

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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

[*tong-len meditation*]

Now, based on that positive motivation, we will read the tenth chapter together. We can make particular dedications for Elvira's father, who passed away recently, and for the victims of the Manchester tragedy. It is really terrifying to see how so many innocent people have been killed and the disruption to the lives of those who survived. Indeed the whole world is affected by this act of terror.

As we read in the chapter, there are dedications for the minds of malevolent spirits and non-humans and so forth to be pacified. We have just seen an example of people who invoke terror and suffering, so we dedicate for their minds to be pacified.

When there are terrorist actions such as these there is no benefit whatsoever. There is only harm for the victims and also the perpetrators. Actions such these arise from very evil negative states of mind, which only lead to harm. So we need to remember that the perpetrators are also an object of great compassion, as they have engaged in such negative deeds motivated by anger, or whatever strong negative mind that might be influencing them at that time. Because they create so much negativity for others and themselves, they are indeed a great object of compassion.

It seems that they are retaliating out of their own ignorance, as a result of the deeds of some leaders of a few nations. Their minds have been disturbed and that is why they are retaliating. This is no small matter for them, but the way that they respond is harmful. This kind of resentment, which is like a sickness, can be passed down over many generations and cause a lot of harm.

May the bodhicitta motivation that we generate bring about only benefit for sentient beings, may all their suffering be removed, and may they create the causes to achieve enlightenment. This is the extent of the motivation we generate. In particular, we are dedicating for the minds of others to be pacified.

Personally, I rely on deities such as Avalokiteshvara and Tara and make strong requests to these enlightened beings to bestow blessings and pacify the minds of those who are completely overwhelmed by ignorance, thus creating negative karma. At our level right now, making strong prayers and seeking blessings is the most we can do. Whenever someone requests to me to pray, I make strong prayers to the enlightened beings to please extend their help and blessing to those in need.

[*Recitation of chapter 10*]

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, and so for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice as best as I can'.

Along with this motivation we generate the really strong complementary aspiration, 'May I be never separated from the precious Mahayana teachers in all my lifetimes, and may I be able to meet with these same conditions that I have now, from life to life, in all my future lifetimes.'

2.1.1.3.2.1. Dedicating for the purpose of ordained ones

This is subdivided into five:

2.1.1.3.2.1.1. Dedicating for the Sangha in general

2.1.1.3.2.1.2. Dedicating for the purpose of gelongs

2.1.1.3.2.1.3. Dedicating for the purpose of gelong-mas

2.1.1.3.2.1.4. Dedicating for the purpose of complete morality

2.1.1.3.2.1.5. Dedicating for the enjoyment of the result

2.1.1.3.2.1.1. *Dedicating for the Sangha in general*

We need to keep in mind that the actual Sangha Jewel refers to the arya Sangha.

Here Sangha in general refers to the ordained Sangha. The teachings mention that an assembly of four pure ordained Sangha suffices as the actual Sangha Jewel. Therefore, ordained Sangha are held in high esteem, and respected in many traditions. The Sangha Jewel refers to those who are actively engaged in preserving the Dharma by propounding and practising the teachings. If we were to think about it in practical terms, then since the buddhas are already enlightened and in the state of perpetual bliss, they don't have to face any challenges and hardship. Whereas the Sangha are the ones who face many challenges and hardship while adopting various means to preserve the Dharma. For the preservation of the Buddha's teachings, along with the Sangha Jewel there is the Dharma Jewel – true paths and true cessation. These are significant points to take note of.

The verse says:

42. *May the monasteries abide well,
And be adorned by reading and recitation.
May the Sangha always be harmonious and
May the purpose of the Sangha be
accomplished.*

As the commentary reads:

May the Sangha who live in the monasteries abide well by spreading and increasing the Dharma through reading the teachings of the Buddha and the elucidations of his thought, and reciting prayers. May the Sangha always be harmonious while engaging in virtuous activities and may the purpose to benefit sentient beings and so forth be accomplished just as intended.

The specific Tibetan term used here is *tsuk la-khang* which is translated as 'monastery', however a more literal translation would be 'temple'. The connotation of *tsuk la-khang* is an abode where the vinaya and the three baskets of the Buddha's teachings are preserved. So in that sense a *tsuk la-khang* is a place where the sutras of the Buddha are kept and honoured, such as on the altar here at Tara Institute.

The word *gompa* is usually translated as ‘monastery’, a place where Sangha i.e. monks and nuns reside. The term ‘gompa’ has the connotation of an abode that is removed from places where there is sexual activity. That is why monasteries are usually found on the outskirts of villages or towns.

As the commentary states, *May the Sangha who live in the monasteries abide well by spreading and increasing the Dharma through reading the teachings of the Buddha.* The meaning here is to recite the Buddha’s teachings again and again, as a way of remembering them in order to be able to expound them. There are of course the recitations that are part of our commitments; however, here it refers to the texts explaining the Buddha’s teachings. Thus the Sangha in the monasteries memorise many different texts and recite them from memory.

In monasteries such as Sera Monastery, there is a tradition where the monks memorise a text during the day and then in the evening the memorised texts are recited from memory. As part of the curriculum, some monks spend from seven in the evening to about four or five o’clock in the morning reciting the texts they have memorised. I did this several times in my youth when I was studying at Sera.

The English translation ‘reading’ does not bring out the full meaning of the Tibetan word *lokpa* which has the connotation of listening to the teachings, contemplating and then meditating on them. This is the ultimate means of preserving the Buddha’s teachings, to keep them fresh and alive.

The next part of the dedication is, *may the Sangha always be harmonious while engaging in virtuous activities.* The Tibetan term *gen-dun*, which is translated as Sangha, has the literal meaning of ‘abiding in virtue’. The emphasis here is on engaging in virtuous activities harmoniously. This is said to be one of the essential elements for the wellbeing of the community of the Sangha. Furthermore, *may the purpose to benefit sentient beings and so forth be accomplished just as it was intended.*

2.1.1.3.2.1.2. Dedicating for the purpose of gelongs

The verse relating to this is:

43. *May the gelongs who aspire towards the trainings
Attain isolation and
Upon having abandoned all distraction,
Attain a mind of pliant meditation.*

As the commentary reads:

May the pure gelongs who wish to protect their training from degeneration attain physical isolation from the bustle of worldly affairs, which is an obstacle to morality. Having abandoned all mental distractions and having become adorned with the bliss of mental and physical pliancy, may they meditate on virtue with pliancy.

May the pure gelongs who wish to protect their training from degeneration attain physical isolation from bustle of worldly affairs, which is an obstacle to morality. In order to practise pure morality, one has to protect it from adverse conditions. Conversely, if there are no adverse conditions, then there is no need to protect anything. The Sangha have taken vows and commitments as a way to protect

themselves from obstacles; if there were no obstacles to be protected from, then there would be no need for those vows. As the Vinaya text indicates, the early disciples of the Buddha didn’t have many vows, but as the early ordained Sangha started to engage in misdeeds, more and more vows were laid down.

These are indications of the need to protect the Sangha from external obstacles, referred to here as the *bustle of worldly affairs*, or being around people who engage in worldly excitement. Physical isolation in this context refers to refraining from bustling worldly affairs, while mental isolation refers to refraining from engaging in superstitious or discursive thoughts. These are the two main obstacles.

As the teachings indicate, one needs to practise in isolation. Although this usually refers to an isolated physical abode, real isolation encompasses both physical isolation i.e. refraining from mingling with the hustle and bustle of worldly life and people and engaging in frivolous activities, and mental isolation, which means refraining from engaging in superstitions or discursive thoughts. You can be physically isolated, but if your mind is constantly engaging in these superstitious or discursive thoughts, you will not be able to maintain your focus on your practice. These are instructions for all of us to keep in mind.

As further explained in the commentary, *having abandoned all mental distractions and having become adorned with the bliss of mental and physical pliancy, may they meditate on virtue with pliancy.* We need to understand how to acquire all the conditions to develop calm abiding, and then actually develop it. In the process of developing calm abiding, one obtains mental pliancy first, followed by physical pliancy, then one experiences the bliss of physical pliancy, which induces the bliss of mental pliancy. Then, having obtained actual calm abiding, one can meditate on virtue effortlessly for as long as one wishes. These achievements are essential for one’s practice.

2.1.1.3.2.1.3. Dedicating for the purpose of gelong-mas

The next two lines of verse are:

44ab. *May gelong-mas have gain, and
May they abandon harm or quarrel.*

As the commentary explains:

May gelong-mas have the gain of being endowed with the Dharma, and abandon the harm of quarrelling, being seduced by others and such.

Being endowed with the Dharma, as translated here, implies being able to sustain oneself without much effort. It is essential that practitioners, particularly bhikshunis, have sufficient resources to engage in the practice of Dharma, because having to expend a lot of effort to secure basic necessities is an obstacle to practice.

Furthermore, *may they abandon the harm of quarrelling* refers to disputes and quarrelling with each other. *Being seduced by others* refers to being led astray by those who speak pleasant words and act as if they are friends, but who have the negative motivation of wanting to disrupt the morality of the bhikshunis. So the dedication is, ‘may

bhikshunis be free from all these adverse conditions and obtain all of the good conditions for the practice of Dharma’.

2.1.1.3.2.1.4. *Dedicating for the purpose of complete morality*

This refers to being able to practise pure ethics, unstained by faulty morality. The first four lines of verse read:

44cd. *Similarly may all those who are ordained
Never degenerate their morality.*

45ab. *Having renounced mistaken morality.
May they always abandon negativity.*

Here the commentary states:

Likewise, may all ordained ones complete their morality and be without degeneration. Should they receive individual mistaken moralities, then may they renounce them by generating regret and always abandon negativity.

As the commentary clearly explains, *likewise may all ordained Sangha complete their morality and be without degeneration*. So the dedication is for the Sangha to abide in pure morality without allowing it to degenerate. *Should they receive individual mistaken moralities, meaning if their moral ethics were to lapse, may they renounce them by generating regret and always abandon negativity*. While making every effort to observe morality, in the event that some breaches do occur due to strong delusions, may that become a cause for the Sangha to develop even stronger renunciation, and with the aid of regret, may they engage in purification practices.

On a personal level, it is good to note that although we may not intend to engage in negativities, if we do create negativities then that can become an impetus to engage in strong purification practices. So in this sense, it becomes a means to engage in further virtues.

The next lines of verse are

45cd. *On having attained a higher rebirth
May their discipline never degenerate.*

46. *May the scholars always be praised,
And always receive enough alms,
May their continuum be perfectly pure, and
May they be renowned in all directions.*

The commentary explains:

Then, having attained a higher rebirth in the next life, may even then their discipline not degenerate. May the scholars of the world receive praise and alms. May their continuum be completely pure, free from pride and such, and may they be pleasantly renowned in all directions.

This dedication for the purpose of perfect morality is framed around the positive results of observing morality. What is the benefit for the Sangha in abiding by all these vows? It is *a higher rebirth in the next life*; the consequence of observing morality is obtaining a higher rebirth the next life.

Furthermore, *may their discipline not degenerate* even in the next life. In other words, may they be able to maintain their morality even in the next life.

Next there is a dedication *for the scholars of the world to receive praise*, which means that those who have great knowledge are acknowledged with due praise. *May their*

continuum be completely pure, free from pride means that when they receive that praise may their mind not be affected by pride.

These are really significant aspirations, which we need also be mindful of applying to ourselves. If we have some specific knowledge and so forth then while we may receive acknowledgement or praise for that, we need to be mindful of not letting that become a cause for pride, because that would ruin our own ethics and positive virtuous mind.

Finally, *may they be pleasantly renowned in all directions.*

2.1.1.3.2.1.5. *Dedicating for the enjoyment of the result*

The next verse is:

47. *May they not experience the sufferings of the
lower realms.
May they, without any difficulties,
Quickly attain enlightenment
Through the body superior to gods.*

The commentary explains:

May they not experience the sufferings of the lower realms. May these proficient ones quickly attain enlightenment, without any difficult hard actions of the three doors, with the body that is the ripening result superior to the ripening result of the gods, this body that possesses the seven qualities of higher status for attaining omniscient consciousness.

May they not experience the sufferings of the lower realms. May these proficient ones quickly attain enlightenment, without any difficult hard actions. Here we can refer to the earlier explanations of how some austere practices involve a lot of physical endurance and so forth. So the dedication here is, may those engaging on the practices be free from such hard and difficult practices *of the three doors, with a body that is the ripening result superior to the ripening results of the gods*’.

This body possesses the seven qualities of higher status that are essential for obtaining the mind of enlightenment. A body that is endowed with the eight freedoms and ten endowments is said to be the body that is needed for obtaining higher status and liberation. To achieve enlightenment, however the seven qualities are necessary. These, as I have presented in earlier teachings, are having: (1) a good lineage; (2) a sound body with all the faculties intact; (3) sufficient wealth; (4) power and control; (5) wisdom; (6) long life and (7) freedom from sickness.

These are the essential qualities that are needed in order to be able to benefit others. Being of good lineage is good condition in itself, but if you are attractive as well as from a good lineage, then apparently that is very appealing to others, and you can accomplish great deeds. Having sufficient wealth, power and control gives you a positive influence over others, making them amenable to being led to virtue and conducting themselves in accordance with the Dharma. Without wisdom or intelligence, of course, you cannot really benefit others, and without a long stable life, you may do some good deeds, but will not be able to continue to do so for long. Being free from illnesses or sickness also enables you to help without interruption.

2.1.1.4. DEDICATING FOR THE PURPOSE OF ALL SENTIENT BEINGS

The lines of the verse relating this are:

48. *May all sentient beings repeatedly
Make offerings to all buddhas and
Through the infinite happiness of the buddhas,
May they always be endowed with happiness.*

The commentary reads:

By the might of whatever virtue there is, may all sentient beings in every action repeatedly make offerings to all buddhas with devotion. In dependence on this may they practise the actions of bodhisattvas, and thus continuously become endowed with happiness, through the infinite happiness of the buddhas.

By the might of whatever virtue there is, or through the power of whatever virtue one may have accumulated, may all sentient beings in every action repeatedly make offerings to all the buddhas with devotion. Here every action includes making an offering of actions that we would normally consider as mundane, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, and walking about. As I regularly emphasise, it is important to make offerings of everything we eat and drink, and this is being backed up in these teachings. In this way, even our normal activities and deeds can become the means to accumulate great virtue and merit. This is the point we need to understand here.

Thus *in dependence on this, may they practice the actions of the bodhisattvas and thus continuously be endowed with happiness through the infinite happiness of the buddhas.* Here we can also derive the understanding that the good, positive results obtained from these aspirations and dedications, such as the happiness of the buddhas, is dependent on causes and conditions. These again are points that we should recall.

2.1.2. Dedicating for purposes having gone beyond the world

This is subdivided into three:

2.1.2.1. Dedicating for the accomplishment of the wishes of the bodhisattvas

2.1.2.2. Dedicating for the completion of the Buddha's actions

2.1.2.3. Dedicating for accomplishment of the wishes of hearers and self-liberators

2.1.2.1. DEDICATING FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE WISHES OF THE BODHISATTVAS

The dedication here is for the incredibly extensive wishes that the bodhisattvas have to benefit sentient beings be accomplished just as they intended. The lines of the verse read:

- 49ab. *May bodhisattvas accomplish the purpose
Of migrators they intent in their heart.*

The commentary reads:

May, in dependence on the virtue of composing this commentary and other virtues, bodhisattvas accomplish the actions for the temporary and ultimate purpose of all migrators the way they intend in their heart.

May all the virtues that have been accumulated become the means for *the bodhisattvas to accomplish the actions for the temporary and ultimate purpose.* Here we need to understand that *temporary* refers to obtaining the high status of a good rebirth in the next life, such as in the human and god realms, and *ultimate* refers to liberation and enlightenment.

2.1.2.2. DEDICATING FOR THE COMPLETION OF THE ACTIONS OF THE BUDDHAS

The relevant lines of verse read:

- 49cd. *Whatever the protectors' intent,
May that happiness be received by sentient beings.*

The commentary states

May sentient beings receive whatever infinite happiness the buddha protectors intend for them

Again, this is very clear. As the commentary explains, *may sentient beings receive whatever infinite happiness the buddha protectors intend for them.* May beings experience happiness and wellbeing, free from suffering as the buddhas intended.

2.1.2.3. DEDICATING FOR ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE WISHES OF HEARERS AND SELF-LIBERATORS

May the wishes of hearers and self-liberators be fulfilled.

The text reads:

50. *Likewise, may self-liberated buddhas
And hearers also attain happiness.*

The commentary reads:

Likewise, may self-buddhas and hearers also attain the happiness of peace.

This is quite clear. *May self-buddhas and hearers also attain the happiness of peace.* Their intended goal is to achieve self-liberation, a state mainly focused on themselves, where they are free from suffering and achieve the state of happiness. May they achieve that state of liberation.

2.2. Dedication for the purpose of self

This is subdivided into four:

2.2.1. Praying for the attainment of the temporary result

2.2.2. Praying to be directly guided by Manjushri

2.2.3. Praying to abide within the bodhisattva trainings

2.2.4. Praying to complete the purpose of others

Here the term 'praying' also means aspiring.

2.2.1. Praying for the attainment of the temporary result

51. *May I also, through the kindness of Manjushri,
Until attaining the ground of supreme joy,
Always remember my lives
And attain ordination.*

The commentary explains

By the power of these virtues may I also, through the kindness of Manjushri, until the attainment of the ground of supreme joy always have mindfulness of my lives and attain ordination, the vessel for qualities.

As explained here the aspiration is, *'may I have mindfulness and attain ordination through the virtues that I have accumulated through the kindness of my teacher*

Manjushri until I achieve the ground of *supreme joy*, which is the first ground of the ten bumis or grounds of a bodhisattva.

The remaining verse under this heading is:

52. *In spite of inferior food
May I have splendour and livelihood.
May I in all my lifetimes abide in solitude
And attain perfection.*

Despite inferior food that is bad and scarce, may my body be endowed with splendour, and may I have a happy livelihood. In all my lives may I remain in isolation from physical and mental distractions, and attain perfection.

This dedication is really very meaningful. 'Although my food may be meagre and not very tasty, may my body be endowed with splendour' means, 'may my body be nourished and thus lustrous and strong'. Rather than a happy livelihood, a more literal translation from Tibetan is, 'may I be able to sustain myself well'. Finally, in *all my life may I remain in isolation from physical and mental distractions*. This refers back to achieving mental and physical isolation, which was explained in an earlier verse.

2.2.2. Praying to be directly guided by Manjushri

The implication here is receiving direct guidance from Manjushri as a teacher.

53. *Whenever I wish to study,
Or have even small questions,
May I be able to behold without obstructions
The protector, Manjushri.*

The commentary explains

Whenever I wish to study the teachings of the conqueror and so forth, or wish to ask a small question regarding some meaningful words, may I be able to immediately, without obstructions, behold directly the protector Manjushri himself.

This is a very meaningful verse, which I recite daily as a personal initiative. As the commentary explains, the prayer is *whenever I wish to study* or have even the smallest of questions, may I be able to behold without obstruction the protector Manjushri himself. *Whenever I wish to study the teachings of the conqueror and so forth*, refers mainly to the teachings of Buddha. The intention here that whenever one wishes to ask a small question regarding some meaningful words, 'may I be able to immediately, without obstructions, behold directly the protector Manjushri and receive answers from Manjushri himself'.

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

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