
Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

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

[meditation]

As usual we now generate a motivation that is based on the altruistic motivation of bodhicitta, such as:

May all sentient beings be free from all suffering and endowed with happiness. By taking personal responsibility for making that happen, may I be able to free all sentient beings from all suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness. It is for that purpose that I will engage in listening to the teaching and put it into practice well.

We can also use this as a motivation for engaging in the meditation practice that we have just done. When one genuinely generates an altruistic motivation such as 'How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from all suffering and led to the ultimate state of happiness, then that needs to be followed with the commitment 'I myself will do that for them, and for that purpose I will engage in this meditation practice'. The practice then becomes very powerful and meaningful. By generating this motivation again and again we become more and more familiar with this positive state of mind. So spending even just a few moments generating this motivation is a highly meaningful practice.

As mentioned previously, while we might not have generated bodhicitta yet, by cultivating this altruistic mind to the extent that we actually feel that sentiment, we are going beyond the mere aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and actually generating the wish to take that responsibility upon oneself. Generating the direct intention, 'for that purpose I will engage in this practice' brings in the element of personal responsibility; thus it is called the superior intention. A superior intention is the active intention to take full responsibility for freeing all beings from suffering, and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness.

By familiarising ourselves with this motivation we will definitely reach a stage where, at the very least, no-one will appear as an enemy. Rather, all beings will start to appear appealing and worthy of love and compassion, and an object of practice that leads to enlightenment. As also mentioned previously, when one develops the intention to do everything possible to benefit sentient beings, and to not harm any living being, then all sentient beings will appear as appealing and not hostile. This pure appearance contributes to a real sense of personal joy and happiness.

This is also a significant practice for our own personal development. As we familiarise ourselves with this attitude more and more, we can see its benefit, and thus be encouraged to continue with the practice; then our wish to benefit others will also increase. By understanding how familiarising ourselves with this motivation further strengthens it, we can understand how, when bodhisattvas

become enlightened, they actively engage in going out and helping sentient beings on a constant basis. They certainly don't sit back, relax and enjoy themselves. Because they are enlightened, there is nothing to hold them back anymore, and they can benefit sentient beings constantly. It is through familiarity with this training that one reaches that perfected state of enlightenment.

This has been an abbreviated explanation of how to generate the bodhicitta mind as the basis of one's motivation. As you would know, in the seven-point cause-and-effect sequence one works through earlier states of mind until one reaches the stage where one spontaneously takes on the responsibility for benefitting sentient beings, and for that purpose engages in practising the six perfections. Based on feelings of love and compassion, one develops great love and compassion, which forms the basis for the development of that superior intention. Having developed superior intention, one can then easily generate bodhicitta. Initially however, generating bodhicitta still requires some effort, and so it is called contrived bodhicitta. Whereas when one reaches the stage where the altruistic mind of aspiring to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings is generated spontaneously, effortlessly and continuously, one has generated actual, uncontrived bodhicitta.

2.2.1.2.1. The power of belief

2.2.1.2.1.1. The object of belief (cont.)

Earlier the text explained how aspiring to achieve enlightenment involves abandoning faults, and next it goes on to explain how to acquire the qualities necessary to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment. Again these very significant points are being presented in a very precise, sequential manner. The Lam Rim teachings mention that the attainment of enlightenment is based on abandoning each and every negativity, and acquiring each and every quality from the very outset of one's practice. More specifically, what is being mentioned is that every attempt to abandon even one negativity, and acquire even one quality, is the basis for proceeding on the path leading to the ultimate state of enlightenment.

This is a really significant point for us to consider. The state of enlightenment attained by the buddhas, who we revere, did not arise spontaneously or miraculously from nothing. Rather, that state of enlightenment is attained as a result of having abandoned each and every negativity, and acquired each and every quality at the time of being a trainee on the path, which eventually and gradually led to that state of enlightenment. This very significant point is very encouraging, because it shows us that we have the same potential. Each negativity that we abandon now, and each quality that we acquire now, is an essential part of the cause to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment. This is the way to relate to this point.

It is, of course, not sufficient to attempt to acquire qualities if one maintains faults. Indeed, the very process of acquiring qualities entails overcoming certain faults. When each and every fault is abandoned, the quality of abandoning negativities is also acquired. So we need to understand that abandoning faults and acquiring qualities are mutually dependent upon each other. We need to understand that inter-relationship, and thus realise that we cannot hope to acquire qualities while not thinking too much about the necessity of abandoning faults. It is essential that we see that our progress is dependent upon abandoning faults. If we attempt to acquire qualities while holding fast onto our faults, then we will fall short of making any progress in the

Dharma. So from the very outset we need to make a strong attempt to abandon and overcome the faults of attachment, anger and ignorance, from which all other faults stem.

As the Lam Rim teachings clearly explain, the signs that one's practice is coming to fruition is when one sees that the delusions have started to reduce, that one's mind has become more subdued, that one has stronger faith in the teachings and the teacher, and that one has more inclination to engage in the practice. When we notice that our mind has become more and more acquainted with the Dharma in these ways, then that is a clear sign that one has made progress in the practice.

The more we become familiar with the qualities, and the greater the effort we put into overcoming faults, the more rapidly we will obtain qualities and overcome faults. The strong imprint that comes from becoming familiar with the Dharma now will ensure that our Dharma practice will be much easier in our future life.

To abandon delusions we need to first identify them clearly. Then we need to meditate and contemplate their disadvantages. When we clearly see those disadvantages, the strong wish to abandon them will arise, and then whatever attempts one makes to overcome the delusions will be fruitful. If we miss that point, then, although we might be exerting ourselves in the practice of Dharma, our mind will feel weighed down, and we may even feel depressed. That is a sign that the practice has not really taken root yet. Even though it may seem impossible to abandon all negativities and subdue all delusions in this life, the attempts we make now will not be in vain. In the next life, we will be much more able to spontaneously and rapidly apply the antidote to overcome the delusions and acquire qualities. So we definitely benefit from this practice. Conversely, if we resort into thinking, 'Oh, well, since I am not able to abandon the delusions now, I might as well just give up, and not do anything about it', then any progress is definitely limited.

The purpose of sharing this with you is to remind you that the real purpose of your efforts to study and practice is to overcome the delusions. If we make a genuine attempt we will definitely reap a significant result. While I cannot claim that I have abandoned negativities to any great degree, I can safely say that I have made some progress. In my teenage years I was influenced by strong emotions such as anger. However, by seeing the great disadvantages of anger, and making genuine attempts to overcome it, I can safely say that I have progressed to the point where the mind of anger hardly ever occurs now. I am not claiming that I have abandoned the delusions, but in comparison to the state of my mind when I was young, I feel that my mind is genuinely calmer now, and not really affected by strong delusions. So to that extent I have benefitted from my attempts to apply the antidotes earlier in my life.

We really need to think again and again about the disadvantages of negative states of mind such as anger, attachment and so forth. Also think again and again about the advantages of overcoming those delusions. When our mind is not dominated and controlled by anger, it is calmer and much more peaceful. Then, not only will we have achieved some personal transformation, but it will bring benefit to others, because of the contribution that our happy mind makes to our immediate surroundings.

We can clearly see that when anyone is affected by delusions such as anger or attachment, they do not have a happy or peaceful mind. For however long the influence of the

delusion lasts, their mind is in turmoil and unhappy. This is true for every one. No-one is exempted from mental turmoil when they experience anger. Delusions can arise in anyone, regardless of their status, whether they are well-known or respected, whether they are rich and famous, or impoverished. For as long as delusions are present they affect the mind negatively, bringing about unrest and turmoil, and there will be no mental peace.

When the mind is not affected by strong delusions, then for however long that state lasts, one will have a peaceful, joyful, contented and happy state of mind. This is true for everyone, regardless of their status. Even those without many worldly possessions will feel contented, happy and satisfied when their mind is not affected by strong delusions. Conversely, those with fame, possessions, wealth and so forth will not have a happy life if their mind is affected by strong delusions. For as long as their mind is affected by strong delusions, they will not be happy. These are the points we really need consider again and again, as a way of reaffirming our commitment to our practice, where the main focus is on subduing our mind and overcoming the delusions.

Of course all of this relates directly to the text that we are studying, where Shantideva presents the delusions and their antidotes in great detail. The fifth chapter identifies many of the delusions, and the sixth chapter specifically deals with one of the strongest delusions, anger, explaining how to apply the antidote by cultivating patience. In this seventh chapter he is again presenting delusions as faults, and showing how to overcome them by applying enthusiasm or joyful effort.

I personally find studying this text incredibly beneficial. I recall how much I benefitted when I received teachings on the entire text from His Holiness Dalai Lama. Now I have to read it again as preparation for presenting it to you. Familiarising myself with it again, reading it and studying it has, once again, brought me tremendous benefit. So it is quite appropriate to thank you for giving me the opportunity to further familiarise myself with the text. It gives me that opportunity to once more relate to this incredibly powerful practice and teaching, which I find really beneficial.

2.2.1.2.1.2. Taking qualities

Now we come to acquiring the qualities for the achievement of the ultimate state of enlightenment. The two verses relating to this read:

35. *One should establish many qualities
Of self and others.
If one meditates for an ocean of eons
For each individual quality,*
36. *One has not generated meditation
On even a part of one's qualities.
This birth that one has somehow found now,
It is strange that I make it meaningless.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary on these verses reads:

One should establish the many qualities of one's own and others' liberation and enlightenment because one has promised to do so.

Not to mention all the qualities, if it is necessary to familiarise oneself for an ocean of eons even for one individual quality of the marks and signs, then one has not started to even partially meditate on those qualities. It is strange that I make meaningless this birth, with its freedoms and endowments, for this and

future rebirths, now when somehow I have found it after such a long time. This is an expression of despair.

As the commentary explains, *One should establish the many qualities of one's own and others' liberation and enlightenment because one has promised to do so.* The third chapter of the text explains the benefits of bodhicitta, and shows how to make that promise to develop bodhicitta. Having made that promise to work for the welfare of other sentient beings, one definitely needs to strive to obtain all the qualities that are the cause for obtaining liberation and enlightenment both for one's own sake, and for the sake of other sentient beings.

In order to establish others in the state of liberation and enlightenment one first needs to have obtained liberation and enlightenment oneself. Without that, one could not possibly establish other sentient beings in that state. Here again we need to reflect upon what liberation means. What does a state of liberation mean, and what does a state of enlightenment mean? At this point, we need to recall all of the explanations on liberation and enlightenment that we have studied. As soon as we hear the word *liberation* we need to immediately recall what that actually entails, and when we hear about *enlightenment* we need to recall what that actually means. We need to go beyond just hearing the words, and contemplate what they actually mean. This understanding, in itself, is said to be a means to purify a lot of negative karma and accumulate a lot of merit. We are aiming at an incredible goal, so whenever these words are mentioned, we need to recall our understanding of them.

As further presented in the commentary, *Not to mention all the qualities, if it is necessary to familiarise oneself for an ocean of eons even for one individual quality of the marks and signs.* The text *Precious Garland*, which we studied in the past, gave an extensive explanation of the marks and signs of the Buddha, obtaining each of which takes many eons of accumulation of merit. So each of the signs and marks of the Buddha has taken tremendous effort, and the accumulation of enormous merit over eons of time.

Yet *one has not started to even partially familiarise oneself with those qualities.* Despite the fact that obtaining just one mark of a buddha requires familiarising oneself with its causes and accumulating merit over many eons, the reality is that one has not yet even started to familiarise oneself, let alone exert oneself, even partially, to accumulate the merits needed to obtain these qualities.

Based on the promise that one has made, and the need to establish those qualities then *it is strange that I make meaningless my rebirth now with these freedoms and endowments for this and future lives.* Not only are we making this life meaningless, but we are also making our future life meaningless by wasting the precious human rebirth we have somehow found after such a long time. This is implying that it is like a miracle that we have obtained the condition of having the freedoms and endowments, and that wasting this very rare opportunity that we have found now is quite absurd.

This is an expression of despair implies that when the enlightened being, the Buddha, who we revere now as a supreme being, was a trainee, he used the opportunity provided by the freedoms and endowments to engage in practices to acquire qualities and abandon faults. Over many previous lifetimes, the Buddha as a trainee, and then as a bodhisattva, engaged in acquiring the causes and conditions leading to enlightenment, thus making his life highly meaningful. As we have the same freedoms and

endowments now, it would be a great pity and a loss if we were to waste it. So this statement is one of words of encouragement to exhort us to actually make the precious human rebirth we have now, with its freedoms and endowments, purposeful and meaningful, by putting it into use in acquiring the causes for obtaining those enlightened qualities.

2.2.1.2.1.3. *Analysing what one has done and what one has not done*

In this section we think about and analyse what virtues we have engaged in, and what we have not done. This is explained in these two verses:

37. *I did not make offerings to the tathagatas
Nor did I offer the happiness of great
celebrations.
I did not do anything for the teachings
And I did not meet the needs of the destitute.*
38. *I did not offer fearlessness to those in danger.
Nor did I give happiness to the wretched.
Hence, I have only given pain and suffering
While in the mother's womb.*

Here, Gyaltsab Je explains:

Previously I did not make offerings to the Three Jewels, such as the Bhagavan, Lord Buddha, nor did I offer the happiness of great celebrations that serve sentient beings and the Tathagata. I did nothing for the teachings since I did not practise accordingly to the presentation of the objects of abandonment that have to be abandoned, and antidotes that have to be adopted. I also did not accomplish the wishes of the sentient beings who are destitute. I did not offer protection to those in danger from enemies or sicknesses. I also did not offer satisfaction to those that are wretched due to suffering, and hence I have not practised the holy Dharma at all and have only caused pain and suffering while being in the mother's womb.

As the commentary explains, *previously I did not make offerings to the Three Jewels, such as the Bhagavan Lord Buddha.* Here, making offerings to the Buddha includes direct offerings and indirect offerings. Direct offerings are those actually made by oneself, rather than having someone else do it. It is said that one gains more merit by presenting the offering oneself, rather than asking someone else to present it. In the monastery, sponsors making offerings to the Sangha, such as money, attempt to physically make the offering themselves. I recall one ex-abbot of Sera Monastery, who, even though he was very old, would go and make his offering to each monk personally, despite his feeble state.

Then the commentary explains that, *nor did I offer the happiness of great celebrations that serve sentient beings and the Tathagata.* Here, *not offering the happiness of celebrations* refers to not making offerings to others, not just Sangha but also enlightened beings and other sentient beings. This implies, of course, that making offerings to the buddhas and sentient beings is a very meritorious practice. For example, on the recent occasion of His Holiness' birthday, I suggested offering lunch to everyone because I thought that it would be a great way for you to accumulate merit.

Furthermore *I did nothing for the teachings* means that I have done nothing to propagate or practise the Dharma. Here we need to understand that the teachings are the Buddha's doctrine. Doing a service for the teachings means engaging in propagating the oral teachings such as the three baskets, and propagating the realisations. The Buddha's doctrine is

subsumed into these two categories: the transmission of oral teachings and the transmission of insights.

Doing service in relation to the oral teachings means that, having studied the three baskets, and gained an understanding of them, one then explains it to others. If one were to engage in that, then that would be doing **service to the Buddha's oral teachings**.

Doing **service for the transmission of insights** of the Buddha's teachings means engaging in the practice according to *the presentation of the objects of abandonment that have to be abandoned, and the antidotes that have to be adopted*. In order to gain the realisations of the Buddha's doctrine one needs to apply the practice of abandoning the faults to be abandoned, and adopting qualities that one has to adopt. If one has failed to either propagate the Buddha's oral teachings, or made no effort to gain the realisations of the Buddha's doctrine, then one has not done service to the Buddha's doctrine.

One also needs to understand that this presentation is meant to encourage one to actually engage in the practice, and, if one has not engaged in these practices extensively, to more actively adopt them. Next the commentary states, *I also did not accomplish the wishes of the sentient beings who are destitute*. This relates to beings who are really impoverished being very poor and lacking the basic necessities. Offering such beings any kind of assistance such as food or clothing would make them feel a bit more comfortable, and so it is a really beneficial and virtuous practice. So this part of the commentary is referring to the practices that involve providing immediate care for those in need, to whatever extent one can. When we come across people who are destitute, it is extremely good to offer them help.

Furthermore, *I did not offer protection to those in danger from enemies or sicknesses*, this refers to the practice of helping those who are in danger. You will recall that one of the practices of generosity is giving fearlessness to those who are in fear of losing their life. One engages in this practice when one extends help to those whose life is in immediate danger.

This also applies to animals. For example, there are those who engage in the practice of buying animals that are about to be slaughtered—liberating an animal from the fear of death is an incredibly meaningful practice. As I have mentioned previously, when you are walking around the park for example, and you see an insect struggling in the water and about to drown, it is very easy to lift it out and put it onto dry land. That is said to be an incredible act of generosity, which is of great benefit to that particular insect. The commentary reminds us, if one has not engaged in these practices then one should reprimand oneself saying, 'I have not engaged in this practice of offering protection'.

With respect to, *I did not offer satisfaction to those who are wretched due to suffering*, some commentaries explain that this point also refers to the generosity of giving the Dharma. Here, *wretched* indicates experiencing suffering as a result of lacking the knowledge of how the Dharma prevents one from creating the causes of suffering. If one has not engaged in sharing one's understanding of the Dharma with such people, then one has not engaged in this practice. Conversely, practising giving the Dharma is very meaningful and beneficial. *I also did not offer satisfaction to those that are wretched due to suffering*, also means not showing that which has to be adopted and how to discard or abandon that which has to be abandoned. The implication is that when one engages in doing that then it is a very meritorious

way of creating the causes for the achievement of enlightenment.

Hence I have not practised the holy Dharma at all. The Tibetan word *dampa*, which is translated here as *holy Dharma* can also refer to the actions of holy beings who are perpetually engaged in virtue and abandoning negativities. Thus practising the holy Dharma refers to engaging in the practices of adopting virtue and shunning all non-virtues.

Of course what is being presented here is that one may have engaged in the practices to a certain extent, but if one has not utilised one's full capacity to engage in these practices then it is as if the *only* purpose in taking rebirth is to *cause pain and suffering while being in the mother's womb*. This is a reference to the suffering experienced by the mother (and the child) as she gives birth. If one has not engaged in any purposeful way to make one's life meaningful, then it is as if one has been reborn just to cause suffering to the mother. So this is another way of exhorting us to actually engage in meaningful and purposeful practices.

Then the commentary concludes with, *not having done anything for others* one feels *regret*.

We can finish here for the evening.

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

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