient beings. If anyone should have pride, it would be the buddhas, but in fact they only benefit and help sentient beings. So one should not develop pride and arrogance towards the very objects the buddhas help.

The really crucial advice here is that if one follows the example of the enlightened beings, the lords, who one holds in high esteem and respects, then one should refrain from harming sentient beings. Rather than arrogance and pride and so forth, they should only think of benefiting sentient beings. That is what has to be kept in mind.

### 3.2.1.1.2.3. Abandoning harm

This is subdivided into two:

3.2.1.1.2.3.1. The reason why it is unsuitable to harm

3.2.1.1.2.3.2. If one harms them there is no way to please the buddhas

3.2.1.1.2.3.1. *The reason why it is unsuitable to harm*

The text and the explanation in the commentary is quite clear. The verse reads:

122. *Those whose happiness makes the conquerors  
pleased,  
Those then when harmed causes unhappiness to  
arise,  
The conquerors are pleased when they are  
happy  
And harming them will harm the conquerors.*

The explanation in the commentary reads:

The conquerors are pleased when sentient beings are happy, and are not pleased when they are harmed. Therefore the best offering to all the able ones is to make these sentient beings happy, by benefiting them. This makes the conquerors pleased, and harming

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these sentient beings becomes harming the conquerors.

As clearly explained here, *The conquerors are pleased when sentient beings are happy, and are not pleased when they are harmed. So the best offering to all able ones is to make these sentient beings happy by benefiting them. This makes the conquerors pleased, and harming sentient beings is in fact harming the conquerors.*

What is being explained here reflects a point that I regularly emphasise: the Buddha said that if you benefit sentient beings you are benefiting me, and if you harm sentient beings you are harming me. Thus, if one considers oneself to be a follower of the Buddha then the best way to please the Buddha is by pleasing sentient beings, and the best way to refrain from being disrespectful to the Buddha is by refraining from harming sentient beings. This is the point to be understood here.

We will break early, and recite the tenth chapter of the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* together.

We will dedicated this first of all to Wendy Pullen's mother who passed away recently. And, as we all know, there has been that disaster in Nepal. So many people have perished there and we need to dedicate our prayers and practices to them. I haven't heard anything directly, but some acquaintances of mine might have been affected. So we also need to dedicate to them.

I have two nieces, who some of you met when we were in Nepal, and one of them has a son. The first time I met one of the nieces was when she came to the last Kalachakra in Bodhgaya, and later the boy came to Sera, which was the only time I met him. They live in Nepal in the Tibetan settlement, and I am not sure if that has been affected. I haven't heard anything specific, but I have quite a few acquaintances in that area. In any case, it is good to dedicate to all who have been affected.

Also Lama Zopa Rinpoche's brother, Sangay, lives in the next village after Boudha. His wife is the sister of Donyo, the Gyuto monk who used to live here. I was once invited to the house and had lunch there with Lama Zopa. I am not sure about the father but the mother passed away not long ago. There are some other relatives as well.

*Student: There are also the men who are to be shot in Indonesia tonight. Many are holding a vigil tonight.*

The nuns over the road said that they were doing some prayers for them. As spiritual people the only help that we can extend is by doing prayers and sending our good wishes and good intentions, and dedicating that to them.

What is happening in Indonesia seems to be because the Prime Minister apparently tried to say something quite forcefully, and then there was retaliation. Then he became very quiet. So if one is not careful it makes others very cross.

These are just some examples, and of course there are many who are suffering, and so we dedicate this recitation to all of them.

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

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