



Here, *bodhisattvas* specifically refers to those superior beings whose state of mind is the awaking mind and whose deeds are the six perfections. To such Sangha objects of refuge as well as the earlier objects of refuge, Gyaltshab Je's commentary says:

*I bow down respectfully with my three doors to all that are worthy of honour.*

We need to relate to a deeper understanding of this presentation. *Respectfully with my three doors* indicates generating a strong faith in, and respect for, the objects of refuge. Paying respect through one's **mind** means generating a strong conviction and faith in the objects of refuge by really thinking about their qualities. The outer sign of having developed strong faith is that the hairs on one's body will stand on end, such as when singing verses of praise. Paying respect through one's **speech** is uttering words of veneration, and paying respect through one's **body** is done with physical gestures such as prostration. So having developed respect in one's mind one goes for refuge, sings praises and bows respectfully to those who are worthy of honour.

Taking refuge refers to taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, with the clear recognition of what the Buddha, the Dharma and Sangha are. It is good to note that the actual Sangha refers to arya beings. However when four Sangha members are gathered together then, even if they are ordinary beings, they are said to be as worthy an object of refuge as the actual arya Sangha. It is good to keep this understanding in mind.

In simple terms, Nagarjuna is presenting us with very clear instructions on how to engage in a practice that allows us to accumulate a vast amount of merit, and which moves our mind very deeply. In fact the following verses are incredibly moving, and we can see that how incredibly kind Nagarjuna was in presenting us with these very practical practices. When I started reading these verses in preparation for class the other day, I was moved to tears by the profound way in which Nagarjuna presents his dedications.

Refuge was presented earlier in the text and so you will be familiar with what it entails. However, as presented in various practices, whenever an occasion for taking refuge occurs we need to be really mindful of what refuge entails.

We need to remind ourselves that the actual refuge is only complete when all the causes of refuge are intact. The cause for taking refuge arises from contemplating one's own dire situation as well as that of all other living beings. We are all alike, in that we are all trapped in the suffering of samsara and the lower realms. Contemplating the sufferings of samsara in general, and the lower realms in particular, generates the fear of having to experience that suffering again and again. Through that fear we realise that the objects of refuge, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha have the complete ability to free all other beings, as well as ourselves, from these sufferings of cyclic existence and the lower realm. The actual refuge is when we place the total reliance on the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha to protect us from the fears of the sufferings of samsara and the lower realms.

Generating refuge in this way, as explained in many teachings, is a really profound practice. We can accumulate so much merit and purify so much negative karma just with the practice of taking refuge, so we definitely should not underestimate its great value. In fact taking refuge forms the very basis of all other practices (such the seven limb practice). Therefore, as explained in this verse, based on that

refuge one offers respect through prostrations to the objects of refuge, the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, because they are worthy of honour.

As I have explained previously, while other traditions have one object of refuge, our Buddhist tradition has three objects of refuge. I have also explained the significance of this many times. So it is good to refer to that, and keep that understanding in the mind.

With respect to the words *I bow down respectfully with my three doors to all that are worthy of honour*, the Tibetan term translated as *worthy of honour* refers to those who are suitable objects to make offerings to, which are the objects of refuge. By making offerings to these suitable objects, the objects of refuge, one accumulates merit and engages in a great purification practice, which is the only way to liberate oneself. So, that is the meaning of *worthy of honour*.

*Respectfully* indicates prostration. As mentioned previously, we prostrate with our body, speech and mind. With strong faith in the object of refuge in our mind, we make a physical prostration by placing our palms together on top of our crown, at our forehead and at our heart. The Tibetan word for prostration has two syllables, *chag* indicating ridding ourselves of negativity, and *tsal* has the connotation of receiving the blessings of the object of refuge. One purifies the negativity of one's body, speech and mind, and having done that one obtains the qualities of the enlightened body, speech and mind.

Placing the palms together on top of one's crown indicates receiving the potential to obtain the qualities of the holy body; placing ones palms at the throat indicates receiving the potential to obtain the qualities of Buddha's holy speech and placing them at the heart indicates receiving the potential to obtain the qualities of the Buddha's holy mind.

In another version, when one places one's palms together on top of one's crown, it leaves us with the imprint to obtain the Buddha's crown pinnacle, or *Usnisa*; placing them at the forehead, leaves us with the imprint to obtain the Buddha's hair spiral; placing them at the throat, to obtain the Buddha's speech; and at the heart, the imprint to obtain the Buddha's mind. This is how we receive the blessings and it is the ultimate way to purify our negativities. When we engage in the act of prostration with that awareness in mind, even if it is just three prostrations, then it becomes really high level of practice. Too often we leave aside some really practical practice, preferring more profound practices. But in fact the very act of doing prostrations with that understanding and awareness and visualisation is, I consider, one of the most profound practices.

We need to have a proper understanding of why this practice can be so profound. As mentioned previously, when we develop the strong conviction of receiving the blessing of the enlightened body, speech and mind, it actually implants a very strong potential to obtain the enlightened body, speech and mind ourselves. For every moment that we engage in the practice, our mind is being implanted with the imprints and potential to obtain the purified body, speech and mind of an enlightened being. It is good for us to be mindful of this point, which I explained in detail during the lam rim teachings.

As I have also explained a number of times, the palms are placed together with the thumbs tucked inside, to represent holding a jewel. The two hands represent method and wisdom which are the two essential aspects of practice needed to attain enlightenment. When we place our palms

together, then that indicates the union of method and wisdom, through which one engages in the practice of creating the causes for obtaining the state of enlightenment. It is only through the union and inseparability of method and wisdom that that we are able to obtain the ultimate goal of Buddhahood.

The tantric explanations of the union of method and wisdom are much more profound. However, you can see how, with this brief explanation, the practice of prostration, which might look like a simple physical gesture, can become a really profound practice. There are so many details that one can contemplate, as a way to create the causes for enlightenment.

There are further elaborate visualisations one can do but, as the great masters have said, one profound aspect of the purification is to visualise around oneself surrounded by numerous beings that represent individual beings of ones previous lifetimes, in the aspect of humans. Then, as one prostrates all these beings also prostrate with you, and all the negative karma that one has created in each and every previous lifetime is purified at the same time. This very profound instruction by the great masters is good to keep in mind.

I went through these details when we studied *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, including an explanation of all the citations as well. These points are relevant to the seven limb practice being explained here. The teachings on *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* produced quite few students who are now able to present the Dharma to others. As a result of the teachings at that time, you have now gained so many tools and methods of presenting the Dharma to others.

The next verse in the root text reads:

*467 I will turn away from all ill deeds  
And thoroughly take up all meritorious actions.  
I will admire all the merits  
Of all embodied beings.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Intact with the four opponent powers, *I will turn away from all ill deeds* that I have ever performed...

Again, this is a really profound practice. In order to engage fully in a purification practice we need to ensure that all four opponent powers are intact. In this one line Nagarjuna is exhorting (as opposed to commanding) us to engage in this practice in order to turn away from all the negativities that we have accumulated.

As I have taught this many times before, I want you to list the four opponent powers.

*Students: Power of object or refuge, power of remedy, power of regret, power of resolve.*

The teachings indicate that regret is the most essential one of the four opponent powers. That is because the stronger the regret the more likely it is that one will resolve not to commit the negative action again. When there is strong regret then resolve (along with the other opponent powers) will follow quite naturally. So how does one develop strong regret? It is by contemplating the ill effects of the non-virtuous deeds. What are the non-virtuous deeds? While there are many various forms of wrong deeds, they can basically be summarised as the ten non-virtuous deeds.

When one contemplates the prospect of having to experience the negative consequences of wrong deeds then regret will naturally arise. We think, 'Oh, I have engaged in a disgraceful deed that will completely ruin me. So I must do

everything possible to purify that wrong deed'. This is how the mind of wanting to purify negativity or non-virtuous deeds arises. We need to see how developing regret is dependent on thinking about the ill effects of negative deeds. I have previously explained how purification actually works; how it actually purifies negative karma. As explained in the *Abhidharma*, regret about having engaged in non-virtue is virtuous, whereas generating regret about virtuous deeds is non-virtuous. So that is another point we need to remember.

Having explained the need for confession, the next part of Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

*...and thoroughly take up all meritorious actions such as that gained from generosity, morality and meditation.  
I will admire and rejoice in all the merits of all embodied beings, thinking, 'How wonderful it is, that they have such virtue'.*

The point here is generating the mind of rejoicing. As indicated here, one rejoices in the positive deeds of noble beings as well as ordinary beings. As indicated in the lam rim, when it is set against the backdrop of our normal state of being completely intoxicated with delusions, engaging in some virtuous deed is an incredibly good deed. Contemplating this, one generates the thought, 'How wonderful it is that even ordinary beings have such virtue'. When one rejoices like that about the good deeds of ordinary beings, then that joy and happiness about their virtue serves as an antidote to overcome jealousy and contempt.

While all of these points are significant and profound, we need to go through the text a bit more quickly, otherwise we will not finish in time. The next verse reads:

*468 With bowed head and joined palms  
I petition the perfect buddhas  
To turn the wheel of doctrine and remain  
As long as transmigrating beings remain.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

Paying homage *with my five limbs*, such as a *bowed head and joined palms*, *I petition the perfect buddhas* not to remain long without teaching after obtaining enlightenment, but *to turn the wheel of doctrine, and to remain as long as transmigrating beings remain.*

As was explained earlier in the text, after the Buddha obtained enlightenment he remained in a meditative state without teaching for forty-nine days. It was only when the Buddha was requested to teach that he imparted his teachings. To this day we continue the tradition of requesting teachers to give a teaching.

As the text explains, having *petitioned the perfect buddhas*, one makes the request for the enlightened beings *to turn the wheel of the doctrine and to remain as long as transmigrating beings remain.* This profound request indicates the profound intention of enlightened beings. As His Holiness Dalai Lama often indicates, one of the verses that inspires him the most is the verse from Shantideva's text, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* which says, 'For as long as there are sentient beings remaining and for as long as there is suffering in the world, may I remain to alleviate that suffering'. As His Holiness says, this powerful verse indicates an incredibly noble intention—one is prepared to forsake one's own enlightenment in order to help sentient beings, for as long as there are sentient beings who remain and suffer in samsara. This verse in *Precious Garland* is making the same point.

For those who are not familiar with it, *paying homage with my five limbs* refers to doing prostrations by placing the

forehead, the two palms and the two knees on the ground. This is the ultimate way of showing veneration or respect. As indicated in the Buddha's life story, whenever he was requested to teach or some question was asked of him, a disciple such as Ananda would kneel down on the ground and bow down with all five limbs; which is an indication that this was the form of showing greatest respect to a great and noble teacher.

#### 2.2.2.2. LIMITLESSNESS OF THE CAUSES BECAUSE OF ASPIRING TO HELP LIMITLESS BEINGS

469 *Through the merit of having done thus  
And through the merit that I did earlier and  
will do  
May all sentient beings aspire  
To the highest enlightenment.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains:

*Through the merit of having done the above-mentioned deeds and through the merit that I did earlier at all times in the past, that I am committed to engage in from now on and will ever do in the future...*

This refers to all the merits one has accumulated in the three times, past, present and in the future. Then one dedicates that merit as follows:

*...may all sentient beings possess the mind that aspires to the highest enlightenment.*

Thus one makes that ultimate dedication of all the merits one could ever accumulate to the highest enlightenment for all sentient beings.

We need to understand that dedicating one's own merit to helping limitless sentient beings to generate their own aspiration to achieve enlightenment means that the merit that one accumulates from that dedication is also limitless. This wish to help limitless beings to achieve enlightenment can be in the form of dedication or an aspiration. As I have explained previously, there is a difference between an aspiration and a dedication, so you need to take note of that difference.

The next verse in this section of the text is:

470 *May all sentient beings have all the stainless  
faculties,  
Release from all conditions of non-leisure,  
Freedom of action,  
And endowment with good livelihood.*

From this, and the following verses one can gain of indication of how profound these aspirations are. So try to generate that thought of how incredibly beneficial they are. As explained in Gyaltsab Je's commentary:

Because the objects of one's benefit are limitless sentient beings, the merit that is accumulated by focusing on that is limitless. And because the causes which is merit is limitless, one develops the conviction that the qualities of the Buddha are limitless. This reasoning is to be applied to the following verses.

As presented earlier in the text, by relating to the causes that are limitless, one can also infer that the qualities that are the result, has to be limitless as well.

*May all sentient beings have all the stainless faculties, that which are uncontaminated; be released from all conditions of the eight non-leisures, have the freedom of action by not being under the control of others; and having abandoned wrong livelihood, may they be endowed with good livelihood.*

These points are relatively easy to understand, so we can move onto the next verse, which reads:

471 *Also may all embodied beings  
Have jewels in their hands,  
And may all the limitless necessities of life  
remain  
Unconsumed as long as there is cyclic existence.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

*Also may all embodied beings, from the moment they are born, have jewels in their hands, and may all the limitless necessities of life remain unconsumed as long as there is cyclic existence.*

This is a symbolic aspiration that no being is deprived of the necessities for their sustenance throughout all times.

472 *May all women at all times  
Become supreme persons.  
May all embodied beings have  
The intelligence [of wisdom] and the legs [of ethics].*

This aspiration is also in line with Shantideva's text. In the past it seems that men were the ones who possessed the power to rule and that women were deprived of these advantages. So this aspiration is for woman to become supreme beings. These are actually very significant points about equal rights. Here, *supreme* indicates that woman will be endowed with the qualities of having the majesty of control over others. Of course in these days women would probably say, 'We are not deprived of these qualities'.

As Gyaltsab Je' commentary explains:

*May all women at all times become supreme persons. May all embodied beings have the intelligence that comes from the higher training of wisdom, such as realising selflessness, and the legs of ethics.*

The Tibetan word *kangpa* is literally translated as 'legs' but it can also be a term for a branch. When something is referred to as a branch, then that means that it is part of something. In this case it implies the higher training of concentration. So the term can be related to all three levels of higher trainings.

These incredible aspirations are, in themselves, an indication of what an incredible being Nagarjuna was. We can see there is not even a hint of self interest to be found in these aspirations. By reflecting on these aspirations we can get an insight of what kind of a noble being he was. Nagarjuna was, without any question, a great bodhisattva or even an enlightened being.

These are aspirations that focus on the welfare of all living beings. Without exception they encompass each and every living being. For example, although this verse is making the specific aspirations for woman to have majesty, it is an aspiration for all women; an aspiration without discrimination, which does not leave out some at the expense of others. The remaining aspirations are focused on all living beings to obtain the qualities of virtue and goodness. So in this way we can develop a keen of admiration for Nagarjuna.

With respect to our own personal practice, these points indicate the kind of aspirations we should generate in our mind, and how we should dedicate our merits. They are an indication as to how we should engage in a practice ourselves.

Would you consider having three discussion evenings on November 27, December 4 and December 11?

Students: Yes!

Thank you for your positive response. The topic for discussion will be generating bodhicitta with the technique of equalising and exchanging self with others.

As clearly explained in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, there are five stages involved in generating bodhicitta with this technique. They are:

- Meditating on how oneself and others are equal
- Contemplating the disadvantages of self-cherishing, using various reasons;
- Contemplating the great advantages of cherishing others, by various means
- The actual mind of exchanging self with others
- Based on that, how to meditate on giving and taking

These points are clearly presented in the lam rim teachings so you can bring the *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* with you to the discussion. Then you can refer to the text and discuss each point, which will be a way to familiarise yourselves with these essential points. Then when you put them into practice in meditation, it will be really beneficial.

As you are aware, prior to training in the actual technique of developing bodhicitta, one need to first be familiar and meditate on developing the mind of equanimity. Even though I don't recall it being explained specifically in *Liberation of the Palm of your Hand*, other texts explain how the equanimity generated in the equalising and exchanging self with others is more profound and surpasses the equanimity presented in the seven-point cause-and-effect sequence, where one meditates on abiding in equanimity, free from attachment to some and aversion to others. There is also the equanimity expressed in the four immeasurables, which is to generate the wish for other beings to abide in equanimity, free from attachment to some and aversion to others; and then meditating 'may they abide in that state'.

Although *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* does not clearly mention this difference between these three types of equanimity other texts do.

The **equanimity of Four Immeasurables** is an aspiration for other beings to be free from attachment to some and having aversion to others.

The **equanimity in the seven-point cause and effect sequence** is contemplating on how one needs to oneself generate the mind of equanimity, where one is free from attachment to certain beings who one consider close, such as friends and relatives, free from aversion towards enemies and indifference towards those who are neutral. In this sequence one meditates on developing the mind of equanimity, so that one views all beings as being equal. When one is free from being attached to some, hostile towards others and indifferent to the rest, then one is able to meditate on how all beings have been equally kind to one; which is then followed by the rest of the seven-point technique for developing bodhicitta.

The **equanimity of exchanging self with others** is where one develops the mind that views all beings being equal in wanting happiness and not wanting to experience suffering. On top of that, as some texts indicate, one needs to add the extra thought that all beings are equal in needing to accomplish happiness and get rid of suffering. This makes it

more profound. The Tibetan word *drub*, which means to accomplish and *sel*, which means to get rid of, indicate that the particular thought generated here is how all sentient beings are equal in needing to accomplish happiness and need to get rid of suffering.

However in *Liberation Palm of Your Hand*, the explanation of equanimity to be developed at this stage is just as we want to be happy and free from suffering, likewise others also wish for happiness and want to be free from suffering. What *is* explained is that no further reason is needed either than just as one wishes for happiness and wants to be free from suffering, others also are in the same state. Therefore the equanimity to be developed is that all beings are equal in wanting happiness and not wanting to experience suffering.

(*In Geshe-la's own words*) Because of thinking, 'I', 'I' 'I'; 'I like this.' 'I don't like that.' 'I like happiness,' then attachment comes! 'I don't like suffering', and then anger arises. Then we create all this bad karma. All the time it's 'I', 'I', 'I'.

The point is that we don't need any further reason to understand why we want happiness and don't want suffering. It comes about naturally. Because of the fact that there is instinctive grasping at the 'I', there is the natural inclination of wanting to have happiness and not wanting to experience any suffering. No other reason is needed.

Coming back to the main point about how to conduct the discussion, it is good to engage in a thorough discussion on this topic on equalising and exchanging oneself with others. Don't be timid about presenting whatever you understand, thinking, 'Oh, others already know that, so there is no point in me relating it'. Thinking like that is, in a sense, crippling.

For the discussion, you need not be timid thinking about whether what one is saying is correct or not. After all we are studying because of the very fact that we do not have a full understanding. So regardless of whether you think it is correct, share your understanding with others, because that is a way to reinforce what one has understood or heard. If you are not too sure don't feel discouraged but present the material in the way you understand it.

You will recall that at the very beginning of his great work, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life* the great master Shantideva said, 'I am not about to present anything here that has not been presented in the past. Furthermore I don't have any skill in rhetoric or great composition, so what I am presenting here is merely as a way to acquaint it with my own mind, and it might be of some benefit to others'.

In saying 'as a way to acquaint my mind with it' Shantideva is indicating that the reason he is presenting his composition and sharing it with others, is that it is a way of further familiarising his mind with the material.

Before the discussion, do the usual prayers and meditation, spend about an hour in discussion, and then you can have an hour of gossip! Actually it is nice to have a friendly chat over a cup of tea with your Dharma friends.

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version*

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