

Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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As usual, let us spend some time in our regular Tong-Len meditation practice.

[meditation]

2.2. Dedication for the purpose of self (cont.)

2.2.3. Praying to abide within the bodhisattva trainings

The verse reads:

- 54 *May my actions, to accomplish
The purpose of all sentient beings,
Extending to the edge of space of the ten
directions,
Equal the actions of Manjushri.*

The commentary explains:

To accomplish the temporary and ultimate purpose of sentient beings extending up to the edge of space of the ten directions, may my actions equal the actions of Manjushri.

The commentary says that, *to accomplish the temporary and ultimate purpose of sentient beings extending up to the edge of space of the ten directions*, one needs to visualise sentient beings extending as far as space exists. Accomplishing *the temporary purpose* refers to the temporary happiness of achieving a higher rebirth (in the human or the god realms – called good status). The *ultimate purpose* is a dedication for sentient beings to achieve the state of liberation, and ultimately enlightenment. The wish for your actions to equal the actions of Manjushri is an incredibly profound dedication and an aspiration which is important to make regularly.

2.2.4. Praying to complete the purpose of others

The verse reads:

55. *For as long as space abides,
And as long as sentient beings remain,
For that long may I also remain and
Eliminate the sufferings of sentient beings.*

Then as the commentary explains under this verse:

For as long as cyclic existence and the migrators circling within it remain, may I remain and eliminate all sufferings of sentient beings.

This is a verse His Holiness the Dalai Lama takes to heart as a strong aspiration. We can see from the extent of the aspiration embedded in the dedication that it is very profound and meaningful. The commentary clearly states that, *For as long as cyclic existence and the migrators circling within it remain, until then, may I remain and eliminate all sufferings of sentient beings*. This shows the extent of the incredibly powerful aspiration and dedication of the bodhisattvas.

The next verse reads:

56. *May any suffering of migrators
Ripen upon myself.*

*By the power of the bodhisattva Sangha,
May all sentient beings enjoy happiness.*

The commentary explains:

May any suffering of migrators that exists ripen upon me. By the nature of the power of the bodhisattvas' Sangha may all migrators enjoy happiness.

This verse describes what we actually intend to do in our regular *Tong len* meditation practice. It specifically encourages us to aspire to engage in the actual practice of giving and taking.

2.3. Dedication for the increase of the Dharma, the source of happiness

Recognising that the Dharma is the source of all happiness, and making aspirations for it to expand and go in all directions is an incredibly profound dedication.

The verse reads:

57. *May the sole medicine for the suffering of
migrators,
The source of all happiness,
The Dharma, abide long
With praise and high regard.*

The commentary explains:

In dependence on whatever virtue there is, may the sole unrivalled medicine for all sufferings, the holy source from which every happiness of migrators arises, the teachings of the Buddha Bhagawan, abide with praise and high regard for a long time, until the end of cyclic existence.

The words, *In dependence on whatever virtue there is*, refer to all the virtues one has ever accumulated. The text uses the analogy of a panacea – i.e. *the sole unrivalled medicine for all suffering*. The dedication thus infers that when one understands the profundity and the expansiveness of the teachings, and how they are a source for alleviating sufferings, Dharma is like an unrivalled medicine to end all the sufferings of sentient beings. In stating, *the holy source from which every happiness of migrators arises*, the aspiration is for *the teachings of the Buddha Bhagawan* to abide with praise and high regard until the end of cyclic existence.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama particularly recites this verse when consecrating new monasteries or temples. There are similar verses in the prayer *Benefits of Constructing images of Maitreya*, and few other verses proclaiming auspiciousness such as '*placing the victory banner in all directions*'. These are some of the verses which are recited. I'm just giving you this extra bit of information to know how the verse is used during certain occasions.

3. PROSTRATING BY REMEMBERING KINDNESS

Prostrating by remembering kindness particularly refers to Manjushri, with whom Shantideva himself had close personal relationship, and relied upon as a guide and teacher. Remembering Manjushri's kindness is highlighted in the first two lines of the verse.

The verse reads:

- 58ab. *I prostrate to Manjushri,
Through whose kindness virtuous minds arise.*

The commentary explains:

I prostrate to the special virtuous teacher Manjushri, the empowering condition through whose kindness the meditation on bodhicitta and then training in the actions as well as the virtuous awareness to compose the treatise taking these as the subject, arose.

From this we can see that Shantideva in no way boasted that he composed this work by himself, but rather relied on his own virtuous teacher Manjushri. In accordance with the lam-rim, this point relates to relying on the virtuous friend or teacher. After stating, *I prostrate to the special virtuous teacher Manjushri*, the empowering condition (to compose the treatise) relates to the fact that any virtuous state of mind does not arise out of nowhere, but rather everything that arises has its own causes and empowering conditions. The empowering condition of the virtue arising from this composition, Shantideva states, is his virtuous teacher Manjushri. In explaining, *through whose kindness the meditation on bodhicitta arose*, the commentary indicates that the ability to meditate on bodhicitta also arises through the kindness of the virtuous teacher Manjushri. Then, having meditated on bodhicitta *training in the actions* means engaging in actions based on the bodhicitta mind also arises through the kindness of Manjushri. Then, *the virtuous awareness to compose the treatise taking these as the subject*, also arose through the kindness of Manjushri. What is being presented here is the need to remember the kindness of the virtuous teacher.

The second two lines of the verse refer to the actual prostration:

*58cd. I also prostrate to the virtuous teachers,
Through whom one develops.*

One section in the lam-rim outline pays special respect to the virtuous teacher by remembering their kindness. You can see that this verse definitely relates to that point in the lam-rim.

The commentary explains:

I also prostrate to the virtuous friend through whose kindness I was inspired to engage in the trainings and who gave strength for the virtuous side by generating the realisations of listening, contemplating, and meditating in my continuum.

As presented here, these are indications of how, when we take it as a personal instruction for our own practice, it is by remembering their kindness that one will naturally develop respect for one's teachers. We can all remember the time when we didn't have any understanding of the Dharma or how to practise it. Now, however, we have reached the level of having gained knowledge of the teachings and received instructions on how to practise. So, gradually our understanding has increased which is all due to the kindness of the virtuous teachers. By contemplating and thinking about that, naturally remembering the kindness of the gurus and the teachers will arise, which is followed by paying respect.

The commentary continues:

This last chapter explains elaborately the training in the generosity of giving away body, possessions, and roots of virtue for the purpose of others with the dedication taking as objects and transforming them with strong aspiration into the temporary and

ultimate objectives of prayer. Since the training in generosity was also explained earlier, I did not write a separate chapter on generosity.

As explained here, this chapter explains elaborately the training in the generosity of giving away body, possessions, and roots of virtue for the purpose of others. As earlier stated, this is mentioned here specifically, *with the dedication taking as objects and transforming them with strong aspiration into the temporary and ultimate objectives of one's aspiration or prayer*. Since the training in generosity was also explained earlier, I did not write a separate chapter on generosity implies that it is included here in this last chapter. This next concluding verse is by Gyaltsab Rinpoche himself.

It reads:

Whatever virtue there is from listening, contemplating
and meditating,
Whether it is the mere virtue of prostration or
offering,
To make all virtues inexhaustible
And to increase them, I adorn them with dedication.
This is the condensed explanation.

Again, this passage reveals an essential instruction to take into our own practice. The commentary's author, Gyaltsab Rinpoche himself, says here that *whatever virtue there is from listening, contemplating and meditating*, that is, whatever time and energy one spends in listening to the Dharma, thinking about it and then meditating on it, *whether it is the mere virtue of prostration or offering*, which includes all other means for accumulating merit - such as doing prostrations and making offerings, the way *to make all virtues inexhaustible* so they do not dissipate or go to waste *and to increase them, is to adorn them with dedication*. This shows how it is really essential and significant to make dedications to ensure that one's virtues are not wasted, and for them to further increase.

As mentioned previously, whenever one accumulates virtue or merit, the way to secure them so they don't go to waste is by making a dedication. That is why we have the dedication at the end of every practice.

II. EXPLANATION OF THE NAME OF THE CHAPTER

As presented here:

This is at the tenth chapter of dedication of the Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life.

The commentary reads:

This is the commentary on the tenth chapter called *Thorough Dedication* from *The Introduction to the Bodhisattvas Way of Life*, called *The Entrance for the Children of the Conquerors*.

The title *The Entrance for the Children of the Conqueror* is the the name Gyaltsab Rinpoche gave to his commentary.

THE MEANING OF THE END

There is a part at the end which has not been translated into English. It comes from under a heading used at the very beginning of the text, where it was the last of the four main headings.

This essentially explains who composed the text and who translated it.

This text is called Introduction to the Bodhisattvas Way of Life and is composed by the renowned master Shantideva, who was guided directly by

Manjushri himself. Shantideva personally engaged in incredibly profound deeds of the bodhisattvas way of life, and in particular, having mastered the highest yoga tantra practices, obtained the state of Vajradhara.

So the treatise propounded by this great master is completed.

It was translated by the Indian abbot Sarvajnadeva and the translator Pal-tzeg, from a manuscript that comes from the Muslim continent.

This probably refers to Afghanistan. There were many great Buddhist scholars in Afghanistan at one time, and there are quite a lot of references to the masters who came from the Muslim continent. That is my assumption knowing that there have been great scholars from Afghanistan.

At one time Buddhism flourished in countries like Afghanistan, but now there seems to be little or no trace of any practitioners there. However through artefacts we can see very obvious signs in carvings of Buddhas etc. still in Afghanistan that prove the strong influence of Buddhism at one time. I don't have a clear understanding of how many artefacts still exist. You might know better yourselves.

This concludes the teaching on the explanations of *the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* which we can safely say went very well.

Now we can make a strong dedication, of the studies done together, with the recitation of the Tenth Chapter.

[Recitation]

For the next session I would like you to have a discussion on the two truths according to the four different schools of Buddhism. How the Vaibhashika assert the two truths, and the two truths according to the Sautrantika, the Cittamatra or mind-only school and then the Prasangika. How do they each assert the two truths? What are their points of distinction and so forth? This is something I had in mind previously, but didn't find the right time for you to have the discussion.

In terms of doing the teachings on the lam-rim *Lamp on the Path*, my intention is just to go over the meanings of the verses.

For your homework, in preparation for these teachings, I would like you to read the lam-rim texts which are translated in English. The lam-rim text begins with the small scope. When it comes to classifications of certain topics, I would ask you to check what the classifications of certain topics are so as I go through the verses we will relate them to the specific classifications presented in the lam-rim text.

My intention is to present the lam-rim as material for you to actually put into practice. The lam-rim teaching is essentially tailored for that. The small scope begins with relying on a virtuous teacher. The actual topics are then: a precious human rebirth; death and impermanence; karma and then refuge. They will be the main topics of the small scope.

So you read from the lam-rim text, then as we go through the verses, we can relate to those topics in the lam-rim.

For example, when we come to the first topic of the precious human rebirth, when the text indicates the eight freedoms, you will be the ones to tell me what the eight freedoms are and what the ten endowments are. This is something to be prepared from your side. Then as we go through the text, we will come to those types of lists such as death and impermanence. We will look at the benefits or the advantages of thinking about death and impermanence and also the disadvantages of not thinking about death and impermanence, and what the measure is of thinking about death and impermanence, or how to go about that. These are the classifications presented in the lam-rim, and something you can familiarise yourself with.

In fact, it is particularly essential to reflect upon the topic of death and impermanence in order for our practice to become a real and pure Dharma practice. Without recollecting death and impermanence, almost everything we do would just focus on this life, and our practice could not be a pure Dharma practice. When the focus is on this life's pleasures or this life's gains, then it is not a Dharma practice. These are essential points. As I also presented during the recent Easter course on *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, until one reverses clinging to this life, one has not really engaged in the practice of Dharma.

The verse itself says that a precious human life is difficult to find and that one does not have leisure time with that life. By contemplating this, the clinging to this life will be reversed. Understanding points like those explained in *The Three Principals of the Path* are essential and can be related back to the lam-rim teachings.

Indeed when one starts to reduce the clinging to and the grasping at this life, one's mind starts to become more joyous, more calm and happier. Otherwise, for as long as we have a strong clinging to this life, we will never be satisfied, and never content. No matter how much we try to gain, there is never a sense of contentment in one's mind.

I think that an example of those with external signs of discontentment are those with tattoos on their bodies. They begin with a small tattoo somewhere, and then it seems that they are not content with that and then they have to get a bigger tattoo, and then they get more tattoos covering all parts of their body. Then when all the other parts of their body are completely tattooed, they even start to tattoo their forehead and face! So I feel that clearly shows discontentment.

Then there are also accounts of someone owning three to four thousand pairs of shoes – another external sign of discontentment. Another instance I saw personally was when I was staying at a home in Perth owned by very rich woman whose father got rich in mining. Now she (Gina Rinehart) is a mining tycoon and has apparently made a lot of money. In any case, the father remarried a Filipino woman (Rose Hancock/Porteous). We were shown the house and there was a small room full of cosmetics! When I saw all that I felt it was a sign of discontentment. Perhaps a few would be okay, but a whole room full of cosmetics! All of those cosmetics

didn't seem to have helped to beautify her body, and surely didn't stop her from ageing!

Then again on the other hand, I have seen well-known and apparently quite rich individuals wear very simple clothes and go around helping those who are poor. I see that that as a really a good sign. The money they would have saved on expensive clothing etc. is rather used to help the poor and the needy, and that is very noteworthy. When we see accounts like that, it can remind us how suffering is really the suffering of dissatisfaction. It is not the suffering of not having, but rather it is the suffering of dissatisfaction. Even if someone has things in abundance, they are still not happy.

I am just indicating here that the main topic of the small scope is an explanation of how to develop a disenchantment with the pleasures of this life, and thus overcome the clinging to and grasping at it. Then when the strong clinging to this life is reduced, even in this life itself one starts to experience the positive consequences of the mind being more relaxed and happier, not to mention the benefits in the future lives.

When we can understand these teachings, and how putting them into practice can begin to transform our mind, we can see how the actual practice of Dharma is a means to bring about a more genuinely happy mind now, and in future lives.

This reminds me of a remark made by a Mongolian abbot when he was abbot of the Gomang Monastery in Drepung. One time when I was visiting that monastery he was asking about the wellbeing of a prominent teacher Khensur Lobsang Wangchuk, who was indeed a great teacher and master. The Mongolian abbot asked me "How is Khensur Lobsang Wangchuk?" and I said "Oh, he is actually quite well". Then he replied to me "Indeed, he would be well whether he is sitting, whether he is moving about, wherever he is going, whatever he is doing he would be happy!".

The main point here is that as our mind becomes more subdued and naturally becomes happier, then whatever we do, on every account we will be more joyful. Of course in terms of this life it is a only certain number of years, but it is especially a good preparation for the time of our passing, at the time of death, when our mind could be much more joyful and more peaceful. We see these accounts occurring. So for the future life it will also be the best preparation.

Basically death and rebirth in an everyday experience is similar going to sleep and then waking up again. By going to sleep with a happy mind, it is more likely you will wake up with a happy mind.

There are accounts of prominent masters and teachers making remarks like "I have no hesitation for an old person in the evening to come back again as a young vibrant child in the morning". Even children appreciate this notion. When a mother was asked by her child "What happens when we die?" and responded with "Oh well, when we die we will just come back again", the young child remarked "Oh, how wonderful. That is very nice". This idea seems to give some solace that everything you know doesn't just disappear, but there is a continuation

and you will come back. This is quite a comforting notion.

Then there are accounts of child prodigies where young children show great skills which usually would have taken years to learn. Without any teaching they spontaneously become great experts in, for example, playing the violin or playing the piano. Those who do not believe in past lives are astonished and wonder how this can be explained, whereas past lives easily explains it as a strong imprint from the past.

On TV recently a child of barely one year old was swimming like a fish with no fear of the water. By now he's probably a bit bigger, but he was swimming then under water with no hesitation and no fear. I don't know what you would relate it to but whenever I see accounts like this I think it's quite astonishing. There are many signs of what seem to be amazing things which are something to be learned about and something to know about.

For the discussion, could those of you who have resources bring them along because we can't expect the newer students to know where to find them or to have access to them. If you can bring those resources it would be good to share them or to show them during the discussion.

This approach will be good for teachings like the tenets, which I have presented previously. There is a particular tenet called *The Precious Garland of Tenets* which is quite a short text that has been translated to English. I think Geoffrey Hopkins has also translated the Changkya tenets by Changkya Rolpay Dorjee. Of course now in my old age I might not recall specific passages, but I have read it many times and it is really good text.

In my youth I memorised the whole lam-rim and its outline, and I was able to quote and recite it. Now, in my old age I may not be able remember it all, however in my youth I definitely made the effort to memorise many texts.

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

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