
Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*

༄༅། །བྱུང་རྒྱུ་སྐྱེས་སྐྱེ་དཔའི་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

6 December 2016

Based on the motivation that we have generated, we can now engage in our meditation practice. [*Meditation*]

We can set the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: for the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice well. Having just spent time meditating on *tong-len* (the giving and taking practice), it will be easier now to generate the bodhicitta motivation.

The reason why the superior intention is not specifically mentioned in the exchanging-self-with-other technique of developing bodhicitta is because it is cultivated naturally after doing that practice of giving and taking. When engaging in the practice of voluntarily taking the sufferings of all living beings upon oneself, and giving one's entire happiness to others, it initiates the personal responsibility to alleviate the sufferings of all living beings and lead them to the state of happiness. Thus, this practice naturally encompasses the superior intention.

It is essential to have a good understanding of why one needs to generate the wish to take the responsibility to benefit all sentient beings. One also needs to ensure that one generates the mind of taking personal responsibility for the welfare of all sentient beings in one's daily meditation practice. Without developing the mind of taking personal responsibility to free all sentient beings from every suffering and endow them in the ultimate state of happiness, there is no way that one is able to develop the superior intention that serves as the cause for generating bodhicitta. As the teachings present, the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment is preceded by the sincere, genuine intention to take on the responsibility to free all beings from suffering and lead them to the state of ultimate happiness. With this reasoning we can see why it has to precede bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta consists of a two-fold aspiration: the aspiration to achieve enlightenment, and the aspiration to free all beings from suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness. The second aspiration is generated when one is moved to the point of not being able to bear sentient beings' suffering, even for a second, and cannot bear to see them deprived of happiness. Thus, one takes on the personal responsibility to free all beings from every suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness.

At this stage one investigates whether one has the full ability to do this right now, and comes to realise one does not have the ability. This investigation leads one to ask 'who possesses that ability?' It is at that point, by reflecting on the incomparable qualities of an enlightened being, one comes to understand the true significance of the Buddha Jewel. The Buddha is a supreme being endowed with all the qualities needed to free all sentient beings from suffering. Here one can reflect on the specific qualities of the Buddha's body, the qualities of the Buddha's speech and qualities of the Buddha's mind.

One can reflect on the qualities of the Buddha as presented in the teachings on refuge. In summary, the qualities of the Buddha's body are the ability to manifest infinite bodies to benefit numberless sentient beings in various numberless ways. With speech, he has sixty qualities of eloquent speech; being able to answer many questions asked at one time with one single answer, and so forth, which satisfies the needs of all sentient beings in accordance with their wishes. With his qualities of the mind, the Buddha's omniscient mind knows all existence past, present and future. Everything that exists is known exactly as it is by the Buddha's mind. He also has the quality of great unbiased compassion towards all living beings, regardless of whether the Buddha is respected or not, or treated nicely or not. From the Buddha's side there is unbiased compassion towards all living beings without discrimination, wishing to benefit them all and with the ability to do so. When one thinks about the qualities of the Buddha, this shows the abilities one would also achieve when one obtains the qualities of a buddha oneself. On a practical level, it is said that by contemplating on each of the Buddha's qualities one accumulates extensive merit oneself.

Since we need to accumulate merit, we need to use all the resources already available to us. Otherwise there is a danger of thinking 'I need to engage in some practice to accumulate merit, but I wonder what I should do?' If after receiving all these teachings, particularly the teachings on refuge, one feels one lacks the ways and means to accumulate merit, then one has missed the point.

Refuge explains the qualities of the Buddha so one can contemplate in a concise way the four qualities of the Buddha: that the Buddha himself is free from all fears; he has the means to free all other beings from all fears; he has love and compassion towards all sentient beings without any discrimination; and helps others regardless of whether the Buddha himself has been benefited or not. These four points are said to be the sole qualities of the Buddha. In terms of refuge, only the Buddha Jewel has these four qualities. It is in this way that one reflects on these points. In simple terms, when one goes for refuge or is making a request, basically one is saying that I admire your qualities and I would also like the qualities you have, please help me to do so. In essence, this is what going for refuge means.

The **causal refuge** is the enlightened being to whom one goes for refuge now, as a way to obtain their qualities. The **resultant refuge** is the buddha one becomes in the future. This acknowledges the potential one has to become a buddha. Going for refuge means taking refuge in the causal refuge, and then aspiring to obtain those qualities oneself.

These are important points to keep in mind and regularly mesh into our practice, because we will all reach the point where we cannot rely upon others, even if they want to help us. There will be a point when we cannot possibly ask others on the outside to help us, which is when we are totally at the mercy of what is in our own mind. At the time of death, we cannot rely on others, as there is nothing they can do for us. This crucial moment is the juncture between this life and the next life, when the mind of death occurs.

This is when we are completely dependent on the Dharma Jewel that we have developed within ourselves. Although we might not yet have obtained the actual ultimate Dharma Jewel, we have a similitude of it within our mind, comprised of all the practices we have engaged in such as meditating on love and compassion, observing morality and the practice of patience, generosity and so forth. All these practices we have attempted to engage in is called the similitude of the

Dharma Jewel that resides within ourselves. The extent to which we strengthen the Dharma Jewel now when we have time is what we can then rely upon at the time of death.

We need to be very mindful that the time will come when we must completely rely upon what we have cultivated in our mind. Many have commented to me that they never saw the real value of the Dharma until they had a grave illness such as a terminal disease, and at that time the value and essential nature of the Dharma become very clear. So, it is good for us not to wait until that critical moment, but prepare from now on so that we are familiar with what we need to do, and can maintain a virtuous frame of mind. A virtuous frame of mind, rather than a negative mind or neutral mind, is the best state of mind at the time of death.

As mentioned earlier, while the actual Dharma Jewel is only in the mental continuum of arya beings, the relative Dharma Jewel (or similitude of it) is the practice we bring to mind in our preparation for death. Meditating on death and impermanence is the best preparation for death as it a great impetus for practising the Dharma. With the nine-point death meditation, as you will recall, the three main points are: death is certain, the time of death is uncertain, and at the time of death nothing but the Dharma can benefit. Each of these points has three reasons and three conclusions. The three reasons for the last one being: at the time of death, friends cannot help, one's body cannot help, and one's wealth cannot help. Thus, the conclusion is that only the Dharma can help one at that time. These are essential points to contemplate.

Even during our life there will be times when we are deserted by friends and times when even our bodies might fail us. Definitely, at the time of death our body will desert us and even our wealth will desert us and cannot help. At the time of death we have to leave everything material behind. At that juncture, when one is completely deserted by all we have been so familiar with in our lives - our body, friends and wealth - the only thing that can help is the Dharma. If we don't familiarise our minds with the Dharma now, and assume that the virtuous Dharma mind will arise spontaneously at the time of death then that is wishful thinking.

When we attempt to meditate now, if a neutral state of mind is all we are familiarising ourselves with, then a neutral state will most likely be the state of mind we will have at the time of death. Therefore the focus of our meditation practice now should be on developing a virtuous state of mind and familiarising ourselves with virtue as much as possible. I am sharing these points which I find very significant myself. These are points that I really think about and try to put into practice myself. I find that there are many simple ways to put Dharma into practice. It doesn't have to be something complicated or profound; there are simple, practical ways you can put Dharma into practice. These are some simple points that I share with you.

Meditating on impermanence has many, many practical benefits that we can experience right away, e.g. helping to develop more contentment in one's mind and helping to alleviate a lot of unnecessary sufferings experienced in our daily lives. Attachment is one of the main sources of the agony that we experience. Because of this strong attachment to our body, we experience a lot of agony and suffering in relation to it. If attachment is reduced, contentment with one's body can definitely bring about more ease in our mind. Likewise, if we have a lot of strong attachment to our friends, then this causes a lot of problems and agony in our

mind. Likewise we have very strong attachment to our wealth. If we reduce these strong attachments to our body, friends and wealth, then our mind naturally becomes much more relaxed and calm, and much more expansive. Rather than being narrow minded and neurotic, the mind becomes more expansive and one can feel much more satisfied with what one has now, relieving us from feelings of dissatisfaction. One can think, 'my basic needs are met, I can sustain myself, and things are going quite well, so I can feel happy'. When one doesn't need to spend so much time and energy to focus on protecting and securing the various objects of attachment, there will be more space in the mind to develop a more positive state of mind.

This is where we take the inclination to develop more virtue in our lives. Familiarising ourselves with this way of thinking and putting it into practice is something which will come about through practice, not right away. Just thinking about it a few times and expecting results in a few months is not realistic. But over time, if we keep our mind in this direction, familiarise our mind with virtue, we will begin to see that a transformation takes place. These are points to put into practice in our daily life that I share with you.

I feel the most essential, the most valuable state of mind is a mind of love and compassion. In making attempts to develop this one begins to sense a genuine feeling in one's mind. Because of the unruly mind we have from beginningless lifetimes, it is hard to continuously maintain love and compassion, as self-centredness slowly creeps in. However, the more one familiarises oneself with it the more the mind of love and compassion will develop.

It is good to focus on each of the thoughts: may all beings be free from suffering; may they be endowed with happiness; may they never be separated from joy; and may they be endowed with equanimity. Just thinking about each of these and contemplating 'how wonderful it would be if all beings were free from suffering, may they be free from suffering, I myself will take the responsibility for freeing them from suffering, please gurus and deities bless my mind to be able to do so', encompasses the most essential points of the entire path to enlightenment.

Reflecting on the sequence of cause and effect encompasses the four noble truths, which, in themselves, are the basis for the entire structure of the path to enlightenment. When one thinks of expanding on each one, beginning with wishing beings to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering, it encompasses the points on the truth of suffering and the causes of suffering, the truth of origination. So we can relate to the four noble truths in a concise way as a means to put them into practice.

Indeed, when we go into more detail on the four immeasurables, we can see how they encompass the essence of the entire path, particularly the four noble truths. When we contemplate further on the sufferings, we recall from the classifications of general sufferings of migrators in cyclic existence from the Lam Rim teachings that there are the eight types of sufferings, the six types of sufferings, and the three types of sufferings that one can contemplate. Then having contemplated the sufferings, one generates the thought of wishing others to be free from the causes of suffering.

This is where one contemplates the causes of suffering from the very basic level of the ten non-virtues. Then more particularly, karma and delusion as presented in the truth of origination, which are the cause of suffering, and the various delusions. There are various types of delusions, and the

primary one is the ignorance of grasping at a self. When one relates to that, one wishes for others to be free from the fundamental cause of suffering, which reincorporates the deeper understanding that one derives from the four noble truths. With wishing other beings to be endowed with joy, this joy can be the joy of liberation and ultimately the joy of enlightenment, encompassing the whole path; then contemplating the truth of cessation, and so on. This is how we can use what seems to be a simple practice as a means to incorporate profound understandings.

Meditating on immeasurable equanimity in particular becomes an impetus for generating great compassion for sentient beings. The compassion developed then is much more profound than just wishing beings to be free from the obvious levels of suffering. Understanding that what causes suffering for sentient beings is when they are not in a state of equanimity, when they are feeling close to some and distant to others out of attachment and aversion. When one wishes beings to be endowed with equanimity that is free from being close to some and distant towards others out of attachment and aversion, then it is said that when one goes into these subtle levels of understanding the level of compassion is much more profound.

The different levels of compassion, from the basic to the profound, particularly the three types of compassion, are explained precisely by Chandrakirti in his teachings on the Middle Way. Feeling compassion because one relates to the suffering of suffering experienced by others is something that is quite readily developed.

One could say that even animals have that level of compassion. When an animal sees another animal suffering they do try to help. This shows that they have the wish for the other animal to be free from suffering. The wish to alleviate the suffering of suffering is also something animals naturally have. For example a dog will go around looking for food when it is hungry to alleviate the suffering of hunger. When the dog finds some food it is temporarily satisfied and will have a nice sleep. Whereas we may not be able to have a good sleep even after our stomach is full.

Similarly, some levels of our suffering of suffering can be alleviated quite easily, e.g. when we have a headache and we take a Panadol to alleviate the pain. That is, of course, a temporary relief from the suffering.

The wish to alleviate the suffering of suffering is quite readily felt by all, so wishing others to be free from this is not very profound. Whereas when one develops compassion towards other sentient beings by recognising their plight – the suffering of cyclic existence and the causes they are creating to remain in it – then generating compassion with that understanding becomes much more profound. We can relate to this. For example, when we see someone poor and destitute we might find it is easier to feel compassion towards them. Whereas when someone is rich and famous etc., it is harder for us to even recognise that we need to feel compassion for them. But when we think about it, despite their wealth, they are actually creating a lot of negativities through attachment of being close to some and aversion by being distant to others, and thus constantly creating the causes to be in cyclic existence to experience numerous sufferings again and again. So, when we can think in that way, even wealthy people will definitely become an object of our great compassion.

What I am attempting to share with you now is that it is really important to try to put into practice what one has already understood at a basic level. You've heard a lot of

teachings and have a wealth of knowledge in your minds already. Now it is time for you to put it into practice and try to derive the benefit of understanding what the teachings mean. You might not see immediate results but if you don't put it into practice now the results will never come. By integrating this into your daily practice, gradually your mind will become more and more imbued with the Dharma.

We all naturally look forward to getting more leisure time as we age, so when we finally get this time, we should refer back to all the teachings we have received and contemplate on them. This will definitely help to bring about a genuinely more subdued, calm mind, a more satisfied and happy mind; how wonderful would that be!

2.3.2.1.2.2. Refuting that the cause exists inherently

Preceding this was the explanation with reasoning that established the non-inherent existence of feelings. This section refutes that the causes of suffering exist inherently. This is subdivided into three:

2.3.2.1.2.2.1. Refuting the inherent meeting of sense power and object

2.3.2.1.2.2.2. Refuting the inherent meeting with the consciousness

2.3.2.1.2.2.3. *Contact that arises from the meeting of these three does not exist inherently* 2.3.2.1.2.2.1. *Refuting the inherent meeting of sense power and object*

What is being refuted here is an inherent meeting of a particle of the sense power and a particle of the object. It can also be related to the actual meeting of a sense power and its object. One needs to relate to this explanation as refuting every possibility of inherent existence. If one keeps that in mind then the following explanation will be clear.

The first two lines of the verse read:

**93ab. If there is room between sense power and object,
Then how can the two meet?**

The **Madhyamika** first present a statement followed by a question.

Madhyamika: One needs to refute that particles meet.

If the subtle and coarse particles of the sense power and the object meet, is there space between them or not?

The **Realists** state:

Realist: I say there is.

Madhyamika: How can these particles meet, as they possess the fallacy of having space in between? In the intermediate space there are also the particles of either light or darkness, between which there is again intermediate space, and thus it would become endless.

What is posited as a question is: If the subtle and coarse particles of the sense power and the object meet then is there space between them or not? In simple terms, the question is when they meet is there space in between them or not?

The **Madhyamika** is pointing out the absurdity of their statement by asking *how can these particles meet, as they possess the fallacy of having space in between?* The very term 'space' implies that there is a separation, and therefore they cannot meet. If there was no space in between, then how could you even talk about the meeting of two particles. If there is a meeting then it implies that there is space in between the two that are meeting. The main point is that if there is an inherently existent meeting, then there would be no space in

between at all. How can the particles meet if they possess an intermediate space in between? Then furthermore there are also the particles of either light or darkness. As indicated in the teachings, there is also an explanation of light particles and darkness particles.

Using the example of two fingers, if there is a separation (space between the two fingers) then there can be light particles in between and also darkness particles in between. If this is so, how can you say they are meeting when there is space in between and particles there? The commentary states, *'between which there is again intermediate space, and thus it would become endless*, meaning that there would be infinite regression. The main point to be understood, again, is that there is neither an inherently existent meeting nor inherently existent space in between. To summarise, what the Madhyamika are saying to the opponent is: if you say that there is inherently existent space in between the two particles then the fallacy of infinite regression will follow.

The next part refutes the meeting of two particles if there is no intermediate space.

The next two lines of the last verse read:

*93cd. If there is no room and they are merely one,
What is meeting with what?*

*94ab. Subtle particles cannot enter subtle particles,
They do not have the circumstance and are equal.*

That is followed by the argument.

Argument: There is no intermediate space.

If the **Realists** say that there is no intermediate space, then the **Madhyamika** present reasons to counter this, which are as follows.

Madhyamaka: Again, when two partless particles meet there cannot be the surface where they touch and the surface where they do not touch, and therefore they would need to touch each other in their complete nature. In that case, they merge into one point of reference, become one mere particle, and then what is meeting with which object to be met? It follows there is no such meeting - because there are no two objects.

The reason for that is that one subtle particle cannot enter, i.e. absorb, into another subtle particle, because there is not the circumstance of empty space between these particles, and they are of the same size.

This states the reason why they cannot meet in their complete nature.

The **Vaibhashika** posit that there are partless particles. What is being refuted here by the **Madhyamikas** is that if there were partless particles, how can they possibly meet when there is no surface or no two sides to them? So if there are no two sides since it is partless, then there couldn't be this side or that side. If there couldn't be this side of the particle, as opposed to the other side of the particle, then what is meeting with what? How can the two particles possibly meet if there are no sides to be met? These questions point out the absurdity of the Vaibhashika assertion.

If the particles didn't have separate sides (because each partless particle wouldn't have a side), when they meet, *they would need to touch each other in their complete nature*, or touch completely, meaning that when the two partless particles meet they would have to touch in every aspect and completely merge into one. As there is no one side that doesn't touch the other side - because there are no sides at

all - they will mingle completely and become one. That is the absurdity being presented here.

The commentary continues with the explanation:

In that case, they merge into one point of reference, become one mere particle, and then what is meeting with which object to be met? It follows there is no such meeting - because there are no two objects.

With this, the following reasoning can be clearly understood.

The next lines of verse read:

*94.cd. Without entering there is no mixing,
Those that did not mix cannot meet.*

*95. How could it possibly be valid to say
That the partless can meet.
In case meeting and the partless
Are seen, show it!*

The commentary explains the meaning of this verse:

There is a pervasion because particles that do not enter and absorb into each other cannot mix, and partless phenomena that did not mix cannot meet. How can the statement 'partless phenomena meet' be accurate? Because it is impossible, if you observe the meeting with something partless, then you should show it, but you cannot.

It explains clearly that if there were partless particles, then the earlier reasoning has a pervasion *because particles that do not enter and absorb into each other cannot mix, and partless phenomena that did not mix cannot meet*.

This reasoning is followed by, *How can the statement 'partless phenomena meet' be accurate?* Being a rhetorical question it implies that it is impossible for partless phenomena to meet, because if they were to meet they would become one, and if they became one you cannot call it meeting. Thus, *if you observe meeting with something partless, then you should be able to show it but you cannot*. This implies that the meeting of partless particles is impossible.

The inherent meeting of particles, refuted earlier, also explains that there couldn't be an inherent meeting of sense power and its object as well.

2.3.2.1.2.2.2. Refuting the inherent meeting with the consciousness

Having refuted the inherent meeting of particles, if the doubt arises that there might be a meeting between the consciousness and the object then again that meeting implies an inherent meeting. So, what is being refuted is that there is an inherent meeting between the consciousness and the object. We can cover this in our next session.

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

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Jill Lancashire
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© **Tara Institute**