

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

༄༅། །བྱུང་རྒྱུ་མེས་མ་དཔའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

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Based on the motivation we have generated, we can now spend a few minutes for our meditation practice.

[meditation]

As usual, 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, so for that purpose I will engage in listening to the Mahayana teachings, and put them into practice well.

3.1.2.2. THE WAY OF MEDITATING ON EQUALISING SELF AND OTHERS

3.2.2.2.2 Explaining the reason why it is suitable to meditate on it as equal

3.1.2.2.2.2. Refuting objections (cont.)

3.1.2.2.2.2.2. The need to contemplate suffering

In the text we are covering the need to contemplate suffering. This point follows from an earlier qualm that, if one generates compassion for others it will cause one suffering, so what purpose does it serve? The response presented here is that, for bodhisattvas, the more they contemplate the suffering of others, the stronger their compassion becomes. For bodhisattvas, generating compassion serves to eliminate their own suffering, rather than causing them more suffering. As I mentioned previously, whenever we feel compassion for another person, at that time there is no possibility of feeling anger towards them. As this was explained earlier, I don't need to go over it again. For those who are keen to put what they hear into practice, when a point is repeated, there is no problem as it is a pleasure for them to hear it again. But for those who do not put what they hear into practice, it may sound like an unnecessary repetition and hurt their ears!

The main point here however is that, although this advice is intended for bodhisattvas, the practices that enabled them to become bodhisattvas were taken step by step. This is also the approach we need to take. Instead of thinking 'Oh, these practices were intended only for bodhisattvas', if we put whatever level we can now into practice, then gradually, we will reach the stage of becoming a bodhisattva.

The step by step presentation here is in itself a guide to developing our practice and, most importantly, it provides us with a means to skilfully present the teachings to others, ensuring we do not present anything unsuitable for their current level of practice and state of mind. One may think one has to present all the profound and extensive teachings to others; however, instead of benefiting them, this might overwhelm them and cause more confusion. We need to remember how, when we were beginners in the Dharma, everything was new and at times seemed overwhelming. Then as we progressively began to understand, slowly, slowly, things became clearer and clearer to our mind. Thus, we need to present the Dharma to others in gradual steps.

The two verses that relate to this heading are:

105. *If through one suffering*

Many sufferings became non-existent,

*Then it is only suitable for self and other
That suffering is generated out of affection.*

106. *Even though Supushpa Chandra
Knew the suffering caused by the king,
He did not eliminate his own suffering,
In order to exhaust the suffering of many.*

The commentary explains:

If it were the case that one insignificant suffering eliminates the many samsaric sufferings of the infinite migrators then, since it has a great purpose, it is only suitable for oneself and others to generate this suffering out of affection.

As it is stated in *The King of Concentration Sutra*, even though the bodhisattva Supushpa Chandra knew that he would receive the harm of being killed by the king, he did not eliminate his own suffering but accepted it, as he saw that this would alleviate the suffering of many sentient beings, and proceeded to the town. He did not listen to his entourage, who tried to stop him.

The main point here is that if one's own experience of suffering becomes a cause to eliminate great suffering for other sentient beings, then it is worthwhile to endure that suffering and willingly take it upon oneself. As the root text states *If through one suffering* presents the fact that when just one suffering becomes a means to eliminate the suffering of infinite migrators, then it becomes worthwhile to willingly accept it, because it serves a great purpose.

This presentation also gives us an insight into the great qualities of bodhisattvas, who willingly endure extensive difficulties and hardships for the benefit of sentient beings. The capacity of bodhisattvas to extend themselves in such great ways to benefit sentient beings, of course, comes from love and compassion. Thus we can see that love and compassion are the basis for bodhisattvas to acquire all their great qualities. When the commentary continues *it is only suitable for oneself and others to generate this suffering out of affection*, the main point is that when one's intentional acceptance of suffering becomes a means to generate compassion for other sentient beings, then it is suitable for one to experience that suffering.

The example presented here is from *The King of Concentration Sutra*. It relates the story of a great bodhisattva by the name of Supushpa Chandra, who resided mostly in isolation and didn't spend much time in towns and so forth. This bodhisattva knew it was time for the people in the town where the king ruled to hear the teachings. However, through his clairvoyance, he knew that if he did so, the king would become enraged and punish him with death. The bodhisattva knew that if he did not go into the city to give teachings, those people would not be free from suffering and obtain happiness. On the other hand, if he gave Dharma teachings, they would be able to be liberated from suffering and obtain happiness. So with this insight, the bodhisattva went into the city to present the teachings to the people for seven days. He taught continuously during the day and in the evenings he circumambulated a reliquary stupa. He didn't have to partake of food and drink because, having reached a high level of concentration, he was sustained by the food of concentration, so therefore didn't need to eat and drink. After the bodhisattva gave the teachings, as he foresaw, the king became enraged and gave orders to kill him. However, it is said that later the king developed great regret and built a reliquary stupa as means to purify his heavy negative karma.

As the commentary explains, even though the bodhisattva Supushpa Chandra knew he would receive the harm of being killed by the king, *he did not eliminate his own suffering*, meaning he disregarded his own suffering *as he saw that this* (that is, giving Dharma teachings) *would alleviate the suffering of many sentient beings, and proceeded to the town. He did not listen to his entourage, who tried to stop him*: his entourage also knew that the king would be enraged and punish him. However, he didn't listen to them but went ahead. This shows his great compassion. One of the greatest sufferings anyone can experience is the treat to one's life, yet out of compassion, the bodhisattva still went into the town for the sole benefit of other beings. Hearing stories like this, of great bodhisattva's deeds, should instil admiration within us and encourage us to make aspirational prayers such as: 'May I also be able to engage in extensive deeds like the great bodhisattvas to benefit sentient beings'. When I read stories like this myself, it instils in me the strong aspiration, 'May I be able to follow these examples of the great bodhisattvas to benefit sentient beings, if possible in this life, and in many lives to come'. At our level, making a strong aspiration is of great significance, as it leaves a strong imprint in our mind. This is one way we can put these teachings into personal practice.

3.1.2.3. THE BENEFITS OF MEDITATING ON IT

There are five subheadings:

3.1.2.3.1. Those dedicated only to the purpose of others do not have great sufferings

3.1.2.3.2. Working for the purpose of others as its happiness is superior

3.1.2.3.3. One's pride will be pacified

3.1.2.3.4. Not depending on reward and ripened results

3.1.2.3.5. For those reasons it is suitable to meditate on equalising self and others

We can derive some meaning from these headings themselves:

Those dedicated only to the purpose of others do not have great sufferings. Here, the text is being honest, admitting that while there might be some suffering when one dedicates to the purpose of others, it would not be so great compared to other sufferings.

Working for the purpose of others as its happiness is superior. Because the happiness one derives is superior, it is appropriate to work for others for that purpose.

One's pride will be pacified. As mentioned earlier, when one has compassion for others, negative afflictions such as anger, and as mentioned here, pride, will not occur. Thus when anyone exhibits pride or contempt for others, it is a clear sign they don't have compassion for others. When one has compassion for others, there is no room for contempt or pride to arise.

Not depending on reward and ripened results. This refers to benefiting others with no ulterior motive of receiving a reward or gaining the ripened result of that action at some time in the future. Rather, the text indicates that we should benefit others solely from the intention to alleviate their suffering and bring them happiness, and not for one's own personal gain.

For those reasons it is suitable to meditate on equalising self and others. In relation to this, we can reflect on how the teachings explain that, of the two different techniques for developing bodhicitta – the seven-fold cause and effect technique and the exchanging self with other technique presented here, – this technique is said to be much more

profound and powerful. The explanation here is that we willingly take others' suffering upon ourselves for the purpose of benefiting sentient beings. That is what makes it very powerful.

3.1.2.3.1. *Those dedicated only to the purpose of others do not have great sufferings*

We usually have this doubt: 'If I work for the purpose of others I might suffer greatly'. This way of thinking prevents us from developing strong compassion. For bodhisattvas, this would not be a concern, but for us at our level, it seems to be a great concern. As a way to remove that doubt, the following advice is presented.

*107. When the continuum becomes thus acquainted
One takes joy in pacifying the suffering of others.
Like ducks entering a lotus pond
One will even enter the hell without respite.*

The commentary to this explains:

If one's continuum becomes habituated to the meditation of equalising self and other as explained before, then one takes joy in pacifying the sufferings of others. In order to destroy the sufferings of others one will disregard one's own sufferings and happily enter even the hell without respite just like ducks into a lotus pond. One will not have any mental suffering working for the purpose of others.

Thus, one familiarises one's mind with the practice of equalising self and other again and again by contemplating the great benefits and virtues of the practice. Then, through repeated contemplation and familiarisation, one reaches a point of feeling confident that exchanging one's own happiness for the happiness of others is possible. As beginners and ordinary beings, we may initially feel daunted by the prospect of exchanging our own happiness for the happiness of others, i.e. exchanging the focus from oneself to solely focusing on the wellbeing and happiness of others. But that is because we have not acquainted our mind with this practice. The point presented here is that, through acquaintance, it becomes possible to develop this state of mind.

The actual meditation of equalising self and other involves exchanging one's previous focus – of working solely for one's own happiness, and eliminating suffering just for oneself – to that of working solely for the happiness of others and removing their suffering. This is the state of mind that one needs to familiarise oneself with. When one actually reaches that state through acquaintance, *then one takes joy in pacifying the sufferings of others.*

Furthermore, *in order to destroy the sufferings of others one will disregard one's own sufferings and happily enter even the hell without respite.* The example given here is *like ducks entering a lotus pond.* If there is a beautiful pond with lotuses, ducks will have no hesitation – they will immediately want to enter the pond where the water is nice and cool. We can see for ourselves how ducks will waddle together and joyfully head straight for water. This example illustrates how, when bodhisattvas see the sufferings of others, they willingly and joyfully attempt to help those who are suffering.

The last line of the commentary for this verse is *one will not have any mental suffering working for the purpose of others.* We might have some experience ourselves of experiencing physical suffering without our mind being greatly affected and disturbed, thus enabling us to avoid mental suffering.

3.1.2.3.2. Working for the purpose of others as its happiness is superior

108. *If one liberates sentient beings
One has an ocean of joy.
Is this not superior?
What use is it to desire liberation?*

The commentary explains:

If one liberates sentient beings from cyclic existence then one will be filled by an ocean of joy that accomplishes all one's wishes, and one will be satisfied. Is this not superior? What use is it to desire liberation only for oneself? Remembering that all sentient beings have been one's mother, one should strive for their purpose.

This shows again that what brings the greatest joy for bodhisattvas is when they see other beings free from the suffering of cyclic existence. Bodhisattvas are indeed blessed and noble beings – their only wish is for sentient beings to be free from suffering. When they see other beings free from suffering, it fills their mind with *an ocean of joy* and accomplishes their wishes, so they are satisfied. Here, the rhetorical question, *Is this not superior?* is presented to indicate that this is indeed a superior state of mind. Then the commentary asks another rhetorical question: *What use is it to desire liberation only for oneself?* If that state of mind is indeed superior, then what use is it to desire liberation just for oneself? This part of the commentary concludes, *remembering that all sentient beings have been one's mother, one should strive for their purpose.* When one remembers the kindness of one's own mother then relates it to all beings having been one's mother, it becomes an impetus for one to naturally and spontaneously want to bring them happiness and remove their suffering, as a way to repay their kindness. This is the point of contemplating the kindness of beings as having been one's mother.

The first step in the seven-fold cause and effect sequence of developing bodhicitta is recognising all beings as having been one's mother. When one reflects upon one's own mother's kindness and really brings it to heart then, as we expand the scope of that meditation, it becomes possible to see all beings as being extremely kind as well. So, based on the recognition of one's own mother's kindness in this life, one can then relate that to all beings, and see them as being as kind as one's mother because of the kindness they have shown to us in the past.

The main point is that one would be able to relate to other sentient beings in the same way as one would relate to one's own mother. When one sees one's own mother who has been kind, one feels great joy and naturally wishes her to be happy; likewise it is possible to relate to all other beings in the same way.

As a meditation practice, contemplating the passages and points here even for few minutes can really settle one's mind. It will definitely have good effect.

3.1.2.3.3. One's pride will be pacified

We need to take this presentation as a personal instruction and reflect on how, when one engages in the actual practice, one's pride will be pacified. In contrast to this, when one learns a bit about the teachings and Dharma, if it serves as means to increase one's pride and a sense of contempt over others, then it has defeated the purpose. This is when the Dharma becomes poison instead of being a remedy, which is really unfortunate. All of the Buddha's teachings are said to be a means to overcome pride. So when those very teachings

become a cause for one's pride to increase, then one will not have benefited from the teachings. This is a real loss. So it is important for us to constantly try our utmost not to allow pride to take over our mind.

109ab. *Thus, though one works for the purpose of others
There is no vanity or astonishment.*

The commentary explains:

Thus, as one takes great joy in the purpose of others, even though one works for the purpose of others, one will not be vain, thinking 'I have nurtured them with kindness,' or feeling astonished with one's deeds.

Referring again to the bodhisattva practices, when one takes great joy in the purpose of others while wholeheartedly benefiting them without any ulterior motive, there is no sense of vanity such as the thought, 'I have nurtured them with great kindness'. This counteracts our normal worldly way of thinking. Normally, we may think 'Oh, I have done such wonderful things for others', 'I have gone out of my way to do great things for them'. Such thoughts of vanity arise due to the self-cherishing mind. When we say 'I have nurtured them with kindness', there is a strong emphasis on the 'I' which focuses very much on one's own sense of fulfilment. In addition, we also have a feeling of astonishment with our own deeds, 'oh, all the wondrous things that I have done'. Such feelings need to be eliminated. One would not have such feelings when one works solely for the purpose of others.

Thus, when one is free from self-interest and solely works for the benefit of others, this completely counteracts any sense of pride; likewise with anger, jealousy, a sense of competitiveness and so forth.

3.1.2.3.4. Not depending on reward and the ripened results

109cd. *As one singularly takes joy in others' purpose,
There is no hope for a ripening result.*

As one only likes to accomplish the purpose of others there is no hope for a ripening result.

Again, this is emphasising that when one works solely for the purpose of others, it should be without any self-interest of seeking a reward, or hope of a ripening result either in this life, or in future lives. Often we lament, 'I have done so much for them, but look how they treat me' [laughter]. If one were free from self-interest, there would no such complaint or lamentation.

3.1.2.3.5. For those reasons it is suitable to meditate on equalising self and others

110. *Therefore, just as one protects oneself
From slight unpleasantness,
One should generate the mind of compassion
And protect others.*

Since it is appropriate to meditate on equalising self and others, one should generate a mind of compassion and protect others from their undesired suffering just as one protects oneself from even just a few unpleasant words.

Having explained the benefits of equalising and exchanging self with others, the commentary continues *since it is appropriate to meditate on equalising self and others.* What comes next in the Tibetan text is the line *just as one protects oneself from even just a few unpleasant words.* We all can relate to this. When someone utters something that offends us, or others accuse us of something we feel we haven't done, we immediately become defensive saying 'How could you say this to me? How could you accuse me?' Even the slightest

remark like this can hurt us, and we become protective of ourselves. So, just as one has that natural inclination to protect oneself, one should generate the mind of compassion and protect others from undesired suffering. The main point here is that one should develop the mind of compassion that extends to other sentient beings, and wishes to protect them from suffering.

3.1.2.4. *If one meditates on equalising self and others, one can develop it*

This is a significant point to counteract our qualms or doubts about whether this practice is possible or not. We might at this point think, 'Exchanging self with others sounds noble, but how could I possibly achieve it or meditate on it?' Here, the text is saying that if one meditates on it, meaning that if one acquaints one's mind with that, then it is definitely feasible.

As a way to explain the verses, the commentary presents this hypothetical doubt or argument:

Argument: Since one does not generate the thought that thinks of the other's body or eye as 'my body' or 'my eye,' how could one generate the awareness that accepts and rejects others' happiness and suffering as one's own?

The answer to this is presented in the next two verses:

111. *Although others' drop of semen and blood
Does not become an object¹,
Through familiarisation,
One says, 'mine' and knows it as such.*

112. *Likewise, why does one not hold
The body of others by saying, 'mine?'
By replacing one's body with that
Of another, there is no difficulty in this regard.*

As the commentary explains, the meaning of these verses serves as an answer:

Answer: Without familiarisation, then this would be correct. But, if one is able through familiarisation to know and grasp at the drop of the father's and mother's semen and blood as one's own object, saying 'this is mine,' then why should one not be able to hold the body of others as one's own through familiarisation? One should be able to. If one meditates, then one generates the mind thinking of it as one's own. Hence, having contemplated the benefits of eliminating the sufferings of others one should strive to eliminate them.

Then, if one purposely stops cherishing one's body and meditates on substituting another, it will be without out difficulty, like meditating on cherishing self.

What is being explained here is that *through familiarisation*, one holds onto the concept of one's body, which is none other than the product of the *father's semen and the mother's blood* [or ovum]: in other words, separate substances. We have no qualms about holding onto this body as my body. We not only call it 'my body' but we also have strong clinging to it. This comes from familiarisation or habituation, which makes us instinctively grasp at this body as 'my body'. Habituation is similar to what we call instinct. A newborn baby instinctively recognises its mother; we can also see examples of animals having a strong sense of clinging to the mother and immediately recognising them.

Then, as we grow up, we identify strongly with our own body as being 'mine'.

Thus if, through familiarity, we can hold as 'mine' an object such as one's body, which originates as substances from others, then *why should one not be able to hold the body of others as one's own through familiarisation?* While the text may literally seem to be advising one to hold others' bodies as 'mine', it actually means that, just as we cherish our own body, it is possible to cherish other beings. That is the main point. Again we have a rhetorical question, 'why is it not possible?', meaning that indeed it is possible if one meditates or familiarises one's mind by cherishing others just one cherishes oneself. *Hence, having contemplated the benefits of eliminating the sufferings of others one should strive to eliminate them.*

In conclusion, *thus, if one purposely stops cherishing one's body and meditates on substituting another, it will be without out difficulty, like meditating on cherishing self.* So just as we now have a natural and spontaneous attitude towards cherishing oneself, through familiarity it will be possible for us to cherish other beings. So we will be able to substitute cherishing oneself with cherishing other sentient beings.

Having explained the benefits and the possibility of exchanging self for others, one may question, what is the method of exchanging self and others?

3.2. The way of exchanging self and others

Here there are two main sections:

3.2.1. In brief

3.2.2. Extensive explanation

3.2.1. In brief

Again, there are two subdivisions:

3.2.1.1. The way of exchanging self and other

3.2.1.2. The reason why it is suitable to meditate on it

3.2.1.1. THE WAY OF EXCHANGING SELF AND OTHER

113. *Understanding that self is faulty
And that others are an ocean of qualities,
Meditate on completely rejecting self-grasping
And on accepting others.*

Since cherishing oneself is the source of all shortcomings it is faulty and needs to be abandoned with great purpose, and since cherishing other sentient beings is the source of all that is good, it has an ocean of qualities. Understanding this, one should meditate on completely abandoning cherishing self and accept cherishing others.

Here, the text specifically presents the faults of cherishing oneself and the qualities of cherishing others. Without recognising the faults of cherishing oneself and the benefits of cherishing others, there is no way one would even consider generating this mind of exchanging self with others. So, to engage in the practice, one needs to remove the obstructions, which are cherishing oneself and neglecting others.

Since cherishing oneself is the source of all shortcomings it is faulty and needs to be abandoned with great intent which means with great purpose – and since cherishing other sentient beings is the source of all that is good, it has an ocean of qualities. As I have expounded in other teachings, the shortcomings one experiences now are said to have all come from cherishing just oneself. There is no gain but only loss when one solely cherishes oneself, whereas cherishing other beings is the source of all that is good.

¹ Gyaltsab Je: In some translations the line 'although not becoming an object' does not exist.

We can readily relate this to our current situation. For us, having a sound body, and all the other good conditions intact is the result of cherishing others. For example, not causing harm to others, such as taking their life, is the cause for one to have a sound human body. And by having engaged in acts of generosity in the past, one now experiences good conditions and resources. Thus, we can see that all the good qualities we have now are the result of having engaged in virtue: first of all, refraining from harming others; and then having the intention to benefit them. So, leaving aside the ultimate benefit of obtaining liberation and enlightenment, and the benefits of a fortunate rebirth in future, even now we can directly relate to the positive consequences and the benefit to oneself of cherishing others.

3.2.1.2. THE REASON WHY IT IS SUITABLE TO MEDITATE ON IT

Argument: Since sentient beings are of infinite number, it is impossible to hold them as self.

This doubt may occur to us because there is an infinite number of sentient beings. How could one possibly cherish them all as one cherishes oneself? The verse that serves as an answer to this doubt is:

*114. Just as the hands and so forth
Are asserted as parts of the body,
Why does one not assert
Embodied beings as limbs of migrators?*

Answer: Even though the hands and feet are different, because they are parts of the body one desires to protect them. Likewise, although embodied sentient beings are many, if one meditates on cherishing them, then why should one not wish to cherish the migrating beings, just like cherishing the limbs of one's body? It is suitable to desire so.

When we separate the body into different parts, there are quite a lot of them. For example, when we talk about our hand, each of the hands has five fingers so altogether there are ten fingers; our feet have ten toes, and so on. There are many parts to the body, yet we protect them all equally because they are part of 'my body'. *Likewise although embodied sentient beings are many, if one meditates on cherishing them, then why should one not wish to cherish migrating beings just like cherishing the limbs of one's body? It is suitable to desire so.* In relation to the infinite number of sentient beings, the way that I understand it is that, in meditation, we extend our aspiration to all sentient beings; in our mind, we extend to all beings the wish to benefit and cherish them. However, in practice, one can only benefit those in our vicinity, the beings we come into contact with. If we think that in order to cherish other beings, we have to physically benefit them, then that would be impossible. For example, if we think that helping others means giving them money, the number of human beings alone on the planet now is more than 7 billion! I wonder if anyone has enough money to give even one dollar to each human? It would be hard enough to find someone in Australia who could give one dollar to each of the 24 million living here.

So, as I understand it, the way to practise is that first we develop the keen wish to benefit others. Then, whoever we meet, and whoever is in our vicinity, we will be able to help to the best of our ability. This is something we are capable of doing. We can extend help to those around us. So while we develop the thought of cherishing others in our mind and extend it to all beings, at a practical level, we benefit those with whom we come into contact. This is how we put

exchanging self with others into practice. We need to remember, however, to train one's mind not to forsake any living being.

Just like we protect our limbs, we need to protect other sentient beings, for the very reason that just like oneself they do not wish for any suffering and wish to experience happiness. That, in itself, becomes a reason why all sentient beings are like parts of our self. They are exactly the same, they have the same sentiments as we do, wishing to experience happiness, and not wishing to experience any suffering. With that in mind, we can extend our attitude of cherishing all other beings.

We recite the Tara Praises this evening to dedicate for Ross's success in his treatment. It is good for us as Dharma friends to pray and extend our prayers to help each other. This is something really significant and worthwhile for us to do.

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

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